



Northern Ireland
Assembly

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard) and JOURNAL OF PROCEEDINGS

Volume 84

(15 April 2013 to 12 May 2013)

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Official Report (Hansard)

Assembly Sittings

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 15 April 2013

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Speaker's Business

Public Petition: Crossmaglen Jobs and Benefits Office

Mr Speaker: Ms Megan Fearon has sought leave to present a public petition in accordance with Standing Order 22. The Member will have up to three minutes to speak on the subject.

Ms Fearon: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. During the past two weeks, my colleagues Mickey Brady and Councillor Terry Hearty and I have received a petition signed by the concerned residents of south Armagh about the closure of the jobs and benefits office in Crossmaglen. I want to present the petition to the Minister today to demonstrate the need to retain that vital service in the area. The petition clearly shows the depth of feeling among the local people who use and value that essential service.

Crossmaglen is one of the most deprived rural wards in the North. That, coupled with the fact that there is a high level of disability among the population, means that any reduction in services is keenly felt. The Minister may not be aware of this, but the cost of a return bus ticket from Crossmaglen to Newry is in excess of £7. That places a severe financial burden on someone who must survive on benefits and is, therefore, wholly unfair. Buses are also few and far between, meaning that people who rely on public transport spend hours and hours waiting. There was a recent example of the flaws in the system when a local man's bus was delayed and he was five minutes late to his tribunal in Newry. By the time he got there, the tribunal had happened in his absence.

My constituency office in Crossmaglen has received complaints about the new Customer First helpline that is designed to replace the permanent office. It has been hailed as a complete disaster. One individual had to hold on the line for 34 minutes, while another elderly man hung up after 30 minutes of talking to what he described as a machine. These people are entitled to their benefits, so they should not be degraded in this manner and forced to fight for what they are entitled to.

Questions also need to be answered about the fact that local community and voluntary groups will inevitably take on the excess work — an added burden on their already strained resources. Will they be subsidised for that?

The Department's priority appears to be wholly centred on saving money rather than providing vital and necessary services to our constituents. There is always

talk about improving rural services, but this is certainly no improvement. It will be a huge loss to our local community. I call on the Minister to stop the closure of the Crossmaglen jobs and benefits office.

Ms Fearon moved forward and laid the petition on the Table.

Mr Speaker: I will forward a copy to the Minister for Social Development and send a copy to the Chair of the Committee, Mr Alex Maskey.

Dr Farry: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I respect the right of the Member to present the petition on behalf of the residents of Crossmaglen, but it is important for the record to show that, although the item of business refers to the closure of the jobs and benefits office in Crossmaglen, there is not a jobs and benefits office in Crossmaglen, never mind one that is closing. If there was one, it would be an issue for both my Department and my colleague Mr McCausland's. I think that the Department for Social Development runs a community-based centre in Crossmaglen, but it is not a jobs and benefits office. In that respect, the wording of the petition and the Order Paper do not reflect the realities of the situation that we are talking about. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. *[Interruption.]* Order. Let me deal with this point of order, first. *[Interruption.]* Order. The Minister has put it on the record. Let me say, as Speaker, that I am very reluctant to get involved in public petitions, unless it is on a more serious matter than the one about which the Minister has spoken. However, the Minister has put the issue clearly on the record to correct it.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. We met the chief executive of the Social Security Agency about the matter, and he did not, at any time, tell us that there was not a jobs and benefits office in Crossmaglen. It is a community office; there are three of them. There may have been some confusion around that, but there is an office in Crossmaglen that is closing. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Let us not have points of order ending up as statements from Members. Order. Let us move on.

Lord Morrow: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I just want to bring some light to the whole thing. We have listened to the Member supporting the petition and the Minister: is this a valid petition, or should it now be handed back and the Member told to try again?

Mr Speaker: This is very much a valid petition that has been presented to the Assembly. Let us move on.

Assembly Business

Suspension of Standing Orders

Mr Dickson: I beg to move

That Standing Orders 10(2) to 10(4) be suspended for 15 April 2013.

Mr Speaker: Before I put the Question, I remind Members that the motion requires cross-community support.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That Standing Orders 10(2) to 10(4) be suspended for 15 April 2013.

Mr Speaker: As there are ayes from all sides of the House and no dissenting voices, I am satisfied that cross-community support has been demonstrated.

Committee Membership

Mr Speaker: The next item on the Order Paper is a motion on Committee membership. As with similar motions, it will be treated as a business motion. Therefore, there will be no debate.

Resolved:

That Mr Jimmy Spratt replace Mr Paul Givan as a member of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister; and that Ms Paula Bradley replace Mr Jonathan Craig as a member of the Committee on Standards and Privileges. — [Mr Weir.]

Mr Speaker: We now move to the second motion on Committee membership. Again, this will be treated as a business motion, and, therefore, there will be no debate.

Resolved:

That Mr Ian Milne be appointed as a member of the Committee for the Environment; that Mr Chris Hazzard replace Mr Mitchel McLaughlin as a member of the Public Accounts Committee; that Mr Declan McAleer be appointed as a member of the Committee on Standards and Privileges; and that Mr Ian Milne replace Mr Chris Hazzard as a member of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development. — [Ms Ruane.]

Election of Deputy Speaker

Mr Speaker: I remind Members that, as Standing Order 5 requires that there should be three Deputy Speakers, a vacancy exists following the resignation of Mr Francie Molloy. The next item of business is the election of a Deputy Speaker to fill that vacancy, which will be conducted under the process set out in Standing Order 4.

I will begin by calling for nominations. Any Member may rise to propose a candidate for Deputy Speaker. Only a name should be proposed at that point. I will then return to the Member to speak in more detail in the debate. Once again, I say to whoever is nominating a Member to be a Deputy Speaker that, at this moment, we require only the nomination. I will return to the Members who are nominating to say a few words and speak in more detail. I will then ask for the proposal to be seconded, as required under Standing Order 14, and ask whether the Member nominated and seconded is willing to accept the nomination. I will then call for any further proposals and follow the same procedure for each. When it appears that there are no further proposals, I will make it clear that the time for proposals has passed. If Members indicate that they wish to speak, a debate relevant to the election may then take place. When Members rise in their place, they must speak on the nominee.

At the conclusion of the debate or the conclusion of the nominations if there are no requests to speak, I shall put the Question that the Member first proposed shall be Deputy Speaker of the Assembly. The vote will be on a cross-community basis. If the proposal is not carried, I shall put the Question on the next nominee and so on, until all nominations are exhausted. Once a Deputy Speaker is elected, all other nominations will fall automatically. Let us proceed to the election of a Deputy Speaker.

Do I have any proposals for the office of Deputy Speaker of the Assembly? Members should rise in their place.

Mr M McGuinness: I propose that Mitchel McLaughlin be elected as Deputy Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Is there a seconder for Mr McLaughlin?

Ms Ruane: I second the proposal. Tugaim tacaíocht don rún. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Speaker: Mr McLaughlin, do you accept the nomination as Deputy Speaker of the Assembly?

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: With some relief, I accept. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Speaker: Do we have any further proposals?

Mr McCallister: I propose the name of Basil McCrea.

Mr Speaker: Do we have a seconder?

Mr Allister: I second that. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Are there any further proposals? Mr McCrea, do you accept the nomination?

Mr B McCrea: I accept the nomination.

Mr Speaker: Are there any further proposals?

There are no further proposals. At this point, as I indicated, Members who wish to speak can do so. I remind Members to keep their comments brief and to the point and not to be tempted to stray into any other areas. The time for

proposals has expired. I call — who do we have first?
Martin McGuinness. Sorry.

Mr M McGuinness: It is a great pleasure and honour to propose my friend Mitchel McLaughlin as the Deputy Speaker. I place on record our thanks to Francie Molloy, who has left the Assembly for another place, for the very positive and constructive contribution that he made in — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order, Members.

Mr M McGuinness: — supporting the Speaker throughout his term as Deputy Speaker.

The north-west has a proud record of supporting and providing Speakers for the Assembly, not least, Mr Speaker, your contribution over a number of years, which has rightly been applauded by society and by everybody in the House, someone who has been very fair, has ensured the speaking rights of everyone in the House and has conducted the affairs of the House in a way that makes us all proud of that contribution. I believe that Mitchel McLaughlin will continue in that vein. He has vast experience of the workings of the House and will make his own unique contribution towards supporting the work of the Chair. There will be further discussions on other positions today, but, for this period and this debate, suffice it to say that Mitchel McLaughlin is eminently qualified to be a Deputy Speaker of the House.

12.15 pm

Mr P Robinson: I think that everyone knows that it is essential to the operation of the institutions that there is appropriate cross-community balance in various positions. This position was held by a Sinn Féin Member; therefore, I think that it is assumed that a Sinn Féin Member would automatically replace him. However, it would be irresponsible of us if we did not provide the likely candidate with the opportunity to indicate his position on some key issues.

I would not have raised this matter had it not been for certain responses to a 'Belfast Telegraph' poll of the activists — the members — who were present at Sinn Féin's weekend conference. That put some doubt on where a large section of the Sinn Féin membership stands on the role of dissidents and their activity; support for policing and giving information to the police; support for prosecutions against those found guilty of various activities; and, of course, support for the rule of law and opposition to an armed campaign.

I know from having been Finance Minister when Mr McLaughlin was the Chairman of the Committee what, I believe, his responses will be to these matters. However, it is important that he shows that he supports the position that the deputy First Minister has taken on those issues, which is contrary to some of the positions that have been adopted by the active membership of his party.

Mr Dickson: The Alliance Party is content with the nomination of Mr McLaughlin for Deputy Speaker. I would like to place on record our thanks to Mr Molloy, who did an excellent job as Principal Deputy Speaker. As others have said, he treated all Members fairly and equally, as indeed you do daily, Mr Speaker.

Mr Allister: The House likes to publicly portray itself as a beacon of inclusivity. It likes to present itself across the world as representative of such inclusivity. Some of us, of

course, have come to experience that the inclusivity is only for those who are inside the Executive tent. Therefore, the filling of the position of Deputy Speaker is an opportunity for the House to disprove that perception and to prove that it genuinely believes in inclusivity by appointing a Deputy Speaker from outside the parties that are represented in the Executive. Therein, of course, lies the nomination of Mr Basil McCrea. It will be a test for all in the House of whether they prefer Mr Mitchel McLaughlin of Sinn Féin and that cosy interparty, intra-Executive relationship or are prepared to afford some inclusivity to those outside the Executive parties and support the nomination of the sole candidate from that position. That is the challenge of this nomination. For that reason, I support Mr McCrea's nomination.

Mrs Foster: I support my party leader, the First Minister, on the questions that he posed. We very much hope that the nominee, Mr McLaughlin, will take the opportunity to clarify the position that he intends to hold: whether he supports the deputy First Minister in the view that dissident terrorists are traitors or agrees with those who were surveyed at the party conference at the weekend, only 12% of whom supported the deputy First Minister's position on dissident terrorists. In fact, of those surveyed, only 34% saw dissident republicans as criminals, and only 36% said that the Police Service of Northern Ireland was an impartial service or force. Therefore, you can see that we have grave concerns arising from the weekend poll, and we want to give Mr McLaughlin the opportunity to clarify his position on those matters. We feel that support for the rule of law and for the institutions of this place are fundamental issues. Indeed, he would just be repeating the oath that Ministers take in relation to their support for the rule of law —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time has gone.

Mrs Foster: — police, the courts and justice, and we expect that he should make that clear.

Mr O'Dowd: Thank you, a Cheann Comhairle, for the opportunity to speak. First, I welcome the nomination to the post of my party colleague Mitchel McLaughlin. I am disappointed that the First Minister has taken the opportunity to respond to what I have to say is a somewhat dubious poll on the front page of the 'Belfast Telegraph'. I am sure that he has experience from his own party conferences of how such polls are conducted.

Mr P Robinson: We have 100% support.

Mr O'Dowd: Yes, and I assure the Member that the most important poll that was taken over the weekend — I think that there were 206-odd polls — was when our party membership went into the voting hall and voted for the leadership of Martin McGuinness and Gerry Adams. Their leadership has been very clear on where this party stands on the use of violence for political purposes. We have stood to the forefront, and, in fact, we have gone toe to toe with these so-called dissident republican organisations. Indeed, the life of many of my party's members has been placed in danger because we have taken that position. Only recently, Martin McGuinness's life has been under threat because of our position.

We should not allow the political agenda or the political atmosphere of this Chamber or our society to be set by dubious polls that are taken of 50 out of 2,000 delegates who gathered in Castlebar, County Mayo, over the

weekend. Sinn Féin does not have to prove itself to anyone in these matters. We have proved our worth to the people who count most: the electorate. The electorate trusts us in these matters, and Members across the Chamber should trust us on our actions, deeds and words. They should not rely on fanciful headlines from any media outlet to judge us on where we stand on these matters; they should judge us on what we have done. The most important people who will judge this party — the only people who will judge it — are the electorate.

Mr McCallister: I support my nominee, Basil McCrea. There are several things that, I think, are important. It is important that the Assembly recognises that there is starting to grow on these Benches an opposition that sits outside the Executive and wants to challenge the Executive — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member must be heard.

Mr McCallister: — and that wants to see the numbers on these Benches grow. More importantly, that opposition needs and should have a voice and representation on the Business Committee, as well as in the form of a Deputy Speaker, so that it can not only speak up for the independence of every Member but represent the independence of the Chamber from the Executive. They are two separate branches of our government and should be treated as such, so we should have the checks and balances to represent that.

I know that DUP Members support the argument on opposition. They also say that they support moving away from things such as community designation. Community balance was the very first issue that the First Minister mentioned. My colleague, Mr McCrea, has amply demonstrated — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr McCallister: — over his time in the Assembly that he will represent everyone in it as Deputy Speaker without fear or favour. That is the calibre of individual that we want to elect to the office.

The First Minister and the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment raised concerns about the Sinn Féin and fheis at the weekend. They have no such concerns with Basil McCrea. They can quite easily — *[Interruption.]* It is strange that they did not mention any concerns about Basil McCrea when they had two Members willing to speak. Now will be the test for them as we go to the vote: will they support a candidate they have no concerns about over one they do have concerns about? Will they support a candidate who will stand up for the independence of the Chamber from the Executive? *[Interruption.]* They will have the chance to do that. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Allow the Member to finish.

Mr Storey: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCallister: I would happily give way if I had more time. The Member can easily take part in the debate. Why does he not speak to the Clerks at Table and take part in the debate, and then he can say whatever he likes? If he is concerned, let him get up and say so. Otherwise, he will have the opportunity in a few minutes to vote. Will he vote for a candidate he does not have concerns about who will represent the Assembly and its independence — *[Interruption.]* I would be surprised if he has more concerns

about Basil McCrea than about Mitchel McLaughlin. That really will say something about where Mr Storey is moving to.

Mr B McCrea: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for the opportunity to say a few words. I am sure that Mr McLaughlin will take a similar opportunity to respond to the questions that were put from the Benches opposite. The House should recognise that there are people who are not part of the Executive but want to make a contribution and will attempt to chair debates, as others have, in a fair and impartial way. Those of you who have sat with me on Committees — there have been many from different parties — will, I think, accept that I am fair and impartial in the way that I chair debates. It is important that we put that challenge to people.

There are some questions being put to other people, but I will answer them on my behalf. First, I am absolutely and totally committed to the rule of law. There is no question whatsoever about my support for what is right in this society or for trying to move things forward. We have an opportunity in the House to show a certain amount of leadership. If there are genuine concerns and the First Minister, in voicing those concerns, wants an answer, no doubt people will take the opportunity to answer him and, indeed, Mrs Foster. If any Members want to make an intervention, I will clarify my position, but make no mistake: the questions that you put to the other candidate will not apply to me.

Mr Campbell: Will the Member give way?

Mr B McCrea: Mr Speaker, is it in order for me to take an intervention?

Mr Speaker: Yes.

Mr Campbell: I thank the Member for giving way. Given that, we assume, he is probably going to have some difficult and onerous tasks ahead of him as the “leader” of the party that he has been trying to form for the past two months, will he have time for the job of Deputy Speaker?

Mr B McCrea: It is very interesting to hear from an MP — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr B McCrea: I will put a question directly to Members opposite, because I do not have time to engage in a debate. You have concerns. You have an opportunity to vote for somebody other than the candidate who you have concerns about. We will watch and listen to what you have to say, but the decision is yours.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. While I am honoured to have been nominated for the position, I am somewhat disappointed that the First Minister took the particular line that he did. I have been a Member of the Assembly since it was established. I was part of the negotiations that brought it about and brought about the new beginning to policing and the establishment of a new justice system. I see all of that as part of my personal legacy, and I stand 100% behind it. It was one of the proudest experiences of my life.

However, I am disappointed. I have had the opportunity, given my long involvement in this Assembly, to work with people across the political spectrum. I think that I have demonstrated to any fair-minded person that I can discharge my duties, and I do it fearlessly.

12.30 pm

My experience of standing up to dissidents and those who would challenge the rule of law has been that my home has been petrol bombed. My home was attacked within the past fortnight. That does not deter me. I will continue to do that, but I will continue also to work with others to map out a better way forward for our entire society.

Every comment that the deputy First Minister has made, from the earliest days of this peace process right through to this weekend, when he addressed our party conference, I stand 100% behind.

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: No, thank you; I could probably write the script.

Question put, That Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, being the first candidate proposed, be Deputy Speaker of this Assembly.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 80; Noes 15.

AYES**Nationalist:**

Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McDevitt, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mrs McKevitt, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Unionist:

Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.

Other:

Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy.

Tellers for the Ayes: Ms Fearon and Mr McMullan.

NOES**Unionist:**

Mr Allister, Mr Beggs, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Elliott, Mr Gardiner, Mr Hussey, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr B McCrea, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Swann.

Other:

Mr Agnew.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Allister and Mr McCallister.

<i>Total Votes</i>	<i>95</i>	<i>Total Ayes</i>	<i>80</i>	<i>[84.2%]</i>
<i>Nationalist Votes</i>	<i>38</i>	<i>Nationalist Ayes</i>	<i>38</i>	<i>[100.0%]</i>
<i>Unionist Votes</i>	<i>49</i>	<i>Unionist Ayes</i>	<i>35</i>	<i>[71.4%]</i>
<i>Other Votes</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>Other Ayes</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>[87.5%]</i>

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, being the first candidate proposed, be Deputy Speaker of this Assembly.

Mr Speaker: I declare that Mr Mitchel McLaughlin has been elected as Deputy Speaker. I offer him my hearty congratulations and look forward to working with him.

12.45 pm

Principal Deputy Speaker

Mr Speaker: The next item of business is the nomination of a Deputy Speaker to act as Principal Deputy Speaker. The process will be conducted in accordance with Standing Order 5A. I will begin by asking for a nomination. Any Member may rise to nominate one of the Deputy Speakers to act as Principal Deputy Speaker. Only a name should be proposed at this point. I will return to the Member to speak in more detail in the debate. When I have confirmed that the person nominated is willing to act as Principal Deputy Speaker, a debate relevant to the nomination will take place.

The Business Committee has agreed that only one Member will speak on behalf of each party in the debate, at the end of which I will put the Question on the nomination. The vote will once again be on a cross-community basis. If the proposal is not carried, I will ask for further nominations and proceed as I normally would.

Do I have a proposal for a Deputy Speaker to be nominated to act as Principal Deputy Speaker?

Mr M McGuinness: I nominate Deputy Speaker Mitchel McLaughlin to act as Principal Deputy Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Mr McLaughlin, do you agree to act as Principal Deputy Speaker?

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: I agree to act as Principal Deputy Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Standing Orders provide for a debate to take place on the nomination. Members may speak only once in the debate. Standing Order 5A(7) requires the debate to be relevant to the nomination. I will not allow Members to stray into any area other than the one that is being debated on the Floor.

Mr M McGuinness: I am honoured to nominate Deputy Speaker Mitchel McLaughlin to be Principal Deputy Speaker. That follows on from the hugely positive and constructive work done by Francie Molloy as Principal Deputy Speaker, who worked constructively with you and your office to ensure that the work of the House would continue.

It has been disappointing today to hear some of the views expressed on the other side of the House, and there is a temptation to respond to that, but I will not do that; I will rise above it. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr M McGuinness: It is hugely important that we recognise that the party that I represent has been at the forefront of supporting not just law and order but the police. We have been at the forefront, even with the risk to the lives of some of our members, of standing against the activities of so-called dissident republicans. We have been very strong advocates that people who break the law should be made amenable before the courts and that society as a whole has a duty and responsibility to provide whatever information is required to ensure that people who break the law and threaten the lives of our citizens are brought before the courts. We have been involved in a huge amount of work on the courts through the review of the criminal justice system, and the changes made have

been to the benefit of everybody. I am very proud of the part that my party played in all that. Our qualifications as a party that supports law and order, the courts and the police are absolutely beyond question.

Other parties have had party conferences, and they have had journalists of all descriptions swarming through the masses. I do not even know who these people spoke to. I do not even know whether they were members of Sinn Féin or members of the public there as spectators of the ard fheis. One thing that is crystal clear is that — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr M McGuinness: — my party stands four-square behind the peace process, the PSNI and the gardaí, who have done a remarkable job over the past 18 months in thwarting the activities of those who would attempt to plunge us back into the past. They have done that in the context of ensuring no loss of life. Anybody attempting to cast aspersions on our commitment to the peace process needs to get real, and what we saw earlier was a bit of a charade.

Mr P Ramsey: First, on behalf of the SDLP, I warmly congratulate Mitchel McLaughlin on becoming Deputy Speaker. Personally, as a former neighbour, I wish you well in your new position. Maybe that is as far as it goes.

There has never been a justifiable reason given or compelling case made for the appointment of a Principal Deputy Speaker. The SDLP believes that it is a carve-up between the two main parties that was done without consultation and without using the normal practices of the House to try to achieve a consensus.

During the previous debate in this Chamber, I said — I will repeat myself — that there is no good reason why we should create a hierarchy of Speakers and an extra layer of bureaucracy. The British and Irish Parliaments do not have Principal Deputy Speakers, and there is no reason for this House to seek such a new system.

Over the weekend, I listened to the deputy First Minister talk about the importance of equality and parity of esteem, yet Sinn Féin made a deal with the DUP without giving any consideration to the notion of equality. His words ring hollow in the House today. If this is his Ireland of equals, I am afraid that it is back to the drawing board.

May I pose a question that has been previously asked? As a result of the change, has the House been better managed? Has the Chamber become more effective and more efficient? I do not think so. Indeed, I believe that the change has done quite the opposite: it has created a feeling among Members that the very institutions that we work in are subject to change on the whim of Sinn Féin and the DUP. The people outside these walls are not blind to that.

We have yet to get answers to the questions that I raised about the management, effectiveness and efficiency of the House. Many will deduce that this is a two-party carve up with the mantra that all Deputy Speakers are equal but some are more equal than others.

For those reasons, the SDLP will not be in a position to support the nomination of Mitchel McLaughlin as Principal Deputy Speaker.

Mr P Robinson: Mr Speaker, let me first dismiss the apology that you just listened to from the SDLP, which still has not come to terms with the electoral facts that it is now a small party that is no longer able to lead and which cannot come to terms with the fact that, if you are looking for two people who will be Speaker and Deputy Speaker, you will naturally look to the larger parties in the Assembly.

Arising out of the previous debate, I will address the remarks made by Mr McCallister, who does not seem to have come to terms with the fact that, at Westminster, it is from within the Government party that the Speaker came on the previous occasion. There is nothing unusual about a Speaker coming from a Government party.

Mr McCallister: Will the First Minister give way?

Mr P Robinson: Am I permitted to give way, Mr Speaker? I will happily do so if I can.

Mr Speaker: Yes, the Member has the Floor.

Mr McCallister: I am grateful to the First Minister. Will he not admit to the fact that, when Mr Bercow was first elected Speaker, Labour was in power? *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Let us not get into a debate on an election somewhere else. *[Interruption.]* Order.

Mr P Robinson: A quick turning-up of the facts will show that the Conservative Party was in government at the beginning of this session, when the election of the Speaker took place. So, there is nothing inconsistent with it at all.

I will also respond to the other issues. At the beginning of the previous debate, I made it clear that we have established a principle of cross-community sharing of top positions, which, naturally, would have fitted Sinn Féin into the position that we are now talking about. That is accepted. However, we did not raise any issues. Sinn Féin members raised them when they were talking to whoever was acting for the 'Belfast Telegraph' poll. I am sure that they are not indicating that the 'Belfast Telegraph' was acting dishonestly with the figures that it produced. If they are not suggesting that the 'Belfast Telegraph' acted dishonestly, we have to accept that, among the activists who were present at their conference, — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr P Robinson: — a significant number, which, in some cases was the largest number of those who were questioned, had a view either about dissident activity, support for the police and passing information to the police or about whether it is a criminal activity that dissidents are involved in. That is a fact of life, and, from my community's point of view, we expect whoever will be sitting in that Chair to be able to declare openly and publicly that they are in support of the police, that they oppose dissident activity, that they believe that it is criminal activity that dissidents are involved in and that they do not believe that the dissidents should have special status because they are supposedly supporting a political cause, although I have not seen much evidence of that.

I think that any person who was going to sit in your job would want the public to know that. It would not be something that you would drag out of them. Indeed, in my comments, I indicated from my knowledge of Mr McLaughlin from when I was Finance Minister and he was the Chairperson of the Finance Committee that I had no doubt about how he would respond to it. I gave him the

opportunity to do so, and he took that opportunity. He said it very clearly in terms that were satisfactory to this side of the House. I do not see that that is in some way a sham or a charade; it is necessary to see that someone who will be a Principal Deputy Speaker in this House supports the rule of law and the police and believes that dissident terrorists are dissidents and should not be given support or special status. I believe that the public will, overwhelmingly, believe that that is the right thing to do, and I am glad that Mr McLaughlin was able to declare himself in that fashion.

Mr Nesbitt: The Ulster Unionist Party did not support the creation of the post of Principal Deputy Speaker, because we did not see the need for it.

Having observed the post in action over the past number of months, we stand by our assertion that there is no need for the position. I understand that the post of Principal Deputy Speaker is, as it were, an optional extra. There is no obligation on the House to elect a Principal Deputy Speaker and I propose that we take that course of action and do not elect one. My party does not support Mr McLaughlin's nomination.

1.00 pm

Mr Dickson: Having formerly had a Principal Deputy Speaker — a position, as I understand it, for someone who is likely to be a Speaker in training — then the principle having been determined, there is no reason why we should not follow that precedent on this occasion.

I will briefly add to comments that have been made about adherence to the rule of law, in particular with regard to those in society who wish to break the law. It is the responsibility of every Member of the House to uphold the law and support the police in the carrying out of their duties, and to do that wholeheartedly and fully, regardless of where the lawbreaking comes from. It is the duty and responsibility of every Member of the House to uphold the law.

Mr Allister: As has already been said, the post of Principal Deputy Speaker is an utterly needless one. It serves no relevant function with regard to the good order and performance of the House. We all know that the position was concocted as part of a sordid deal between the DUP and Sinn Féin in order to sustain you, sir, in your position for some time at the start of this Assembly mandate. It has proved to be an utterly pointless position. However, it exists by dint of the will of the greater number in the House and I am sure that it will be filled today, although it is unnecessary. In the filling of it, Members will declare themselves as to how far they are satisfied with the quality, character and nature of the person whose name has been placed before them.

I declare that I will oppose the nomination of Mr Mitchel McLaughlin on the basis not just that I do not think that he is fit for the office, but very specifically because of what he said, and has yet to withdraw, in respect of the callous, brutal and dastardly murder of Jean McConville. When he was interviewed on RTÉ in January 2005, Mr McLaughlin said that that was not a crime. How can anyone who thinks themselves fit to hold the office of Principal Deputy Speaker simultaneously think that of the callous kidnapping, the ripping away of a mother from her children and the taking her to a spot where she was ruthlessly and bloodthirstily killed? How anyone can think that that is not

a crime is beyond my comprehension. How anyone can vote for someone who thinks that that is not a crime is beyond my comprehension.

It is all very well to have a little sham fight about the position of Deputy Speaker, and to require some weasel words, but here is the real test: does Mr McLaughlin still think that that vicious, vile murder was not a crime? He had an opportunity in the House a year ago tomorrow, when he was challenged on that issue, and through obfuscation and weasel words he refused to say that it was a crime.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is almost gone.

Mr Allister: Of course he thinks it was not a crime, because it was a product of a court martial of the IRA. By saying that, he accepts the IRA's spurious legitimacy and position.

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

Mr Allister: That is still his position, and so long as it is, he is not fit to be Principal Deputy Speaker of the House.

Mr B McCrea: Elections are good for the soul. It is a useful exercise to put the questions — not just from that side of the House — to Mr McLaughlin asking him what his opinion was on the rule of law or some other important issues. However, it is also important to know what way people are going to vote and divide in the House. Members sit over there and ask questions and then take a flimflam of an answer and say, "That is OK then, we are going to vote for him". That does not seem to me to be the real democratic process.

I have to say to people, and I will say to other people in the Assembly from different parties — the SDLP and the Alliance Party — that I thought that you had more backbone. I thought that you were rejecting sectarian carve-ups; I thought that you were trying to fight for democracy. Instead of that, you have signed up for another two-party carve-up, and when it comes to the elections, people will remember. I can tell you this here and now: I will remember. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr B McCrea: I will remember this. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order; the Member must be heard.

Mr B McCrea: I ask this question to the people jeering on the other side: look at yourselves —

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member should not point across the Chamber. Remarks should be made through the Chair.

Mr B McCrea: I appreciate the direction, Mr Speaker. I am merely trying to point out that it is good to ask the right questions in a Chamber like this. However, unless you get the correct answers, you should follow your conscience, and that is the issue.

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for giving way. Recently, the Member made great stock of the need for people to represent all of the people from all of the communities in Northern Ireland and to promote reconciliation. How, therefore, can the Member justify a situation where three out of four Speakers would have been designated as unionist in a society that is made up of people from a range of different backgrounds?

Mr B McCrea: Because, Mr Speaker, we are trying to move matters forward. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr B McCrea: There seems to be some mirth and merriment on the issue. I can only surmise that Members do not understand the arguments. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr B McCrea: What you are seeing here is an emerging opposition. We reject the five-party collection of which that Minister is a part: that Minister provides the fig leaf for a sectarian future that this country does not need, and I will not stand for it, and you need to think very carefully —

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr B McCrea: — about who you are going to —

Mr Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr B McCrea: — vote for in this election.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr McCallister: It is on record that I and other colleagues had issues about creating the post of Principal Deputy Speaker. It creates a hierarchy among the Deputy Speakers that, quite frankly, I do not think is helpful. We spoke on that at the time of the debate, and we voted that way when the post was created.

Obviously, the two largest parties in here do the Executive's bidding with little regard for the Chamber or the way in which the Chamber should work, should function and should represent all of the membership in here. Whether you agree with that individual or not, we should all have certain rights in the Chamber. The Speaker is the role, and when the Deputy Speakers are in the Chair, they take on that role. That is why it is important. That is why I reject the post of Principal Deputy Speaker, and that is why we should not be supporting it.

Effectively, Mr Speaker, Members quite rightly know that when they elect the Principal Deputy Speaker today, they are electing your replacement. I, like other colleagues, Mr Speaker, hope that that is not for a very long time, but they effectively will be electing your replacement, and that is what colleagues on the DUP Benches should reflect on today, and that is what they should be thinking about. A deal was done a couple of years ago, and they are going to stick to it. I suppose it is a surprise that they are sticking to a commitment that they gave in private. That is why we should reject this proposal and reject the idea of a Principal Deputy Speaker.

Question put, That the nomination of Deputy Speaker McLaughlin to act as Principal Deputy Speaker be approved.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 70; Noes 28.

AYES

Nationalist:

Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr Brady, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mr G Kelly, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Maskey,

*Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuillín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd,
Mrs O'Neill, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.*

Unionist:

*Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown,
Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mr Craig,
Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan,
Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch,
Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea,
Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan,
Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr Poots,
Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt,
Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.*

Other:

*Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Lo,
Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy.*

Tellers for the Ayes: Ms Fearon and Mr McMullan.

NOES

Nationalist:

*Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan,
Mr Eastwood, Mrs D Kelly, Mr McDevitt, Mr McGlone,
Mrs McKeivitt, Mr A Maginness, Mr P Ramsey, Mr Rogers.*

Unionist:

*Mr Allister, Mr Beggs, Mr Copeland, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson,
Mr Elliott, Mr Gardiner, Mr Hussey, Mr Kennedy,
Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr B McCrea, Mr Nesbitt,
Mrs Overend, Mr Swann.*

Other:

Mr Agnew.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Rogers and Mr Swann.

<i>Total Votes</i>	<i>98</i>	<i>Total Ayes</i>	<i>70</i>	<i>[71.4%]</i>
<i>Nationalist Votes</i>	<i>39</i>	<i>Nationalist Ayes</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>[69.2%]</i>
<i>Unionist Votes</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>Unionist Ayes</i>	<i>35</i>	<i>[70.0%]</i>
<i>Other Votes</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>Other Ayes</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>[88.9%]</i>

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

*That the nomination of Deputy Speaker McLaughlin to act
as Principal Deputy Speaker be approved.*

Mr Speaker: Once again, I offer my congratulations to our new Principal Deputy Speaker. I certainly look forward to working with Mr McLaughlin over the next number of months.

I ask Members to take their ease as we move to the next item of business.

Executive Committee Business

Tobacco Retailers Bill: First Stage

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I beg to introduce the Tobacco Retailers Bill [NIA Bill 19/11-15], which is a Bill to make provision for a register of tobacco retailers; to make provision for dealing with the persistent commission of tobacco offences; to confer additional powers of enforcement in relation to offences under Articles 3 and 4 of the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1978; and for connected purposes.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

Pneumoconiosis, etc., (Workers' Compensation) (Payment of Claims) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development):

I beg to move that the Pneumoconiosis, etc., (Workers' Compensation) (Payment of Claims) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 be affirmed.

The regulations are made under the Pneumoconiosis, etc., (Workers' Compensation) (Northern Ireland) Order 1979. They increase the compensation payable under the order to sufferers of certain dust-related diseases and their dependants who satisfy the conditions of entitlement on or after the day on which the regulations come into operation. The increase in amounts payable under the order maintain parity with the corresponding scheme operating in Great Britain and are in line with the annual uprating of social security benefits. The corresponding Great Britain regulations came into force on 1 April 2013. On claims made here since that date, the difference between the 2012-13 and 2013-14 amounts will be paid on an extra-statutory basis.

I will outline briefly the purpose of the order. People suffering from an industrial disease can sue their employer if that disease was contracted as a result of working for that employer. Some diseases covered by the order can take years to develop symptoms and may not be diagnosed until decades after exposure to the dust. Given the time frames involved, it is possible that the employers responsible may no longer exist. Consequently, sufferers and their dependants can experience great difficulty in obtaining compensation.

The scheme was introduced in 1979 to provide a lump sum payment for sufferers unable to pursue employers through the courts because the employers are no longer in business. To receive a payment under the scheme, a person must have been awarded industrial injuries disablement benefit. A claim can also be made by dependants after a sufferer's death. To receive the payment, there must be no relevant employer who can be sued, and court action must not have been brought or compensation received in respect of any of the diseases for which a person is claiming.

The lump sum payment is in addition to the weekly industrial injuries disablement benefit that is paid for the same disease. The scheme covers five respiratory diseases, most of which are directly related to asbestos exposure. They are mesothelioma; diffuse pleural thickening; primary carcinoma of the lung; byssinosis; and pneumoconiosis, which includes asbestosis. The lump sum payment is based on the age of the sufferer and the level of disability, with higher amounts paid to people with higher levels of disability and whose disability arises at an early age. Lower amounts are payable to dependants who claim after a sufferer has died. The maximum amount that can be paid from 1 April 2013 is just over £83,330 for a person aged 37 or under at diagnosis. The amounts payable under the scheme have been increased by 2.2% in line with this year's uprating of industrial injuries benefits. The increase will help to ensure that the compensation provided under the order maintains its value.

I am sure that Members across the Assembly will agree on the importance of support to those suffering from these terrible diseases and will, therefore, support the regulations.

1.30 pm

Mr Maskey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development):

Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. On behalf of the Social Development Committee, I support the motion, and I thank the Minister for moving it.

The Committee dealt with the proposal on pneumoconiosis at its meeting on 14 February, and it considered the statutory rule at its meeting on 11 March 2013. The Committee was, of course, content that the rule be made. Suffice it to say that, as the Minister mentioned, the regulations will increase the amounts payable to sufferers of certain dust-related diseases, which are noted in the regulations, or the dependants of persons who were disabled by such a disease before they died. In each case, the increase is 2.2%. The Social Development Committee recommends that the Assembly affirm the statutory rule.

Mr McCausland: I am pleased with the support for the regulations across the Assembly. I thank Mr Maskey and the Social Development Committee for the positive way in which they dealt with the regulations. I am certain that we all want to ensure that the value of compensation under the 1979 order is not eroded by inflation, and the regulations will make sure that that does not happen. I therefore commend the motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Pneumoconiosis, etc., (Workers' Compensation) (Payment of Claims) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 be affirmed.

Mesothelioma Lump Sum Payments (Conditions and Amounts) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development):
I beg to move

*That the Mesothelioma Lump Sum Payments
(Conditions and Amounts) (Amendment) Regulations
(Northern Ireland) 2013 be approved.*

The regulations will be made under the Mesothelioma, etc., Act (Northern Ireland) 2008. They will increase the compensation payable under the Act to persons diagnosed with diffuse mesothelioma or, if the person has died, their dependants. The amounts payable under the order are increased in line with the corresponding scheme operating in England, Scotland and Wales.

I will outline briefly the scheme's purpose. The mesothelioma scheme provides financial support within a matter of weeks without the need to establish an occupational link or, indeed, any causal link. Many people who were not previously eligible for help — for example, those who are unable to pursue a civil claim or to claim a lump sum under the Pneumoconiosis, etc., (Workers' Compensation) (Northern Ireland) Order 1979 — now have access to financial help for this terrible disease. That means that sufferers of mesothelioma are eligible for a payment regardless of whether they were employees or self-employed or, indeed, never worked, provided that they have not already received a compensation payment from another source. The regulations increase the amounts payable under the mesothelioma scheme by 2.2% in line with the uprating of industrial injuries benefits from April 2013. For example, the amount payable to a person aged 37 or under at diagnosis will be increased from £81,536 to £83,330, which is the same maximum that can be paid from April 2013 under the pneumoconiosis scheme.

I am sure that Members across the Assembly will warmly welcome the increase in the amounts payable, thus ensuring that compensation provided under the scheme maintains its value. I am sure that Members across the Assembly will welcome that and support the regulations.

Mr Maskey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Again, I thank the Minister for bringing the proposals for mesothelioma.

The Committee dealt with the matter on 14 February and formally with the statutory rule at its meeting on 14 March. Of course, the Committee was unanimously content to support the motion, so I will not rehearse the Minister's remarks. The Committee is happy to recommend that the Assembly approve the statutory rule.

Mr McCausland: I am again pleased with the consensus of support for the regulations across the Assembly. I again thank the Chairman and the Social Development Committee for the positive way in which they dealt with the regulations.

I am sure that we all want to ensure that the increased lump sum compensation payments under the Mesothelioma Act continue to be available to those who contract this terrible disease or to their dependants. I commend the motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Mesothelioma Lump Sum Payments (Conditions and Amounts) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 be approved.

Committee Business

Suicide Prevention

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 to propose and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Ms S Ramsey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I beg to move

That this Assembly notes with concern the significant rise in suicide rates in Northern Ireland over the last 15 years; and calls on the Executive to prioritise suicide prevention strategies.

Go raibh maith agat, Mr Speaker. I am delighted to be able to propose the motion on behalf of the Committee.

Suicide is one of the biggest killers in our community, with around 300 people taking their own life each year. The overall suicide rate has doubled in the past 30 years from 7.7 per 100,000 of the population in 1980 to a peak of 17.4 in 2010. For males, the increase has been even steeper, from 9.9 per 100,000 of the population in 1980 to a peak of 27.1 in 2010. Over the same period, the female rate has risen from 5.5 per 100,000 of the population in 1980 to eight in 2010. Suicide is a major public health issue, and there is a need for both crisis response and preventative interventions to address it. We need an approach that takes in the underlying causes of mental ill health and, at the same time, provides support for those suffering from it.

The Committee welcomes the Department's commitment to the Protect Life strategy, which has been effective overall in raising awareness of suicide prevention, engaging with families and communities and helping to provide a focus for suicide prevention and intervention. The non-recurrent nature of funding for Protect Life initiatives has, however, made it difficult to plan and sustain effective programmes and support services to prevent suicide. That is particularly difficult for the community and voluntary sectors, which currently receive the majority of Protect Life funding. There is also an issue of access to funding for groups, with obstacles for new groups that wish to apply.

The Committee is also concerned about whether there really is a joined-up approach and a commitment across all Departments to tackling suicide. We, as a Committee, believe that suicide prevention has to be a priority right across the Executive. Although the Programme for Government notes that an outcome of health improvement work is a reduction in suicide, there are no specific commitments or priorities identified for suicide prevention. That has the knock-on effect of suicide prevention not being identified by Departments other than the Health Department as a key part of their business plans.

Unfortunately, the recent economic downturn has had an impact on the rate of suicide. The restricted funding climate has impacted on community and voluntary sector responses to suicide intervention and prevention and statutory service provision. Committee members recently met representatives of the East Belfast Community Counselling Centre, which has seen the need for its

services rise sharply. They put that down partly to the impact of economic circumstances and welfare reform on people's mental health and, indeed, their ability to cope with everyday life.

To mark World Suicide Prevention Day last September, the Committee invited young people to come to the Assembly and tell us about the things that affected their lives. Members, Committee Chairs and Ministers, as well as senior civil servants, attended the event and engaged directly with the young people. They told us about the availability of support and counselling in schools, the difficulties in finding work and the provision of services in their communities. Those issues affect their lives and well-being, but they are not all the responsibility of one Department.

Suicide affects everybody; it is cross-cutting. I know that Members and their families have been either directly or indirectly affected by the issues of suicide and mental health. There was no target set in the last Programme for Government to deal with suicide or suicide prevention strategies. We need to ensure that, in the next Programme for Government, these strategies are a priority across all Departments. Indeed, the last ministerial co-ordination group on suicide prevention was held on 30 January. I have raised this numerous times. Prior to that, it had not met for 18 months, although I know it is due to meet in August. In fairness, when I raised this issue with the Health Minister and with OFMDFM, they ensured that the group met. It has met twice, but I am concerned: if it met in January and is not due to meet again until August, where is the priority in dealing with suicide and mental health? What message does that send out about how we prioritise?

I want to record my appreciation of the Health Minister and OFMDFM for their focus on these issues. I appreciate the work that they do. I also appreciate the work being done in the community and voluntary sector and by medical professionals, but the reality is that suicide and mental health issues continue to rise, and we need a cross-departmental strategy approach to the problem.

Suicide has a devastating effect on individuals, families and communities. Every week, more than five people die by suicide here. That is five of our brothers, our sisters, our mothers, our fathers, our children and our neighbours. Five people every week die through suicide — five times more than were killed in road accidents last year. In fact, I want to give some statistics. In 2010, there were 313 deaths due to suicide, while 55 people died in road traffic accidents. The year 2010 was significant, as it marked the highest occurrence of death by suicide, but it was also the first year in which road traffic deaths dropped below 100 since records began in 1931. That has to be welcomed. However, over the past 30 years, the overall suicide rate has doubled while deaths on the road have fallen by three quarters. Achieving the reduction in death on our roads involved commitment, co-operation and energy between a number of Departments. That has to be welcomed. It involved the commitment of agencies in DOE, DRD's Roads Service, the PSNI, the Fire and Rescue Service and the Ambulance Service, among others, to deliver a programme of road safety education, advertising campaigns, engineering and enforcement initiatives. Every life lost in any circumstances is a tragedy, but a greater tragedy is not to learn lessons that can prevent future

deaths. The lesson to be learned here is that co-operation across Departments saves lives.

The Committee is asking the Executive to take a lead in co-ordinating a cross-departmental approach that will target the underlying causes of mental ill health. That needs to involve the promotion of good mental health in our schools to give our children the skills to deal with life's problems and support for those who need help in times of crisis. We would like to see the same co-operation and commitment as has led to a steady decline in road deaths over the last 30 years being focused on suicide prevention. We would like to see a situation where suicide and mental well-being is not solely a health problem but an opportunity to develop a strategy to build mental resilience in our communities.

Over the past year, in my role as Chair of the Committee, I have sought meetings with a number of Ministers to bring suicide prevention to their attention and to find out what role their Department is playing. Just this morning, I met the deputy First Minister, who has reaffirmed his commitment and the commitment of OFMDFM on the issue of suicide prevention strategies. That is to be welcomed. The Health Minister will introduce a revised suicide prevention strategy over the next few years, and that will give us the opportunity to make sure that Departments such as Education, Justice, Social Development, Employment and Learning, DCAL, DARD and indeed all Departments play a full and coordinated role in reducing deaths from suicide.

The Committee is unanimous on the motion. We are delighted that we are able to bring it forward. The Assembly needs to send out a clear message. We were able to reduce deaths on our roads by a significant percentage because people worked together. Let us ensure that we reduce death by suicide and mental health issues because everyone works together. If we are honestly and truthfully committed to tackling health inequalities and issues around suicide and mental health, we need to get away from Departments working in silos. We need an Executive approach to this. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

1.45 pm

Ms P Bradley: As a member of the Health Committee, I support the motion.

Suicide has long been a taboo issue in our society. We are not comfortable talking about it, nor do we want to think that it could affect any one of our families. However, the sad fact is that it so easily could. Look around the Chamber today: any one of us may have been touched by suicide or could be at risk of suicide, and you would never know.

Over the past 15 years, we have seen a stark rise in those completing or attempting suicide. We have to bear it in mind that not all completed suicides or attempts by people to take their own life are accurately reported, so there is a hidden number that we do not know about. Belfast is one of the areas most affected by the phenomenon. I welcome the fact that, since April 2012, the PHA has put in place a system to speed up the notification of suspected deaths by suicide. That may help those in the statutory and voluntary agencies who are trying to reduce the numbers and react to deaths.

It is well known that, where a person completes suicide in a family or community, those in that grouping are more at risk of also completing or attempting to complete suicide. I am dismayed that suicide seems to be an issue that is sexy for some of the time and then forgotten about for the rest of the time. No other major killer would be treated in that way. There is recognition in the health profession that it is one of our biggest killers. The health system alone cannot deal with that, nor is it always appropriate for it to do so. If we expect the third sector to do its part in addressing the issue in partnership, we have to ensure that it is properly resourced and trained to do so. We cannot afford to have a piecemeal approach to the issue. We know the impact that courses such as ASSIST and Mental Health First Aid have on increasing the capacity in communities to help to address the issue, but we must go further. We must ensure that we remove the stigma of mental health problems. We must remove the stigma in our society of talking about our feelings and increase the promotion of good emotional health and resilience. With men being the most at-risk group for suicide, we must welcome courses such as the Man Matters course run by the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) and the introduction of the various MensSheds projects that are appearing all over the country. Those are examples of good work by the third sector in our community, and they must be applauded.

We can further build on that by having a cross-departmental approach. We know that the years of terror and violence inflicted across Northern Ireland has had an impact on the rate of suicide. We know that deprivation has a direct impact, and we know that the impact of family breakdowns also has a direct correlation to the rate of suicide.

Cancer was once a big taboo subject in our society. By destigmatising the word, we have people more prepared to come forward when they notice changes that could signal that something is wrong. We need to make suicide the same. We need to have more safe places. For many, hospitals are not that place. We need to make our communities more aware of the warning signs. We must ensure that suicide is not thought of as the only option. These are lives lost, young and old. Families and communities are left with a massive void. I have said many times in the Chamber that we, as elected representatives, have a duty to protect the vulnerable. Through a robust suicide prevention strategy, we can go some way to ensuring that lives are saved.

Mr McDevitt: I am happy to contribute to the debate. I guess that it is a measure of the significance of suicide as an issue in our society that this is the third or fourth occasion in recent years that the House has taken time to debate the topic.

As colleagues have said, the current recession, the extent to which there is marginalisation in our society, certain negative online cultures, the existence of hate and prejudice and an unhealthy relationship with stigma all fuel or contribute to the incidence of suicide in this part of the world. They all, I suppose, help to fester the conditions in which suicide is seen or deemed to be a solution. Of course, as is said over and over again by people at every level in society, suicide is not a solution and never will be.

The huge amount of work that has been done at community level over the past decade, particularly with

young people, must again be acknowledged. So many innovative and positive responses to suicide cultures that were emerging, often, as I said, among young people, have been developed in local communities. That work needs to be supported, but it also needs to be, if you like, mainstreamed and given the opportunity to be deepened and to move beyond being simply about intervention or very basic support into something that is much more structured and sustainable. If that means that all of us — the people who work at community level, those working in the trusts, in primary care and in social care, GPs and social workers — need to challenge ourselves a little, so be it. For me, it is about everyone in society benefiting from the bits that are done really well and making sure that the really good practices, whether they emerge in the community sector, in social care environments, among social workers or are used by certain GPs, are shared and become available to us all.

Given the decade that we are in and the issues that we face as a society, it is also worth turning our mind to the impact that suicide has on older generations and the fact that people from older generations take their life. As an Assembly and a society, we need to become much more aware of the issue of trauma in our society and to develop a better understanding of it. There is growing evidence that we live in a society in which an awful lot of post-conflict trauma is present. That manifests itself in all sorts of ways, but it is there. It is there among the survivor community, among those who describe themselves as victims or the families of victims, but it is also there in all sorts of very small ways among those who do not consider themselves to be much more than people who just lived through the Troubles.

A failure to acknowledge the fact that conflict-related trauma is present among us would be a very bad thing indeed. It would undermine our duty to a generation that is well represented in the House and lived through and survived the Troubles. It would also cost us very dearly not just in human terms but economically and socially in the long term. We tend to think about suicide as a young person's crisis and problem. When we have debates such as this one, and as we get to the point — we are getting to it — of maturing as a society after conflict, we should face up to the very real threat of post-conflict trauma that is among us. I am very happy to support the motion.

Mr Beggs: I also support the motion tabled in the name of the Chair of the Health Committee. I also thank the Assembly's Research and Information Service for its useful briefing on the subject.

With recorded suicide rates in Northern Ireland more than doubling over the past 30 years from 7.7 per 100,000 in 1980 to 17.4, it is clear that Northern Ireland faces a particularly large challenge in bringing about a reduction in the number of suicides, which has been increasing. The statistics are concerning. Since 2003 in particular, there has been a significant increase. I notice that, in highlighting this, Mike Tomlinson indicated that it was against a backdrop of a lowering of or generally slow decline in levels of suicide in England and Scotland, even in the most deprived north-east England region. So, why is suicide having a particularly adverse effect here?

Statistics show that suicide is much more prevalent among males. Men account for almost three quarters of suicides during the period. Suicide affects a huge number of

individuals and families, and a single incident affects many people. Friends and family are left to think whether they could have spotted a cry for help or what they could have done differently. However, no one fully understands the working of the mind.

I welcome the motion's call for the Executive to do more. Although the Department of Health and its Minister have a key role in this area, it is clear that other Departments must also play a major part. I think of how the Department of Education can encourage mental well-being through healthy lifestyles among young people at our schools and by increasing their awareness of the support and counselling that is available in schools or in the community for those who may need it.

The Department of Justice has a role because many of those in the justice system have mental health difficulties or addictions, all of which can increase the risk of suicide. Here, I declare an interest because of my involvement in the Carrickfergus Community Drug and Alcohol Advisory Group. The abuse of alcohol and drugs — legal or illegal — can destabilise an individual and adversely affect a person's well-being.

I also think of DARD and the issue of rural isolation, which is recognised widely as being a factor in the rural community. Over the past number of years and in recent months, in particular, extreme weather has resulted in significant financial pressures on such communities.

I believe that DCAL can also have a role because of the importance of sport, arts and music, all of which are widely recognised as contributing to good mental health and well-being and as having an important role in preventative work. So, too, has OFMDFM, which, through its responsibility for children and young people, has a role in preventing the next generation from suffering from this illness and event. OFMDFM also has a role in co-ordinating the Executive response.

The Health Minister recently indicated that the Justice Minister was the only Minister to turn up at the last meeting of the ministerial co-ordination group on the issue. It is vital that all Ministers make this an important issue in their Department and demonstrate awareness of that importance.

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

The recent knowledge exchange seminar in Parliament Buildings also pointed towards the legacy of the conflict as a major contributory factor, with paramilitary groups having inflicted pain and punishment and mentally scarred individuals not only through past events that still trouble such individuals but, sadly, through some still happening today. As a community, we must all work together to bring that activity to an end and to rely entirely on the criminal justice system.

Other reasons for the increasing occurrence of suicide include reporting methods, economic pressures, increased drug and alcohol abuse and changes to protective or resilient factors such as smaller family units, family breakdown and a reduction in church attendance. A number of issues actually strengthen an individual against times of trouble. So, there are significant pressures in our society.

I also pay tribute to Lifeline for its work and to a number of individuals who have suffered personally, including Carol

Goodall in my constituency, who works with Preventing Addiction Larne (PAL) and PIPS —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is almost up.

Mr Beggs: — and channels her efforts into preventative work so that others do not have to suffer.

2.00 pm

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Chair of the Health Committee, Sue Ramsey, for bringing this important issue to the Assembly today. The Alliance Party and I fully support the motion.

I had prepared my contribution to the debate some time ago, but things changed dramatically for me last Tuesday. Last Tuesday morning, I was in the Chamber taking part in the business of the day when I was asked to take a phone call from home. A hysterical voice at the other end of the phone told me to come home immediately. My 39-year-old son-in-law had been found dead in our garage. I raced to the home of my daughter to be confronted with an ambulance, police and other personnel and, of course, a distraught daughter and family members, and I was told of the circumstances of the tragedy.

Hugh O'Prey, my son-in-law, had fallen victim to this horrible illness. He was a big, strong family man with everything to live for — a good home, a wonderful, hard-working wife, a fantastic eight-year-old daughter and a good job. He was the principal of the local primary school. Now, our families and, indeed, the whole community are faced with something that we simply cannot understand. The question is this: why, why, why? It has been asked in Northern Ireland over 300 times. We are not the first family to endure this shocking experience. Some 300 people in Northern Ireland have lost their life in such unexplained circumstances — 300 human beings, all good people. It is far too many, and we must continue to strive for answers and prevention.

I very much welcome the Minister's commitment and his Department's fight against suicide. Much work continues to fulfil the Protect Life strategy, and the efforts of the Public Health Agency continue, particularly the recent TV ad, Minding Your Head, on looking after your mental health, but, unfortunately, we continue to lose people to this illness. I fully support the efforts made by the ministerial co-ordination group on suicide prevention and, indeed, the all-island Young Men and Suicide project. On 13 January this year, the Health Committee had a briefing from the Public Health Agency and was able to hear about all of the activity that it operates. The agency certainly does sterling work, but there really must be a much bigger reduction in the number of deaths through suicide right across Northern Ireland.

On 10 September last year, World Suicide Prevention Day, the Assembly agreed to fully support the recommendations contained in the Protect Life strategy. I fully congratulate and commend organisations throughout Northern Ireland that continue to work in this difficult and sometimes harrowing aspect of our mental health service.

In conclusion, I refer again to my experience last week, and I make an appeal to John O'Dowd as Minister of Education and, indeed, to other Departments as it applies to them. My son-in-law was a teacher, as is my daughter. All teachers do sterling work. Maybe, just maybe, they

are being asked to stretch themselves to breaking point. Anybody in the Chamber who has family members who are teachers will know exactly what I am speaking about. They do not finish at 3.00 pm; they come home with an armful of cases and work until all hours of the night. Officials must look for signs of over-ask. I am thinking of targets, results, inspections and so on. There is a very fine line between success and disaster. Of course, we all want success, but at what price? We need to look after all our providers and prevent people going over the edge and into the abyss.

There is so much more to be said on the issue, and I thank Members who have already spoken. They have covered most of what was needed. Cross-agency working, training, education, the fulfilment of the Bamford report, economic factors, deprivation —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is almost up.

Mr McCarthy: Until we get on top of this issue, we will have more Hugh O'Preys, more sadness, more grief and more tears. We need action, and we need action now.

Mr Dunne: First, I extend my sympathy and that of our party to Kieran and his family on this very sad occasion. We trust that God will bless you and give you strength. We appreciate the hard work that you do in the Strangford constituency, and we recognise your courage in speaking here today.

We all welcome the opportunity to speak on this important motion and to speak again on an issue that hits people across Northern Ireland. Unfortunately, suicide continues to be a real problem for our society. I am sure that everyone in the House knows someone who has very tragically taken their own life. We all know the devastating impacts for those who are left behind. Indeed, we have witnessed the evidence even here today. Sadly, suicide can touch the lives of the young and old, the rich and poor. It transcends all boundaries and is something that will not be resolved overnight. Although tackling suicide is a challenge, we must continue to do everything that we can to reduce and help to remove this terrible problem. I know that the Health Minister and his Department have already done much good work to tackle the issue, and I commend him for the active interest that he has taken to date.

Many issues have been identified as causes of suicide, and other Members who contributed referred to some of them. Given the current economic climate, debt can be a huge challenge for many, especially with the property slump. Recently, a personal friend of mine of many years tragically ended his life after getting into financial difficulty, feeling that the pain was just too much to bear. Cyberbullying through social media is also becoming an ever-increasing issue for young people. It should not be overlooked or underestimated. The bully now is in our children's pockets. Parents need to be properly educated on the risks of the internet. Teachers and schools must have proper anti-bullying policies in place, with proper counselling available to all pupils. Many homes have a clear lack of family support for young people, and that can often lead to young people having negative thoughts and feeling that they have nowhere to turn. Alcohol abuse is another major problem that can devastate lives, with low-price drink being readily available through supermarkets and off-licences.

There is room for improvement in further promoting public awareness. Our young people must be made more

aware of the devastation that suicide can cause for those left behind. Support structures must be put in place, but people must be made aware of them so that those most in need can readily access them. The key to tackling suicide is ensuring that vulnerable people know who to contact and where to go to find that much-needed help and support.

As with many health issues, early intervention and detection are crucial to helping to reduce suicide rates across Northern Ireland. We have seen how effective public awareness campaigns have been in reducing the number of road accidents. I feel that more could be done to highlight issues around suicide through public awareness campaigns across the media. The health service alone cannot eradicate suicide from our society. That will be achieved only with cross-cutting action involving a range of Departments and agencies working together to tackle this growing problem. The community and voluntary sector has a key role to play, as is often the case, at the forefront of dealing with vulnerable people. That sector must continue to help to reduce the risk of further suicides across our population in conjunction with schools, sports groups, libraries, rural networks, prison staff, police and our churches. They all have key roles to play. Groups such as North Down Samaritans, based in Bangor, do a tremendous job in supporting vulnerable people. It would be remiss of me today not to pay tribute to those groups —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is almost up.

Mr Dunne: — which give up their time to do such valuable work.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I, too, support the motion and would like to offer my sympathy and that of my party to Kieran and his family in their tragic loss.

As has been said, our suicide rate has doubled in the past 30 years. Surely it is an indictment of the society in which we live that people are driven to that point. I want to pay tribute to the Public Initiative for the Prevention of Suicide and Self-Harm (PIPS) organisation in Newry in my constituency for the work that it does and continues to do in suicide awareness and prevention.

In the space of 10 months in the Newry area, three young men in their 30s who lived within 200 yards of one another took their own life in very tragic circumstances. That, to a large extent, galvanised the community. PIPS facilitated meetings that brought together all the statutory and voluntary agencies, including the PSNI, the trust, Lifeline and other organisations to help people to come to terms with the trauma that had been visited on that small community. As a result, many of the young men's friends, neighbours and relations have taken counselling courses and suicide prevention and awareness courses and are now very much involved in that area of work. That has to be seen as something beneficial that has come out of such tragic circumstances.

I have attended PIPS services, which are held in churches every Christmas and include all denominations. One of the most poignant things at those services every year is a tree on which relatives and friends put cards containing the names of people who have taken their own life during that year. The sad fact is that, every year, the numbers increase; they do not decrease. That is borne out by the statistics.

Mr McDevitt, I think, said that suicide was not just the preserve of young people. In the past year in my constituency, an 82-year-old man took his own life. The issue of rural isolation has been raised, and it really needs to be addressed.

It is somewhat ironic that the Minister is, rightly, promoting Transforming Your Care and the concept of caring for people in the community with a strong support infrastructure, yet, on the other hand, we have the advent of welfare reform, which will cut benefits and put people in situations in which they will feel that they cannot cope. The issue of financial distress has been raised, and we need to be aware of that, address it and take it into account when those draconian measures are being implemented.

I sit on the Committee for Social Development and the Health Committee, and it is clear to me that there are many overarching, cross-departmental issues that need to be addressed by those two Departments. However, other Departments, such as the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) and DARD, which is also involved in rural isolation programmes, need to take stock and put forward ideas to implement suicide prevention programmes in a structured and affirmative way. I support the motion and commend the Health Committee for tabling it.

Ms Brown: As a member of the Health Committee, I support the motion. I commend Mr McCarthy for speaking today in what must be incredibly difficult circumstances. I extend my heartfelt sympathy to you, Kieran, your daughter and, of course, the entire family.

Suicide has a devastating impact on the lives of far too many families in Northern Ireland. The startling increase in the number of deaths by suicide over the last 15 years is deeply concerning. My constituency, South Antrim, has suffered terribly. Over the last 10 years, there has been an average of over 11 deaths per year, which is nearly a 100% increase on the figure for the previous decade.

2.15 pm

In January, I tabled an Adjournment debate about mental health service provision in South Antrim. In that debate, I highlighted the concerns raised by members of the public who had held a public meeting about the number of deaths by suicide in the area. The series of tragedies motivated the organisers of the meeting to tackle the scourge of suicide and raise awareness of mental health issues in the community. At that meeting, I was struck by a number of things, not least the real benefit to our communities when ordinary people decide to take action and work together across all divides for the greater good. At a time when community relations in Northern Ireland have been under such severe strain, this was a real example of a positive and uniting initiative. I hope that it continues to make progress, and I will certainly do whatever I can to ensure that it does.

I was also struck by the sheer number of groups, both voluntary and charitable, that were there that day to talk about their work and highlight their services in the field of mental health. Many of those present were not aware of the existence of the other groups in the area or the extent of the resources already available. Therefore, I respectfully observe that one of the key difficulties that we face is highlighting these services; ensuring that they can operate

in a joined-up way; avoiding duplication; and developing common themes and strategies in a cohesive framework.

Across government today, we are constantly looking at a means of delivering more for less, particularly in the health, community and voluntary sectors. The meeting that I attended seemed to have the potential to do just that. I urge the Executive to recognise that effort and take urgent measures to support and promote it. As a first step in that process, I ask the Minister for another update report on his Department's strategy and, in particular, on what his Department is doing to ensure that communities are informed and supported.

Across all our constituencies, we are fortunate to have so many dedicated individuals and groups working to address mental health issues. I pay tribute to them and ask the Minister and the Executive to offer them full support as we all endeavour to ensure that, as a society, we work together for the aim of good mental health for everyone. Our young people will be our future. We cannot ignore the statistics, which highlight the desperate need to protect them and keep them safe.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat. I support the motion as a member of the Health Committee. At this point, I, too, want to express my deepest condolences to Kieran and his family. I hope that you and your family get every support that you need at this very difficult time.

As has rightly been pointed out, suicide has blighted our island, with almost every city and village knowing the pain of losing people through suicide. Yet the question for us in the House is this: do we do enough to tackle it? In our health systems right across the island, mental health protection is considerably lower down the importance scale than physical health in terms of treatment and research investment. Yet mental illness can lead to more lethal outcomes than many physical illnesses. The European average spend on mental health is 12% of the budget. We need to increase our spending to bring it in line with that average.

We can only begin to tackle mental health issues when we tackle the stigma associated with mental ill health and suicide. I commend the groups, including NIAMH with its anti-stigma campaign, that do vital work in this area. Research has indicated that, at any one time, 20% of adults will suffer from mental health problems and that, while 90% of people with mental health problems want to work, only 20% actually do. This week, Assembly research has shown us that 33% of appointments that are cancelled by hospital providers relate to mental illness. Recent Assembly research indicated that the gap between suicide rates in the most deprived and the least deprived areas is 73%. Statistics from the Child Poverty Action Group highlight that in some areas, including my constituency, more than 60% of children live in poverty. That statistic is stark and cannot be removed from this debate.

As pointed out by Members who have spoken, 313 suicides were recorded in 2010 in the North of Ireland. We, therefore, need an overview of the impact of funding for tackling suicide in our communities. Is that funding targeting the need? Is that support having the desired outcome? Prevention, early intervention and support must be accessible, local and within communities.

Recent research by Mike Tomlinson, as has been rightly pointed out, highlighted how coming out of conflict cannot

be ignored in this critical debate. The Institute of Public Health in Ireland referred to the need for the preferential resourcing of disadvantaged communities. We need to look at the extension of dedicated psychiatric liaison teams to all maternity and children's hospitals. We need to train health professionals and educators in mental well-being, using established and internationally endorsed training modules that will enable carers of our children to assess and recognise vulnerability and emerging mental health difficulties from infancy onwards. We need GP support service provision to identify training needs and support the provision of an appropriate, continuous and professional development response to dealing with first-stage mental health problems.

We need, therefore, to take the issue of suicide seriously and adapt similar strategies to those that lower deaths from cancer, heart disease and road traffic accidents so that, by providing the support and prevention that should be in place now, we stop losing our loved ones.

Mr Gardiner: On behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party, I extend to Mr McCarthy sincere sympathy on his recent bereavement.

With one million deaths by suicide across the world each year, with a suicide occurring worldwide every 40 seconds, with suicide being the second biggest cause of death among 15- to 19-year-olds, with the suicide rate for men in the United Kingdom at its highest since 2002 and with the rate of male suicide being three to five times higher than the rate of female suicide, it is right that the Assembly is debating the issue today. I thank Ms Sue Ramsey, the Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, for bringing the matter before the House this afternoon.

The suicide rate for the United Kingdom is at its highest since 2004, and there seems to have been a significant increase between 2010 and 2011, from 11.1 deaths to 11.8 deaths per 100,000. It is difficult not to see the economic downturn as a major factor in the rise in suicide rates.

Research by the Samaritans shows that disadvantaged men in their middle years are especially vulnerable to suicide. Disadvantaged men in midlife face a perfect storm of challenges: unemployment, deprivation, social isolation, changing definitions of what it is to be a man, alcohol misuse, demographic changes and changes in the labour market. Those challenges have had a dramatic effect on their work, their relationships and even their identity. Many victims feel worthless and undervalued and have a deep sense of shame. Men are defined so often by their job and by what they do, so for that group of middle-aged men, the increase in unemployment may particularly disadvantage them. Unemployment can also contribute to relationship strains, problems with marriages and social isolation. Suicide rates may well be underestimated, and many deaths that are suicides are wrongly attributed to factors such as road accidents, drug misuse and so on.

There are practical actions that we can take to make a difference. A study released this February by Oxford University found that deaths from paracetamol overdoses had fallen by 43% in the 11 years since the law on packet sizes was changed. If the means of suicide is removed, it can be enough. The media also have an important responsibility in reporting deaths by suicide. Information in the press about suicide methods can have a profound

effect on vulnerable people, and that information must be controlled to keep copycat incidents to an absolute minimum.

I support the motion and believe that it will help to focus the public on the issues that the community faces today.

Mr Deputy Speaker: As Question Time begins at 2.30 pm, I suggest that the House takes its ease until then. This debate will continue after Question Time, when the next Member to speak will be Mr George Robinson.

The debate stood suspended.

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Agriculture and Rural Development

Food Standards Agency: Horse Meat

1. **Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development when she last met with the Food Standards Agency regarding the horse meat scandal. (AQO 3760/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Since 15 January, I have met Food Standards Agency (FSA) officials on several occasions to discuss the horse meat issue. The dates of the meetings were 5, 7, 13, 15 and 18 February. At my most recent meeting on 18 February, the First Minister, the deputy First Minister and the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety were also present. I had planned to meet with FSA in the week commencing 25 March but was unable to do so because of issues arising from the snow. My officials have also been in regular contact with FSA, formally and informally, throughout the three months since the scandal came to light here, most recently concerning the finding of phenylbutazone (bute) in corned beef that had been contaminated with horse meat and the recall of the substantial amount of material handled through the trader in the Netherlands. I am reassured that neither of these two recent incidents has affected the situation in the North, where consumers can continue to have confidence in produce that has been sourced from local farms and processors.

Lord Morrow: I am sure that the Minister accepts that this has a negative impact on our whole meat industry. Bearing that in mind, will she tell us today how many, if any, prosecutions will follow as a result of her inquiries to date?

Mrs O'Neill: As I have said to the House many times, FSA is in the lead on the investigations, which are ongoing. To my knowledge, no prosecutions have arisen from any issues in the North. I am led to believe that there have been prosecutions in other countries. Investigations are ongoing not only at a local level but at an EU level because of the nature of the situation and what has transpired over the past number of months. I am happy to keep the Member updated as anything such as that occurs. A number of investigations are ongoing, and if there are instances in which people have been identified as being involved in fraudulent or criminal activity, they should be prosecuted, and rightly so.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister tell us what additional controls are now involved in the food chain?

Mrs O'Neill: It remains the responsibility of all food businesses, including processors, catering suppliers and retailers, to ensure that the food that they sell is exactly what it says on the label. The EU initially agreed to DNA testing on food samples for one month, with a possible extension to two months. Member states are to notify the

EU's rapid alert system for food and feed of tests that show over 1% horse meat in mislabelled products. Member states are being asked to take one sample per 50 tons of horse meat for bute testing, with a minimum of five per country. The EU will finance 75% of the costs, with each DNA test costing up to €400. A programme of enhanced food standard inspections of approved meat products, preparation establishments and cold stores commenced here on 6 February, conducted by district council and Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) officials. All cold stores, meat-processing plants and cutting plants here have now been visited. I also welcomed the commitment from the Commission to accelerate the production of its report on the labelling of the origin of meat in processed products. However, the report must be supported by a full and proper impact assessment that will allow the cost and practicality of any extension to the existing origin-labelling controls to be fully considered.

Mrs Overend: Will the Minister detail whether she believes that the current regulations on the labelling of meat products are as strong as they need to be to allow the authorities to bring before the courts every single person or party that is criminally involved in the meat scandal?

Mrs O'Neill: There is an issue with confidence in the food chain, and, as I have consistently said throughout the crisis, our local industry maintains a high reputation, is fully traceable and is not involved in this incident. We are talking about processed food, and an issue with labelling needs to be resolved. By the end of the year, we expect the EU to bring forward more discussions and possibly to look to regulations on country-of-origin labelling. We also need to factor into that discussion a delegation to represent the needs of the local industry here, which wishes, in some instances, to label its produce as British and also wants to label it as Irish. There is an issue on country-of-origin labelling, and we are up for that discussion. I have had these discussions with the Commission and with Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) officials and the DEFRA Minister, because the discussion will happen at EU level. I want to keep distinguishing the local industry from the processors and the people who have been involved in the horse meat scandal.

Mr Allister: In other answers, the Minister indicated that, until this crisis, the practice in recent years was that, at most, there were two inspections of meat plants and four investigations of labelling per annum, but in none of those was there any taking or testing of actual product. How far does the Minister accept that that contributed to enabling horse meat to appear in our meat plants? Has that gap now been plugged?

Mrs O'Neill: The issue is very clear, in that it is either one of gross negligence or criminality. No matter what checks and balances you have in place, if there is a criminal element involved, it will always try to find a way to take forward the actions that it has been involved with. From this instance, it is very clear that there is a criminal element that needs to be exposed. The PSNI needs to be involved in bringing that to the fore and making sure that people are being dealt with appropriately by the law.

FSA is leading the investigations of testing. If those throw up areas that potentially need to be tightened up, I am happy to talk to the agency about them. FSA has been leading the investigations from the start and is continuing

them. It is very important that we explore those very fully at European and local level. I am committed to making sure that we work with officials to do that.

Badger Setts: County Down

2. Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the badger sett survey in County Down. (AQO 3761/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) has been commissioned to undertake a badger sett survey in two areas, each of 100 square kilometres, in County Down. These areas were selected on the basis that they have higher badger density, higher cattle-herd density and high confirmed levels of bovine TB. The first area is between Banbridge and Rathfriland, and the second is near Castlewellan. Letters issued from the Chief Veterinary Officer to farmers in the Banbridge/Rathfriland area on 31 January 2013 invited their participation. Similar letters, issued on 8 March 2013, invited the participation of farmers in the Castlewellan area.

The badger sett survey is an essential preparatory phase of the test and vaccinate or remove (TVR) wildlife intervention research, which involves testing live badgers, vaccinating and releasing the test-negative badgers and removing the test-positive ones. My Department has already received permissions for AFBI to conduct a badger sett survey on 73% of land in the first area and 40% of land in the Castlewellan area. Agreements to allow badger sett surveying continue to be received daily. Reminder letters were issued last Friday to farmers in the Castlewellan area who have yet to respond. I expect that that will lead to a significant increase in the number of permissions given. I encourage those farmers to reply as soon as possible, using the prepaid envelope provided. I also advise that AFBI continues to make good progress on the survey fieldwork in each area.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a ghabháil leis an Aire as ucht a freagra. I thank the Minister for her answer. Will she outline when the badger sett survey will be complete? Will she note that some Members may be parochial, but certainly not this one, who is enquiring about County Down? *[Laughter.]*

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Member for his supplementary question, and I am sure that people will be delighted to hear that you are concerned right across the board.

The optimal time to conduct a badger sett survey is during the winter and spring months when the vegetation is low, so, ideally, this will run from November right through to April or May. The current badger sett survey started in mid-February of this year in the Banbridge area and in mid-March in the Castlewellan area. So, depending on the weather and grass growth, we expect this phase of surveying to conclude around mid-May, and farms not surveyed by then can be surveyed next winter.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call Karen McKevitt, who may be parochial.

Mrs McKevitt: How many farmers volunteered for the scheme in South Down? What outcomes has the scheme achieved so far?

Mrs O'Neill: This is the first phase of our whole TVR approach, and we have had quite a number of responses. In the Banbridge/Rathfriland area, 152 farmers have still to respond, but the number who have come forward is very positive, and we welcome the fact that they are engaging because this is a very difficult issue to deal with.

I do not have the exact figures with me, but I am happy to provide them to the Member. However, I can say that there has been a very positive response right across the board. If any farmer has not responded, I encourage them to do so even now, because we can make sure that their land is surveyed in the next winter period.

Mrs Dobson: Will the Minister detail the backup plan that, I assume, she has in place if, for whatever reason, individual landowners decide not to grant permission, meaning that partial areas of land will remain throughout those areas on which no survey will be conducted? Does she believe that that could pose a risk to the tests' overall integrity?

Mrs O'Neill: As I said, a very high number of farmers have engaged in this. I do not start anything with a defeatist attitude, so I am coming at the matter thinking that this is a very positive way to deal with TB. It commands the highest support in the environmental sector for people's issues and concerns, and I am committed to taking it forward. I am very enthused by the early work that has been done. As I said, a very high number of farmers have come forward and are engaging very positively with the project, which I think will give us enough scope to be able to take forward this very important work.

Rural Crime

3. **Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the efforts to tackle rural crime. (AQO 3762/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Responsibility for tackling rural crime rests primarily with the PSNI, and I have met the Chief Constable on a number of occasions to make him aware of my concerns about the increasing level of rural crime, including agriculture-related crime. I have also discussed the increase in rural crime with the Minister of Justice.

My Department has been working closely with the police and other enforcement agencies to address the scourge of livestock theft. In 2012, that partnership was evident in a number of joint initiatives with the police on livestock theft, including Farm Watch and the freeze-branding initiative. Furthermore, in December, I launched a Crimestoppers campaign with the Justice Minister, David Ford, that encouraged the rural community to report suspicious activity anonymously. That campaign had the support of the police, other government agencies, the NFU and the UFU.

At an operational level, the Department's central enforcement team is actively working with the police on, for example, conducting roadside vehicle inspections, undertaking joint criminal investigations and, indeed, training constables to identify suspicious consignments of livestock. Cross-border smuggling of livestock, which is sometimes stolen, is a feature of rural crime, and the central enforcement team is working closely with its Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine counterparts and the gardaí. Relationships have been strengthened with joint training and enhanced

communication channels. My Department also works closely with the Department of Justice to ensure that rural dwellers' specific needs are taken into account in the development of community safety initiatives.

Mr Beggs: Rural crime has come to the fore, particularly over the past couple of years, with some very high-profile incidents, including the theft of heating oil, lead from the roofs of community facilities and even some overhead and underground community power lines. Is the Minister satisfied that the PSNI and, indeed, her officials, are doing all that is reasonably possible to work with local communities to try to tackle those who are responsible for such heinous crimes?

Mrs O'Neill: I am satisfied that we are holding the discussions that need to be held. I am engaging regularly with the PSNI and directly with Matt Baggott, the Chief Constable, on the approach to be taken. There is a difference between agriculture crime and rural crime, and that has been highlighted consistently over the past number of years. We have seen an increase in livestock theft due to the rurality and isolation of farm stock. However, given the level of crime, particularly in livestock theft, everybody needs to put their shoulder to the wheel.

I am confident that a lot of hard work is taking place, and I am confident that the central enforcement team in DARD is doing all that it can. However, I think that we can make a difference in tackling rural crime only if we deal with the issue collectively with all the relevant Departments, the police, the gardaí and everybody working together.

Mr Campbell: The Minister said that everybody needs to:

"put their shoulder to the wheel."

However, as she knows, the problem in some rural areas is that thieves are taking the wheels with them. What will she do in rural areas, in co-ordination with the police, to ensure that the rural text scheme, as well as the trailer ID scheme, is expanded and developed to try to combat crime in rural areas?

2.45 pm

Mrs O'Neill: As I said, a collective effort is needed. My central enforcement team will continue to work with the PSNI. We have made some progress over the past year on initiatives that have been taken forward, particularly around freeze branding. There has been some positive work, but there is always a lot more to do. We have seen a rise in rural crime, so it is an issue that needs to be taken seriously. I am happy to continue to liaise with the PSNI and the Chief Constable to make sure that they are carrying out their role responsibly, and I will make sure that the central enforcement team in the Department will carry out its role responsibly. We will bring forward more of the positive initiatives that we have seen launched over the past number of years.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a freagra. I thank the Minister for her response. Can she outline what provisions are in the rural White Paper for the involvement of rural communities in community safety?

Mrs O'Neill: The rural White Paper action plan contains a commitment by the Department of Justice to develop a new community safety strategy, which will ensure that the

needs of rural communities are taken into account. The Department of Justice has confirmed that the community safety strategy has now been published, and action plans for each of the eight individual strands of activity detailed in the strategy have been developed and agreed by the Justice Committee. One of the eight strands is around reducing the opportunities for crime and includes measures on supporting safer rural communities and working in partnership with rural groups to prevent and reduce crime.

Dairy Farming: Milk Quotas

4. Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what proposals she is putting in place to sustain and develop the dairy sector given that milk quotas are to be abolished. (AQO 3763/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The dairy sector makes an important contribution to the local agrifood industry. To ensure its future sustainability when milk quotas end in 2015, it is vital that it remains competitive. My Department's overall aim, therefore, is to help the dairy sector to improve its performance and grow its potential in the marketplace. That work has included joint support with Invest NI for an industry-led dairy competitiveness study, the aim of which was to help the sector plan for the future, post milk quotas. The recommendations of the study are now being taken forward by the dairy industry.

I believe that a market-led strategy is vital for the dairy sector because, when milk quotas end, there will be no restraints on production. As a consequence, future decisions on milk production will be taken by the dairy sector in the context of input costs and market returns. Therefore, to help ensure that the industry remains sustainable, my Department, through the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) and AFBI, will continue to provide education, training, technical support and research to help improve efficiency, competitiveness and innovation. In addition, we will review the range of support measures available to the local agrifood industry, including the dairy sector, under the 2014-2020 rural development programme.

The dairy sector has the potential to grow further and to exploit opportunities arising from the predicted expansion in world population. In that context, I look forward to receipt of the report of the Agri-Food Strategy Board, which the dairy sector has engaged positively with, and which will help shape the future growth of the sector, particularly following the ending of milk quotas.

Mr McGlone: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for that response. What assessment has her Department made of the effects that the CAP reform proposals may have on the dairy sector, the volume of milk produced, the number of farmers employed and the consequences for the agrifood sector?

Mrs O'Neill: As the Member is aware, the CAP negotiations are ongoing; we are still in the middle of those. Broad principles have been agreed, but we are still working out the detail of the supports that we will be able to provide to the dairy sector under the shaping of the new rural development programme. I am involved in consulting on that at the moment, and I will formally consult on it towards the end of the year.

There are a number of challenges. The ending of milk quotas will present an obvious challenge to the sector, given the importance of the dairy sector to our industry, which produces 32% of gross agrifood output. It is a very important sector in agrifood production. We need to work with the sector, and the opportunity to do that will come through the Agri-Food Strategy Board and the strategy that is produced in the action plan, which will then inform us of the new approach to the new rural development programme and how we provide supports to the industry. As I said, it is a very significant industry that employs over 3,500 people on dairy farms, and it is an industry that we want to continue to support. Although the ending of quotas presents challenges, it will also present some opportunities, and we need to exploit those, particularly in reaching into new and emerging markets.

Mr Swann: I thank the Minister for her answer. It was near enough the same answer that she gave me when I asked that question on 24 September 2012, so not an awful lot has changed. There is a lot of talk of reviews, and the ending of milk quotas is not far away. Minister, you spoke about open markets and the industry being sustainable. Have you had any dealings with Minister Coveney in the Republic of Ireland, where parts of the organisations, especially the Irish Farmers' Association, have actually launched a campaign that only milk that carries the Milk Development Council brand should be bought? That effectively bars milk produced in Northern Ireland from entering the Republic's market.

Mrs O'Neill: I have ongoing discussions with Minister Simon Coveney on a whole range of issues, and that is one of them. We send about 20% of the milk that we produce to the South, so it is an important market for the local dairy sector and how it sells its product.

Instead of competing against each other, we should be competing for the bigger markets. That is where the opportunities lie. When I talk about emerging markets, we should be competing together for those markets, which I am committed to doing. Arlene Foster, who, as Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, looks after the processing sector, has also had discussions about the issue that you raised.

The South wants to raise its production by 50% by 2020. There is now an opportunity for us, with the work of the Agri-Food Strategy Board, to look at how we can also increase our production and how we can work together. The Agri-Food Strategy Board will clearly set out the challenges and how we can tackle them. Let us then shape the new rural development programme to support the identified needs of the industry.

There has been a lot of work and a lot of discussions in the dairy sector recently, particularly on the EU dairy package and the voluntary code of practice, which the industry wants to see implemented as quickly as possible, particularly around the contractual relations. There are opportunities, but instead of competing, we should be looking towards the bigger markets, how we get into them and what markets we can reach. There is potential and a good opportunity there for the dairy sector.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Alastair Ross is not in his place.

Beragh Flood Relief Scheme

6. **Mr Byrne** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what progress the Rivers Agency has made in progressing the Beragh flood relief scheme. (AQO 3765/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am pleased to be able to inform the Member for West Tyrone that the Rivers Agency continues to make significant progress with the Beragh flood alleviation scheme. The design of the preferred scheme option is being finalised, and agency staff are in regular contact with landowners and affected residents regarding the impact of the scheme on their properties.

The business case has been completed and approved, enabling the procurement process to move forward. Invitations to tender will be publicly advertised in June, and it is envisaged that the contract will be awarded and construction work commenced this autumn. The Rivers Agency has been mindful of the need to keep the local community informed, and a further community meeting is being arranged for May.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for her answer and welcome its detail. Will the Minister state whether all parties are satisfied with the refurbishment that has to take place on the bridge, and when does she hope that the scheme will be completed, given that it is over two years since we had the big flood there?

Mrs O'Neill: The timescale, as I said, is that the business case has been approved and we are now moving towards procurement. We hope to be on the ground and work started by the autumn, with an expected work period of 12 months. So, we hope to be finished by autumn next year. That is ongoing, and I know that the people of Beragh are eager to have the scheme commenced and completed as quickly as possible because I saw at first hand the impact of the flooding in the area, so we will move on with that.

While we are working towards completing the project, the bridge was removed — I assume that you are talking about the railway bridge. I was led to believe that people were content with that because they felt that it was causing an issue with flooding further down, so I am not aware of any issues about the bridge.

Mr Frew: Given the Minister's answers there, and the role that the Rivers Agency has in the Planning Service consultation process, will she put her mind to giving the agency a much more strategic position and deeper input into the Planning Service in order that we are not left with scenarios in future of communities, villages and towns being flooded?

Mrs O'Neill: The Member raises a very good point. There are real issues in that relationship. It has been improved, particularly with the Rivers Agency's new maps and the system that it uses. However, further improvements could be made. A good example of that is where a planner wants to push someone down a field but the Rivers Agency wants to push them up and away from a river. That is a competing demand, and I had discussions with the Rivers Agency on that very issue as recently as last week. I intend to talk to Minister Attwood on how we can improve that situation, because there are competing issues from a planning perspective and the Rivers Agency's perspective, so there are issues that need to be resolved.

Mr Hussey: I agree entirely that tackling the risk to Beragh must remain a priority for the Rivers Agency, but does the Minister agree that the same problem will apply further down the river towards Omagh when the corrective actions are put into place? I raised that with your officials, at the time, during the meeting in Beragh. Can you tell me whether any targeted study has been conducted to learn what the impact and improvements will be for householders and landowners further downstream?

Mrs O'Neill: When establishing any flood alleviation scheme, all those factors are taken into account, because there is no point in merely moving a flood further downstream for other people to deal with. That does not solve the problem for anybody. All those things will be discussed. However, I am very happy to write to the Member to give him more detail on the progress that has been made further downstream and on any works that are planned there. I can give an assurance that there is no plan or intention to push a problem further down the river for somebody else to deal with.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. What is the overall cost of the scheme at Beragh?

Mrs O'Neill: It is estimated that the scheme will cost £1.5 million. As I said, we hope to be on the ground and starting work in early autumn, and it will take about 12 months to complete.

Farmers: Health and Safety

7. **Mr McQuillan** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action is being taken to address health and safety issues for farmers over the age of 65. (AQO 3766/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Health and safety is a matter for all farmers and their families, irrespective of age. I am pleased to advise that my Department has joined with the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), the Ulster Farmers' Union (UFU), NIAPA, the NFU Mutual and the Young Farmers' Clubs to form the Farm Safety Partnership. The partnership launched its comprehensive action plan in November 2012. It has made good progress against the plan. The plan will deliver on four key areas: the provision of information and promotion of safe working; health and safety training; motivating good practice and discouraging poor practice; and the collection and analysis of information.

On 25 March 2013, the partnership launched a multimedia campaign. It is hard-hitting and designed to change the attitudes of farmers to risk. It also targets their influencers and family members. The campaign covers TV, radio and news media. Indications are that farmers are well aware of the risks and of what they should do. It is a matter of changing the mindset to stop and think safe.

My Department plays its part in delivering the farm safety message in a number of ways. Through locally based CAFRE development advisers, information is distributed to farmers attending training events and workshops across the North. The information that is being distributed focuses on slurry mixing, including the dangers from gases, and the safe use of machinery when mixing and spreading.

My Department is also rolling out the FarmSafe Awareness course to 3,000 farmers of all ages across the North. The FarmSafe course covers the four key risk areas on the

farms: tractors and machinery; livestock; falls from height; and slurry.

Mr McQuillan: I thank the Minister for her answer. Does she agree that, according to the figures, the 65-plus age group seems to be most at risk and that whatever can be done to make those farmers more aware will be of benefit?

Mrs O'Neill: Absolutely. That is why I am delighted that we have the action plan in place. It is targeting those who are most vulnerable. We have a lot of farmers in that age bracket, so we need to make sure that we are getting messages out and discouraging the practice of just doing things the way that they have been done for years. Sometimes, you need to think about a new way of doing things and about putting your safety first. The campaign message is clear: stop; think about it; act safely. We will continue to do that and get that message out there strongly. I hope that the Member agrees that the media campaign that we are rolling out is effective and that it is getting that message across to the wider farming community.

Mr Cree: I commend the recent efforts of the Farm Safety Partnership in its media campaign, which was very striking. Can the Minister provide any information as to how her Department regularly liaises with the Health and Safety Executive, so that they look at the near-fatal accidents involving, again, farmers aged 65 and older?

Mrs O'Neill: I can give the Member an assurance that the Department engages regularly with the HSE. It is very important that we do so. It is in the lead on health and safety in general, but my officials are regularly engaged on farming issues in particular. That is why we have this partnership working, and I think that it is very important that we have it. It is important that we work collectively to ensure the safety of the farming community when it is out doing its work. Farming is a very dangerous profession. It is a very rewarding profession, but the potential risks that it poses for farmers mean that it is a very dangerous profession.

We will continue to work with HSE and our other partners to ensure that we get strong safety messages out there. It is key that we also work with farming unions to ensure that they get messages out to the farming community. We will do more of that in years to come.

3.00 pm

Culture, Arts and Leisure

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 13 has been withdrawn and requires a written answer.

Arts: Media Coverage

1. **Mrs Cochrane** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what steps she has taken to ensure that local arts events and productions receive greater coverage across television and radio. (AQO 3775/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): I take every opportunity to promote local arts events across all media platforms. Therefore, I am engaged in a series of meetings to attempt to influence the commissioning of more locally-made programmes, to ensure more local cultural coverage and to discuss where

opportunities for local companies might be improved. I have already met BBC, UTV and Ofcom. I will meet RTE, TG4, Channel 4 and Channel 5. The Arts Council and NI Screen continue to advocate to local and regional broadcasters the importance of increasing the amount of arts coverage that is available and, in so doing, covering the positive impact that our arts have on our society and, indeed, our economy.

Mrs Cochrane: I thank the Minister for her answer. What type of tax incentives could be used to promote film and TV production in Northern Ireland? Has the Minister had any discussions with the UK Government on that?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am waiting to have a meeting with a Minister from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in England. My Department is working with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) and Invest NI on vouchers. Certainly, we need to ensure that, first of all, companies, particularly television companies, that have responsibility for local commissioning look directly at what we have to offer here rather than at the cost-effectiveness of a certain proposal. Unless we take a collaborative approach, local television and film producers will be constantly on the outside looking in. They see people from other places availing themselves of opportunities here. However, it appears that they cannot do the same to best effect. Therefore, as well as trying to talk to a culture Minister in England, I have, as I outlined, pulled together a series of meetings with television companies to try to ensure that people who are involved in the creative industries here get the best possible opportunities. I am not convinced that they do at present.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a cuid freagraí. Does the Minister agree that we have managed to increase the amount of drama that is produced by the BBC in Northern Ireland? Would she also agree that it is now time for UTV to step up to the mark, considering the fact that it has not produced any home-grown drama for many a long year?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I acknowledge the sentiment in Dominic Bradley's question. As licence fee payers, we expect some return for our licence fees. However, that is not to say that UTV and other companies could not do a lot better. They need to step up to the mark. I think that they are committed. I have had very good discussions with UTV. I think that it is very sympathetic. Not only is it sympathetic, but it is open to ways of trying to ensure that local artists and film and television producers have a better chance. In, probably, our third meeting, we will start to look at what that detail may look like. I agree that people here need to be given better opportunities in television and film production. It is up to me to ensure that I fight their corner. I am doing that.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagraí go dtí seo. Will culture, arts and music be televised as part of the City of Culture and the World Police and Fire Games?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The answer is yes. I do not know whether the Member saw 'Lesser Spotted Culture' recently, which has continued to provide a good overview of the City of Culture. Indeed, other television and film companies are interested in what we have to offer in 2013.

I recently hosted a meeting with Mike Graham, who is the president of the World Police and Fire Games Federation, and the World Police and Fire Games company. We briefed the media on our programme and also on what we would like to see with the coverage. Coverage is at the discretion of local media, but we offered a good insight into the possibilities and potential by highlighting what I think will be a wonderful opportunity between 1 and 10 August this year.

Creative Industries: East Londonderry

2. Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what support her Department has given to the creative industries sector in East Londonderry over the last three years. (AQO 3776/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Over the past three years, my Department has provided funding through the Arts Council of more than £750,000 in support of the creative sector in the East Derry constituency. That includes support for three companies through the creative industries innovation fund in areas such as digital media, publishing and cultural tourism. The work of NI Screen in attracting major film and television productions to the North has resulted in the internationally acclaimed 'Game of Thrones' being shot on Downhill beach. That provides a global showcase for the north coast and East Derry as a film, production and tourist location.

Mr Campbell: The Minister referred to £750,000, which is obviously a welcome spend, and she mentioned Downhill beach. Given that the whole stretch of coastline features some of the most majestic and beautiful scenery in western Europe, does the Minister agree that it would make a natural backdrop for many of the creative industries and that more could be done to promote it as a filming location?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I certainly do agree. Having seen some of the landscape that the Member referred to, I can say that it is an excellent location. I think that local government in those areas needs to step up a bit more, to be quite frank. It is no coincidence that local government in Derry and Belfast have received more funding than others from the creative industries innovation fund. Even during the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure's inquiry, an uneven distribution or an uneven success rate was highlighted around that fund. I want that to change. It is not just about relying on a single source of funding but about capitalising on other opportunities through tourism. I certainly think that the Member's constituency is one of the prime locations. I am keen to hear any of the Member's suggestions. I do not want regional disparities around opportunities; we have had too many decades of that. We need to ensure that we try to spread the opportunities across the North.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister consider other ways of expanding the creative industries innovation fund, and does she see the RPA as an opportunity for local government to do that?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I always think that there is an opportunity to expand a fund, and I am keen to ensure that that fund is expanded. It has been very successful and plays an important role in innovation for people whose applications are successful. If the RPA is an opportunity, I am sure that

there are many others. I want a coming together through NILGA, the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers or both, probably with companies such as Digital Circle in Derry and others to try to give advice and provide expertise and guidance about how to be more successful with applications to the creative industries innovation fund. I have absolutely no doubt that there are people across the North who are creative, entrepreneurial, work in the community and voluntary sector and have loads of good ideas but just do not know how to articulate them through a successful funding application. Indeed, officials from my Department are more than willing to talk to people about how they could expand their opportunities. The Arts Council will be happy to do so as well.

Mrs Overend: Following a recent meeting with our councillors in the East Londonderry area, I know that that is a particular interest to the creative industries. Will the Minister outline what action has been taken to upskill the workforce in pre-production techniques to take full advantage of the opportunities being presented, for example, by 'Game of Thrones'?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Member will know that NI Screen's education and outreach programme has been very successful in getting young people excited about the creative industries by letting them see not just the 'Game of Thrones' set but the crafts, skills and expertise involved. A lot of them have been surprised by the different opportunities in local television and film production. As part of the work experience programme through schools and colleges, they can also go on-site and work with companies.

I know that the Nerve Centre, the AmmA Centre, the Ashton Centre and others are involved in outreach, particularly with the creative hubs. We recently looked at ways in which we can try to maximise opportunities to make sure that there is upskilling. A very small example is that shirt factory workers in Derry are now involved in providing the wardrobe for 'Game of Thrones'. People who were involved in hair and beauty and found themselves unemployed are now going into theatre production to try to enhance their skills and opportunities.

There are many opportunities, but I think that the Member's point is that those need to be spread out and that everybody needs to know what they are. I will offer the Member the same advice that I gave to my colleague in a previous answer: if your councillors or a group of people in your area want to know what those additional skills are, they should contact us, through the Arts Council or my Department, and we will be happy for people to go out to see what else we can do.

Mr Byrne: At this stage, I extend my generosity to East Derry, as Barry McElduff did earlier to South Down.

What proposals does the Department have to help the creative industries in further education colleges? North West Regional College's Limavady campus has a very good track record in art and design, and I think that there could be some benefit from investing in some of the projects that those colleges engage in.

Ms Ní Chuilín: We all need to link and make connections with further education colleges and the community and voluntary sector, but I am not putting my money into further education colleges when that is the Minister for

Employment and Learning's responsibility. However, I am certainly trying to make sure that those connections are made. If investment is needed to make those connections, I am happy to look at that, but I am certainly not happy to fund gaps in anybody's budget if they have added in young people as an afterthought rather than doing that upfront.

Athletics: Indoor Training Facility

3. **Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she will meet with Athletics Northern Ireland to discuss the potential development of a dedicated indoor athletics training facility. (AQO 3777/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Discussions on the potential development of a dedicated indoor athletics training facility can and will be taken forward only in the context of a clear, co-ordinated strategy for the sport, mainly developed by the governing body, Athletics NI. I previously said to the Member that I would consider a future bid for capital funding should Athletics NI produce a suitable proposal that would contribute to the delivery of the targets in the Sport Matters strategy and my wider priorities of promoting social and economic equality and tackling social exclusion and poverty. To that end, I have asked my officials, along with Sport NI, to meet Athletics NI in order to open up discussions on the potential and the need for a dedicated indoor training facility.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Minister for her answer because, after contacting her office by e-mail and letter, I have, to date, received no response to my requests for a meeting. It is my understanding that Athletics NI also contacted the Department and received no response. I welcome that progress will potentially be made. Is there a greater opportunity to access capital funding given that the likes of capital projects such as the A5 are not advancing as planned?

Ms Ní Chuilín: As far as I am concerned, the A5 is going ahead; I have not been told that it is not. If the Member has information that it is not, I think that he should share that with the House.

There is certainly no excuse for my Department's bad manners, so I apologise for that. At the very least, you should have been given an acknowledgement, if not an explanation for why a meeting was not going ahead. There is absolutely no excuse for Athletics NI not getting a response either. The Member can be assured that I will go back and find out what is happening.

I asked officials to meet Athletics NI to see whether there was the potential for such a development and to start discussions. The process will be lengthy because I will have to bid for funding, but we will try to get it done in this side of the mandate in order to get some security on what indoor facility there might be, based on a business case. All I can do is apologise again to the Member for his not getting any response.

3.15 pm

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for her response. I am surprised that, following last year's very successful Olympics, there is no strategic plan for the development of indoor training facilities, which I believe is necessary. Can the Minister give us any time frame during which we will see positive action to put such facilities on the ground

so that people can benefit from them before the next Olympics? I suggest that North Down might be a suitable venue.

Ms Ní Chuilín: In the first instance, the business case and the proposal need to come from the governing body, which is Athletics NI. Regardless of what should or should not have happened, that process is going to start now. I am sure that every Member could jump up on their feet and do what you just did, which was to suggest that it could happen in such and such a place. The fact is that it is really down to Athletics NI to come forward with a proposal. Where that potential venue will be is probably for another day's Question Time.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for her answers. Will she consider wider discussions over and beyond Athletics Northern Ireland so that you can take in educational establishments, the universities, schools, and so forth, so that a better basis can be provided for making a decision on an indoor arena?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The answer is yes. In the first instance, however, any additional support for Athletics NI needs to come with a strong business case. Further education, education and local government are all involved in the Sport Matters strategy and the Sport Matters implementation group. That has been a very good and positive experience. Despite all the needs out there and the rationale that we all want to try to future-proof — the assumption being that more children, young people and older people will get involved in sport and physical activity — and that you want to get the best, there is a realisation that the public purse just is not there. That is not to say that the facilities are not needed. A more joined-up approach is definitely needed. I have had discussions, albeit brief, with Athletics NI, and it is more than aware that that is needed. It would welcome more people coming on board to give it support. It also wants to make sure that our children and young people have every opportunity to compete with the best.

Ms Lo: I hope, Mr Deputy Speaker, that you will forgive me if I widen the question a little bit. What progress has the Minister made in developing walking trails in the outdoor activities strategy?

Ms Ní Chuilín: A lot of the sports providers include walking trails. The most recent one that I saw was a huge outdoor walking trail in the Mid Ulster Sports Arena in the Mid Ulster constituency just outside Cookstown. DARD was heavily involved in that. There are opportunities coming up, even through the stadia development and the programmes in that. If you are looking at what else you can do for communities, you could look at outdoor walking trails. That is a park-run scheme, and the parks that have been involved have included walking trails. I participated in the trail in north Belfast, but certainly not in the running. I will just have that on the record.

Mr McDevitt: Go on.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am too old. Certainly, the walks —

Mr McDevitt: You are not too old.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am too old, Conall. I will be honest about it. I enjoy the walks. Other people, particularly those in rural areas, should have those opportunities. A lot of rural communities do not even have footpaths to walk on. They need to have access to physical activity, training and

running if they wish. We are looking at future building, trying to have that future-proofed and trying to build in those things while the developments are happening, rather than to have them as an afterthought.

Mr Deputy Speaker: It was very good of Ms Lo to warn me that she was widening the question, but I encourage Members to try to stay as close to the question on the page as possible.

Soccer: Sectarianism

4. Mr Ó hOisín asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what measures are being put in place to help curb sectarianism in local soccer. (AQO 3778/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: First, I congratulate Cliftonville Football Club on its winning the Irish league. I am sure that the House will join me in that. Commiserations to Linfield. The big two are now in North Belfast, so that is something to be proud of.

The Irish Football Association (IFA) oversees local soccer and is responsible for putting in place measures to help to curb sectarianism in the game where it arises. I am aware that the IFA already runs a very successful Football for All campaign, which seeks to promote an inclusive culture throughout the game and challenge any forms of prejudice, such as sectarianism, in the sport. I fully endorse the Football for All campaign. It is entirely consistent with the aims of my Department's strategy for sport, which seeks to promote community cohesion, good relations and integration. Furthermore, as part of the delivery of Sport Matters, DCAL, with the support of the IFA, assisted the Department of Justice in introducing Part 4 of the Justice Act. That legislation incorporates a number of provisions to help combat sectarianism at regulated football matches. It also includes offences that relate to sectarian chanting and the stirring up of sectarian hatred by those who attend games.

However, I am concerned that, despite the good work of the IFA and the implementation of those measures, there remain perceptions that sectarianism continues to be a problem, particularly in local soccer. I, therefore, intend to commission research into sectarianism in soccer to help establish what else, if anything, needs to be done.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht an fhreagra sin. Has the Minister or her Department done anything specific to curb sectarianism in local soccer?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have supported events that Mr Michael Boyd has run with the IFA. I have also criticised sectarianism in a very public way and condemned it across the board, regardless of where it emanates from. I do not think that it is acceptable to comment only on certain games. When it happens, it needs to be condemned and challenged. However, there are challenges. That is why I am looking at conducting research to look at this issue specifically and to try to give the IFA another form of support. The IFA can do only so much, and it is down to the clubs and the wider community to do their best to try to challenge sectarianism. I know that it is problematic, and it is certainly challenging. We need to look at new ways to open up the discussion. I do not think that anyone in the House would not condemn sectarianism, and certainly not in sport. It needs to be given the boot.

Mr Humphrey: I agree with the Minister's comment on the actions that have been taken by the IFA, and I congratulate it on its work.

As a Member for North Belfast, I congratulate Cliftonville Football Club and Tommy Breslin and his team on winning the Irish League on Saturday. However, as a Blues man, I have to say that it was a pity about the result.

Will the Minister join with me in condemning those Cliftonville supporters who mocked Baroness Thatcher's passing before the game on Saturday by carrying a coffin draped in a black flag with a witch's hat on it up the Cliftonville Road, singing offensive songs and using offensive and gratuitous language about her? Such behaviour is not acceptable in any Irish League ground.

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

Mr Humphrey: Such behaviour should not be tolerated by society. Will the Minister join with me in condemning it? Does she agree that Cliftonville Football Club needs to distance itself from such behaviour?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I condemn any sectarian incident. I have not seen the YouTube footage that his colleague referred to in the 'Irish News' today, but I will look at it. However, I asked people who were there, and they said that Cliftonville fans were not involved. Had that activity occurred in Cliftonville's ground, we would be having a different conversation, but it did not. In fairness to Cliftonville Football Club, it needs to be given the flexibility and space to make remarks about this.

Regardless of how people feel about Maggie Thatcher — I have my own feelings — and regardless of her legacy on this island, which was not good, and the fact that she is a divisive character even in her own country, I do not think that it is befitting of people to follow in the footsteps of someone who brought nothing but misery, humiliation and degradation to this country. It is undignified, and I would not encourage anyone to become involved in that activity.

Mr Elliott: I also join in the congratulations for Cliftonville Football Club. I would have preferred Ballinamallard United to have won the league, but I am quite happy to congratulate Cliftonville. I obviously wish the club well for the future, but I hope that it does not win the league again too soon.

I want to follow up on the previous question. I think that Mr Humphrey's question was whether the Minister condemns that activity. I agree with the Minister that Cliftonville Football Club should be given the space and opportunity to say its bit, and I am sure that its management will do that, but will the Minister take action, if it is deemed necessary following the incidents that took place on Saturday after that match, in relation to cutting out totally this type of behaviour from football and, indeed, sport in general?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am taking action. I am looking at bringing forward a report and a piece of work to challenge sectarianism in soccer. Taking action about sectarian behaviour around soccer, football matches or any other matches is solely down to the PSNI. The legislation is there to do that. Do I condemn sectarianism? Absolutely. Do I think that it is wrong? Absolutely. Do I think that it is ugly? I totally do. Am I going to condone the behaviour of people who act in a way that is not dignified around soccer matches and behave in a sectarian way? I am absolutely not going to do that. However, to link the incident with the

coffin to Cliftonville's success is, I think, wrong. People are making connections here where there is none to make. Cliftonville Football Club needs to be given the space and flexibility to make whatever statement it feels is appropriate.

Anybody who is serious about condemning and challenging sectarianism needs to do it with a genuine heart, and not use places such as this to make it easy for people to be sectarian outside.

Cycling: Giro d'Italia 2014

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call Mr McDevitt for a question.

Mr McDevitt: In the spirit of the question: numero cinque.

5. **Mr McDevitt** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how she intends to maximise the opportunity to promote cycling afforded by the Grande Partenza (Big Start) of the Giro d'Italia 2014. (AQO 3779/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am aware of the recent announcement that — if I pronounce it right — the Grande Partenza of the Giro d'Italia will take place in the North of Ireland in 2014. This will be a welcome return to Ireland for one of cycling's Grand Tour events, the Tour de France having visited these shores in 1998. Primary responsibility for maximising the opportunity to promote cycling arising from this event rests, in the first instance, as the Member knows, with the governing body, Cycling Ireland. That having been said, my Department remains interested in working with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Tourist Board (NITB) to see how 2014 can best be used to promote sport, and particularly that cycling event. To that end, DCAL has recently accepted an invitation from NITB to sit on the board's steering committee that will be responsible for overseeing the delivery and organisation of this event. In addition, I believe that the fact that the Giro d'Italia is coming to Ireland in 2014 provides a much needed opportunity to promote even greater North/South co-operation in a range of areas, particularly sport.

Mr McDevitt: As the Minister said, the Grande Partenza of the Giro d'Italia is certainly a big deal. It is huge for us here in Northern Ireland and across Ireland. Can the Minister give us some sense of where we might hope to see the cyclists visit during their two or three days north of the border before they head south to Dublin?

Ms Ní Chuilín: It is premature for me to say what those will be, because the Department has not had any meetings yet. I agree with the Member, though, that we need to exploit every opportunity here in the North. I am sure that, with the guidance of Cycling Ireland in the first instance, we will. It needs to direct us where those places might be. I know that from the recent success of Marty Irvine and many others, and even from the Olympics, interest in cycling has increased, and that is a good thing. Certainly, in tourist potential, my Department, along with DETI, Invest NI, the Tourist Board and Cycling Ireland will be looking at opportunities here before the event goes south.

Mr Milne: Go raibh mile maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. What is the likelihood for further funding for cycling in the years ahead?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I mentioned Cycling Ireland in answer to Conall McDevitt, and we are working with it to look at and consider a bid under the performance focus programme. Further funding around that programme is targeted at achieving athletic performance in the first instance, but any funding provided to Cycling Ireland under the programme would be aimed at improving not only athletics performance but athletes in general, through cycling, across the North. Sport NI recently commissioned a consultant to develop a high-performance and talent strategy for Cycling Ireland. It will be making a decision on this in due course, I think probably around the end of May or beginning of June, when the high-performance and talent strategy is due to be completed. However, I am certainly committed to trying to find additional money for Cycling Ireland.

3.30 pm

Committee Business

Suicide Prevention

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly notes with concern the significant rise in suicide rates in Northern Ireland over the last 15 years; and calls on the Executive to prioritise suicide prevention strategies. — [Ms S Ramsey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

Mr G Robinson: First and foremost, I extend my sincere sympathies to Kieran McCarthy on his family's great loss to suicide.

I speak in the debate with great respect for the families who have lost members in the tragic circumstances that the debate covers. All Members, including me, have constituents who have been affected and who wish to see maximum effort expended to prevent further tragedies.

We must never lose sight of the fact that numbers and statistics about suicide all come down to one thing: people. They are real people who are cherished by their families but who, for whatever reason, take this tragic course of action that leaves devastation in its wake. We must also acknowledge that some cases cannot be attributed to a specific incident or prevailing circumstances.

I also take the opportunity to echo the plea of the Health Minister during the recent severe weather to anyone who has been severely affected by the prevailing conditions to seek help if they feel that they cannot cope. As everyone understands, current circumstances are extreme and have deeply traumatic effects on some individuals.

We would all welcome any move that would reduce the rate of suicide. The Minister is committed to that reduction. On Tuesday 26 June 2012, the Minister stated:

"Tackling suicide in our society remains a priority ... and I am fully committed to continually seeking ways of reducing this tragic loss of life."

The words are clear, strong and, for me, very welcome. The more we understand of the reasons for suicide, the better we can prevent the ultimate tragic act. I take this opportunity to appeal to anyone who has suicidal tendencies to speak to someone about their concerns. There are great organisations that do sterling work in suicide prevention.

In that statement, the Minister also acknowledged how the refreshed Protect Life suicide prevention strategy set a new aim to reduce the differential in the suicide rate between deprived and non-deprived areas, particularly for males in the 15-to-45 age group. Those groups seem to be more prone to taking drastic action, and identifying them and addressing their concerns has real potential to see the annual total of lives lost reduced.

I note that criticism has been made of the Protect Life strategy, but I understand that there is verbal evidence that, due to that strategy, people have been prevented from taking that last tragic step. I believe that those accounts are successes. It must be highlighted that, since 2006,

figures have remained generally level, but I agree that more still needs to be done, as they are still unacceptably high in Northern Ireland.

I also noted that there is an emphasis on greater interdepartmental co-operation and that the Minister was struck by my colleagues' willingness to be involved. That cross-party and interdepartmental approach is essential and very welcome in tackling the rate of suicide in Northern Ireland. The £3 million wasted each year on hoax calls to the emergency services could fund an excellent programme of prevention. Perhaps those who make such calls should remember that that money could be better spent on suicide awareness programmes.

I want to see the suicide rate in Northern Ireland fall, and I will support effective measures to ensure that that happens. We must remember that our neighbouring countries are seeing a fall in numbers. I also believe that the Minister shares my outlook, and I am, therefore, pleased to support this worthwhile motion.

Mr P Ramsey: I welcome the motion from the Health Committee. I am not a member of the Committee, but it is important for me to make some contribution.

Suicide and self-harm are among the most prevalent public health concerns to come to the fore, particularly in the last 10 years. We must ensure that our public services are in the best position to address and prevent them and to provide proper, professional, community-based support for those who have attempted suicide, have self-harmed or have suicidal thoughts.

From 150 deaths in 1998, rising consistently to 313 deaths in 2010, in our communities, throughout front line health services and in the media, we are more aware of suicide and the impact that it has on a family, a street and a community. I vividly recall watching the news some years ago about the horror of growing suicide rates among young people in rural Wales and the devastation that that brought there. We have to address suicide in the round. Prevention, in my opinion, is the key to stemming the tide of suicide in our society. When we hear that between 2005 and 2009 almost one third of deaths among those between the ages of 15 and 34 were attributed to suicide, we begin to scratch the surface of an issue that is still, unfortunately, a taboo subject in so many of our communities.

We should commend the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the PHA in particular for the work on the creation of the Protect Life strategy. The revised action plan from the summer of last year focuses on the local dimension to addressing suicide through education, counselling and support services. As I have said when we have debated this strategy in the past, a number of organisations in my constituency are simply world-class in the delivery of those services. I want to name some of those organisations in the Derry City Council area: Aware Defeat Depression, HURT and Foyle Search and Rescue. There are many more to mention.

Foyle Search and Rescue, in particular, has been phenomenal in its direct and indirect support in dealing with suicide in Derry. Formed 19 years ago as a community reaction to an 18-month period in Derry when 36 lives were lost in the river Foyle, many through suicide, the charity was set up with the aim of saving life in and around the river Foyle. Members may recall a documentary on the BBC recording the charity's work

in the December period of last year. The organisation works with community and statutory agencies to deliver counselling, education and direct intervention around the river Foyle. I am confident in saying that the balance in how it conducts its work has proven the most successful. It has become a mark of excellence in the delivery of those vital services.

In calling on the Executive to prioritise suicide prevention strategies, the most practical call I make to Ministers is to listen and learn. Go out into the community and see what organisations — many of them are charities — are doing in this area. In the Civil Service and throughout the public service, we are often so entrenched in our ways that, unfortunately, we do things a certain way, conform to policies and are protective of them. All life is precious. As such, we should do all that we can to replicate support and finance the organisations that are a model of good practice on the ground. The Public Health Agency alone cannot do all that needs to be done, especially in rural areas, where we need to be mindful that, often, only piecemeal services are in place. Key support services are available mainly in urban settings. That is something that we must address and the Executive must prioritise.

It is important to put on record the support that we should give to services and strategies that support those who self-harm or who have self-harmed in the past. Between 2005 and 2009, 23,500 admissions to hospital were as a result of self-harm. This is another growing problem that we cannot afford to ignore. I want to reference the Protect Life strategy and its aims in that regard. I will single out one worrying quote on self-harm from the report.

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

Mr P Ramsey: "It is important to note that the DSH Registry has highlighted that approximately 40% of hospital attendances do not result in admissions and therefore the reported self-harm figures substantially underestimate the true size of the problem."

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

Mr Wells: First, I apologise profusely that I was not here for the start of the debate. Unfortunately, I got my timings wrong. I looked at the busy schedule of business and assumed that the debate would be held after Question Time. I am particularly disappointed that I missed not only the Chair's contribution but that of the Member for Strangford Mr Kieran McCarthy, which, I understand, was very powerful and personal. I will take the first opportunity to read it in Hansard as soon as possible.

We are dealing with a desperately serious issue, incidences of which are becoming worryingly more frequent. As the honourable Member for Foyle said, the number of suicides in our Province has more than doubled in a very short period, up to 313 in 2010. I understand that, when the figures for 2011 and 2012 become available, they will, unfortunately, make fairly grim reading.

I had the privilege of going to Dungannon recently, where I met representatives of the Niamh Louise Foundation, which is doing marvellous work in the Armagh and Tyrone area dealing with suicide prevention. They handed me a little booklet called 'The Last Taboo'. Although one of the staff said that I would probably not get time to read it, I certainly did. The booklet tells very personal stories of

those who have committed suicide and those who have been left behind. One of the booklet's major themes is the endless questioning of close relatives as to why someone who perhaps had all to live for should decide to end their life. There is no common theme. Many of these people appeared outwardly to be extremely successful, healthy and fit. Some young people were clearly extremely popular with members of the opposite sex and had no problems getting boyfriends or girlfriends. They seemed to be the life and soul of the party, and yet, sadly and tragically, they decided to take their own life.

It is absolutely incumbent on the Health Department and the social services to get to grips with the reasons why we have this huge upsurge not only in the number of people who commit suicide but in the number who attempt to do so. There are some trends, and areas such as north and west Belfast have huge problems with the issue. It is a problem among young people, but other factors do not seem to be present. Some of the people who are mentioned in 'The Last Taboo' did not have alcohol dependency problems, nor did they take illicit drugs or anything like that. There just does not seem to be a common trend.

We need to identify very clearly what is happening. There must be something terribly wrong in Northern Ireland when our suicide rate is rising while that in other Western societies is falling. It cannot be entirely explained by economics or by the recession because, again, some of the folk whom I learned about through attending the Niamh Louise Foundation meeting and others were successful, were in good employment and had strong family ties, and there was no obvious shortage of money. So, we cannot have quick-fix solutions for what is going on, but we clearly need to do more as a society.

For every one of the people mentioned in 'The Last Taboo' and for every one of the 313 people who died in 2010, there is a family who are grieving intensely. It is one thing to lose a son or a daughter through, perhaps, a traffic accident or a long-term medical condition, when at least you know why what happened did; it is totally different when a loved one walks out the door and you get the dreaded phone call to say that they have committed the ultimate act and have ended their own life.

There have been quite a few dreadful situations in my constituency of South Down where people have taken their own life. To this day, sometimes 20 or 30 years later, their relatives are still trying frantically to work out what went wrong and what triggered it. Of course, at that time, two or three decades ago, there was not a high level of support.

I know that the Department takes the issue very seriously and is working hard to intervene early to give people the opportunity, when things are getting on top of them, to seek help and to give medical help to those who have suicidal tendencies. However, we must begin to take the issue even more seriously because it is getting out of hand and becoming extremely worrying. Were there any other situation in Northern Ireland in which we were losing 300 people a year, we would quite rightly be worried. We have had huge success in reducing the number of road accidents —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is almost up.

Mr Wells: — and yet, while that has been going on, we now lose far more people to suicide.

3.45 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: There are literally two minutes of the allocated time left. Chris Lyttle, you have two minutes.

Mr Lyttle: It is clear from the debate that there is still much work to be done to improve the mental health of people across Northern Ireland, both in the resources that we are able to allocate to it and the attitudinal change that is needed in the community so that people who feel that they need to discuss their mental health are given the freedom and confidence to do so.

I take this opportunity, in the brief time that I have to speak, to offer my sympathy and support to everyone affected by suicide in Northern Ireland. On behalf of the Alliance Party, I offer sympathy and support to the wider O'Prey family. I pay particular tribute to my colleague Kieran McCarthy MLA for the courage that he showed in speaking about this today. I have learned a huge amount from Kieran McCarthy in my short time as an MLA, and I know that he will be a sterling and ongoing advocate on the issue.

I also pay tribute to the volunteers and health professionals who work tirelessly to help families affected by suicide and to deliver the adequate resources that we need to prevent this tragedy from affecting others. Mental ill health and suicide can affect absolutely everyone, as MLAs have said today. It requires every Minister in our Executive and every MLA to work together to deliver adequate services in response. I am proud that, in east Belfast, parties have worked on a cross-party basis on the issue. Although I do not agree with every position that the Minister of Health takes, I recognise the effort that he has made to listen to the concerns of organisations such as Survivors of Suicide in order to tackle the issue in east Belfast, which, I understand, had the second highest rate in all of Northern Ireland in 2010. I also thank the Chair of the Health Committee for meeting groups in east Belfast under the facilitation of the East Belfast Community Development Agency —

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

Mr Lyttle: — which is working hard to devise a suicide community response plan in the constituency.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I thank everyone who has spoken in what has been a thoughtful and useful debate on this very sensitive issue. I pay tribute to Mr McCarthy for speaking when his emotions are very raw. I assure him that the thoughts and prayers of many in the House will be with him and the O'Prey family over the coming months. As I was telling Mr McCarthy, other families have suffered similar bereavements, some of more distant relations and some of very close relations. That is reflective of a community, just as the House reflects a community in which people have various problems, ailments, illnesses and sicknesses associated with their family. Tragically, suicide has affected a number of Members, and that is the case across our community.

Suicide remains one of the biggest public health and societal challenges that we face in Northern Ireland. The provisional figures for registered deaths by suicide for 2012 show that the rates remain far too high, with some 278 deaths recorded last year. That is a modest decrease on the number of deaths registered in the previous year and a more significant decrease on the record high of deaths

in 2010, which stood at 315. The Protect Life suicide prevention strategy, published in late 2006, was developed in response to local concerns about increasing numbers of deaths by suicide. Over the earlier part of the past decade, there was an average of 150 deaths by suicide each year. By 2006, the annual number of registered deaths had virtually doubled. The rate of increase in recorded suicides over 2005 and 2006 was unprecedented. The length of time that it takes to investigate and register a death by suicide means that most of those recorded deaths actually occurred in 2003 and 2004, which coincides with the time when local communities were raising concerns about the increase in suicide in their midst. Clearly, something happened over 2003 and 2004 because the increases in suicide have been sustained since then.

The Department has looked for reasons for the sharp increases in suicide over that period. However, there is no obvious explanation. The increase in recorded suicides follows a comprehensive reorganisation of the Coroners Service and the introduction of more robust recording processes. However, I believe that that may only partially explain the increase.

Regardless of the reasons, Northern Ireland experienced an upward trend in suicide over the past 10 years while neighbouring jurisdictions experienced downward trends. It may be that there was under-recording prior to 2005, and the fact that rates have plateaued at around 280 deaths annually since 2006 supports that view. However, that simply means that we have had a much higher suicide rate than England, Wales and the Republic of Ireland for some time. There may be some post-traumatic stress-related issues from the Troubles that mean that Northern Ireland has a higher rate of suicide than anywhere else. Those things would bear further examination.

Does the continued high rate of suicide here mean that the Protect Life strategy has failed? At its inception, the strategy aimed to reduce the suicide rate to around 11 deaths per 100,000 of population. However, the current rate is 16 per 100,000 of population. So, we have clearly not met the targets that we set ourselves. I deeply regret that we have not had that decrease, but it is not fair to say that that is down to the strategy failing. Indeed, a substantial number of lives have been saved through the efforts of those working on suicide prevention under Protect Life. Although we cannot put a figure on that, we have testimonies from many people who have been helped and who have stated that, without such intervention, they would not be alive today.

It is also worth noting that Protect Life was launched at the onset of a sharp upward trend in suicide rates. International evidence indicates that it takes many years to reverse such a trend. Evidence also indicates that economic recession tends to be accompanied by increased national suicide rates. That is now being seen in England and the Republic of Ireland, where sustained downward trends have recently been reversed. The fact that the rate here has been steady since 2006 and has not increased in the teeth of a recession may be some indication that the prevention efforts are having a positive impact. However, I cannot emphasise it strongly enough that the level of suicide in Northern Ireland is unacceptably high. Therefore, there can be no grounds for complacency.

In judging the impact of Protect Life, we have to look beyond the overall suicide rate, although we must always

bear it in mind that the long-term aim is to reduce it by as much as possible. Independent evaluation of Protect Life was completed last year, and the evaluation report is available on the Department's website. The evaluation found that there has been very strong community engagement in suicide prevention, a reduction in stigma and greater awareness of suicide and of the need to encourage help-seeking behaviour. That provides some evidence that we are doing the right things. The evaluation also found that the least progress had been made in areas that require wider cross-departmental collaboration and engagement, which is the very crux of the motion that we have been debating today. It has highlighted the importance of a broad range of action across government and across sectors.

I have repeatedly said that suicide cannot be addressed by the Health Department alone: it is a societal issue that requires the engagement of nearly all the Departments. I have met on numerous occasions with my ministerial colleagues to explore how we can do more to tackle suicide. I also agreed that, following publication of the refreshed Protect Life document, the ministerial co-ordination group on suicide prevention should meet on a more regular basis. Previously, the group met on an ad hoc arrangement to address specific issues as they arose. Following the publication of the refreshed Protect Life strategy, the ministerial co-ordination group met in June 2012 and again in January this year. We are scheduled to meet again later this year. The membership of the group has been broadened and now includes all Departments except for Finance and Personnel; Environment; and Enterprise, Trade and Investment. The remit of the group has been revised to cover a broader range of activities to promote positive mental health. That is appropriate because most Departments can influence upstream factors that increase the risk of suicide. Rather than being engaged in delivering the front line crisis response services that are required when a person is actually suicidal, all member Departments now report to the group on progress that they have made on programmes to improve mental health and reduce suicide.

At the last meeting of the ministerial group, I was impressed by the range of activity being undertaken. The Department of Education, for example, is rolling out its emotional health and well-being programme in post-primary schools. The Department for Social Development is funding projects that directly impact on suicide prevention and mental health through the neighbourhood renewal programme, and the Department for Employment and Learning is ensuring that front line staff receive relevant training. The Department of Justice faces particular challenges in the prison population and provides a listener scheme in staff training. It also works with groups such as PIPS to encourage prisoners to spot the signs of emotional distress and to seek help. For its part, OFMDFM has committed to the creation of a support advocacy service to assist victims and survivors of abuse. I recently launched a joint initiative with the Ministers with responsibility for agriculture and sport to promote mental health awareness and help-seeking behaviour through rural networks and sporting organisations. That initiative also involves the provision of training for sports coaches on suicide awareness so that they can spot the signs, intervene appropriately and signpost to further resources of help.

We need to understand more about what is driving the high suicide rate in Northern Ireland. Some of the research funded under Protect Life will help to improve our understanding. High levels of deprivation and mental illness, the effect of societal change on family life, alcohol and substance abuse, serious adverse incidents in early years, the aftermath of the Troubles and physical, emotional and sexual abuse all contribute. In addition, Northern Ireland has a unique experience of 40 years of conflict. Research shows that a legacy of the conflict is high levels of untreated post-traumatic stress disorder. People who were children during the Troubles are now moving into middle age and are the group at greatest risk of suicide. That is particularly true for men and even more so for men living in deprived areas, which are the very areas that experienced the worst of the violence. The more we understand the underlying driving forces for suicide here, the better informed our response will be right across government. It is too big an issue for this Department or myself, and we all have to work together. There is no magic solution. If there were, we would have used it by now. We all need to work together to identify incremental improvements, make that difference and continue to drive down year on year the number of people who take their own life.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity not only to move the motion but to wind up on the debate. I commend all the Members who took part and listened. It is not only important that it is cross-departmental, but it is about our involvement as MLAs and how we bring it to our Committee. I am delighted that the motion has been supported right across the Chamber.

In a personal capacity and as Chair of the Health Committee — Kieran is a member of our Committee — I take this opportunity to extend my thoughts and sympathy not only to you, Kieran, but to your family on your recent loss. I did not want to say anything at the opening of the debate because it is your personal circumstances, but I hope that you understood that I was thinking about you during the debate from the general comments. I know that you understand that.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Member for giving way. I take this opportunity to thank everyone from the Speaker, the Minister and all my colleagues on behalf of Angela and Cara, Hugh's mother, and their family. Thank you all very much indeed.

4.00 pm

Ms S Ramsey: Thank you. Again, I take this opportunity to send out a clear message that we are thinking of all of those families who have been bereaved through suicide.

You would think that the Deputy Chair of the Committee and I had co-ordinated our response to the debate. It has not been co-ordinated, but I was going to quote the same book that he quoted. It is called 'The Last Taboo', and people should read it if they get the opportunity to do so. I was thinking about your circumstances, Kieran, and, without getting into other people's personal circumstances, suicide has affected a lot of us, whether directly or indirectly. There is a quote at the back of the book:

"In life, sometimes you can meet extraordinary people who open their hearts and souls to bring greatness to

anyone who takes the time to read their story. Please read and you will be inspired."

The book contains the families' stories, and I assume that people can contact the Niamh Louise Foundation to get a copy of it.

I firmly believe that if we as an Assembly are to target the issues of suicide, self-harm and mental health and our approach to it, and even the issue of life skills, we need to have a comprehensive, joined-up approach. I am heartened by the Minister's comments. We need that approach right across the Executive, with all Departments making it a priority. I know that a lot of good work is being done in Departments, but I am concerned that there is not that co-ordinated, joined-up approach. The Minister mentioned the ministerial group on suicide and self-harm, and I remind the Minister that that group had not met for 18 months, even though suicide was increasing daily. That aside, I commend the work that is being done among some Departments. I felt that it was important to bring the motion to the Assembly today, because we need that approach.

A number of Members gave out statistics, and I will not go into those. This is not just a young person's illness, and it is not just killing our young people. Recent statistics have found that there are increasing trends among males over 40. It cuts across all barriers, all housing estates and all families. It cuts across whether you are employed or unemployed and whether you have a family or are single. This is killing our people. Clustering seems to be a big issue in some areas, and Paula Bradley mentioned that. Parallel to that, you are right; some people are very uncomfortable talking about suicide, and we need to deal with that taboo subject.

In case anybody is under any illusion, I welcome and commend the work that the Public Health Agency has been doing. Not once in the course of the debate did I hear anybody criticise the Public Health Agency. I want to send out the clear message that it is doing a lot of good work, but it is not just down to the Public Health Agency or the Minister of Health. It needs to be everybody. We need to have that expansion. Roy Beggs touched on the fact that it is clear that other Departments have a role, and the Minister highlighted the fact that those Departments are there and that all Ministers need to make this an important issue in their Department.

Conall McDevitt said that this is the third or fourth time that the Assembly has discussed this issue and that that shows how important it is. I am not known as a cynic, but the cynic in me says that this is the fourth time that we have discussed this and suicide is still on the increase. Again, I agree with Conall that we must recognise the positive responses that communities have developed to deal with suicide. Kieran referred to his personal circumstances and the difficulty of trying to understand why. We need to look after people and look out for people and look for the signs that they are under pressure.

Mickey Brady, like other Members, highlighted the fact that it does not just affect young people. Older people and rural isolation are also factors. A number of Members touched on the issue of welfare reform and the financial distress that people are finding themselves under. That is not a health issue, but the health system has to pick up the pieces when people cannot cope. That is why we need a co-ordinated approach to this.

Gordon Dunne said that suicide continues to be a real problem for society. He emphasised the need for schools to have support mechanisms and counselling in place. The information that I am receiving, Gordon, is that there is a waiting list for this. So, if we are encouraging young people, through schools, to access that counselling service, it is very hard to tell them that they might have to wait for a week or two weeks. Again, Gordon highlighted the fact that we need cross-cutting action.

Maeve McLaughlin said that we need to ask ourselves whether we are doing enough to tackle suicide, and I agree totally with her. Mental health is given a lower priority than physical health in our system, and we need to tackle the stigma attached to mental health issues. In her contribution, Pam Brown said that suicide has a startling impact on families. One of the key difficulties is highlighting services and ensuring that they are provided in a joined-up way. Again, that is an issue. People do not know what services are there and, unfortunately, only want to know what services are there when they need them. We need to have ways of ensuring that that information is there.

Sam Gardiner touched on the fact that, worldwide, there is a suicide every 40 seconds. That is how quick it is, so, as a society, we need to get our head around that. The economic downturn has made a major contribution to the growing incidence of suicide and mental health problems. I think that Sam is right to say that the media needs to take a responsible attitude to how it reports suicide. The media is a key partner, and we should want to take a partnership approach to it. I know, through the National Union of Journalists, that there have been negotiations on this and other sensitive issues, such as sexual abuse. It is important that the media plays its part.

George Robinson agreed that there needs to be cross-departmental work. He said that other countries are seeing a fall in the number of suicides, and that perhaps we should learn the lessons from that.

Pat Ramsey, like many who spoke, paid tribute to those working on suicide support and prevention. I firmly believe that, but for that work, the suicide figures would be higher. Such people are unsung heroes of our communities. They do not work nine-to-five jobs; a lot of them are volunteers, and their work is 24/7, and we need to recognise that.

Jim Wells, the Deputy Chairperson, mentioned the work of the Niamh Louise Foundation. As I said in my opening remarks, I had a meeting this morning, along with the deputy First Minister, with representatives of PIPS and the Niamh Louise Foundation on that very issue. The deputy First Minister has once again committed himself to ensuring that this becomes a priority through the Executive.

Mr Wells: I thank the Member for giving way. Does she accept that the foundation, although doing marvellous work, has struggled to find funding to continue the excellent services that it offers? In a sense, it does not seem to fit into any of the pockets for funding streams for the work that it does.

Ms S Ramsey: Yes. I do not want to be critical in this debate, but you have highlighted a point. During the Committee's inquiry into health inequalities, we wrote to all the Ministers about how their Departments deal with health inequalities in constituencies, and, to my horror, it is as though we were still in our silos. Some Ministers wrote

back to say that they did not believe that they had a remit to deal with health inequalities. If you were talking about inward investment or finance and personnel, if that money is not there, how can you tackle all that? The refreshed Protect Life strategy has closed down some of that opportunity for some of the groups, and that is a criticism of that happening. So, there is no criticism of the work of the PHA or the work that is done on the ground. The criticism is that we have closed that funding down.

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

Ms S Ramsey: Just quickly, Mr Deputy Speaker, I think that it is important that I end this with a quotation from a bereaved mother, because we need this hope.

Mr Deputy Speaker: All right.

Ms S Ramsey: "Look at prevention, rather than reaction. It is not the people who have been affected by suicide who need to be made aware of it; it is those who have not been touched who need to be aware of the devastation it causes."

I ask everyone to support the motion.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes with concern the significant rise in suicide rates in Northern Ireland over the last 15 years; and calls on the Executive to prioritise suicide prevention strategies.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Members may take their ease for a few seconds while we change the top table.

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

Topical Questions

Mr Deputy Speaker: The next item of business is a motion from the Committee on Procedures. The Business Committee has agreed to allow one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer will have 15 minutes to propose the motion and 15 minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Mr G Kelly (The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures): I beg to move

That this Assembly approves the report of the Committee on Procedures on its inquiry into topical questions.

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. On behalf of the Committee on Procedures, I am pleased to bring the report on the Committee's inquiry into topical questions to the Chamber today. Although it may be a short report, I believe that the implementation of the recommendations has the potential to transform Question Time and, most importantly, to increase public engagement with the Assembly.

The Committee considered the existing opportunities for questioning Ministers and holding them to account and concluded that, although there are already a number of options for scrutinising Ministers, opportunities for posing questions are largely scripted and the timing for tabling questions can result in a loss of topicality. Questions for oral answer are published seven or eight working days before they are due to be taken in the Chamber, which means that newly emerging issues that arise between the time questions are submitted and asked in the Chamber cannot be covered. Although questions for urgent oral answer provide some opportunity for more current questioning, those are limited to single topics and are selected at the discretion of the Speaker.

The Committee considered the potential benefits of introducing a system for asking topical questions of Ministers, and those are outlined in the report. Topical questions would provide an additional opportunity for Members to scrutinise Ministers and hold them to account on more immediate issues while a topic was still current. Greater spontaneity and topicality has the potential to assist in encouraging a livelier and better-attended Question Time and to ensure that sessions are meaningful and current. As I said, it is hoped that the introduction of topical questions would increase public engagement with the Assembly.

Having considered the potential benefits of topical questions, along with the views of stakeholders and the experience in other legislatures where a system of topical questioning operates, the Committee concluded that a facility for asking topical questions of Ministers should be introduced in the Assembly. However, given the nature of the work of the Assembly Commission, the Committee agreed that it was not necessary to provide additional opportunities for questioning its Members and, therefore, recommended that the Assembly Commission be excluded from the topical questions rota.

Having agreed that a system for asking topical questions should be introduced, the Committee considered the

arrangements for managing the process. One of the key issues considered by the Committee was whether topical questions should be spontaneous or whether notice should be given to ensure that the information is available to provide an answer. The Committee was clear that the strategic aim of topical questions was to provide a forum to gain current information from Ministers that could then inform further questioning and consideration. With the exception of questions for urgent oral answer, the existing opportunities for posing questions are largely scripted, as several days' notice is given for Ministers to prepare their responses. It is worth noting that, in the written submission from the Executive Committee, the view of Ministers was that, if introduced, topical questions should be spontaneous. Having considered the views expressed in each of the written submissions and the processes in place in other legislatures, the Committee recommended that topical questions should, therefore, be spontaneous. Ministers would be informed, three working days in advance of their topical Question Time, of only the names of the Members selected to ask questions and the order in which they would be called. No notice of the content of the question itself need be provided in advance. Such an approach would go a long way to providing spontaneity, but it would also allow Ministers some opportunity to identify individual constituency issues that had the potential to be the focus of questioning from individual Members and, therefore, provide an opportunity to centre any preparation on those.

With regard to the rules surrounding the admissibility of topical questions, the Committee agreed that, in common with the Scottish Parliament and House of Commons, no specific definition of topical questions or topicality was necessary. However, the Committee agreed that broad admissibility criteria would need to be set; namely, that topical questions may relate to constituency or regional issues and must relate to a Minister's official responsibilities. The Committee also agreed that the admissibility criteria for questions for oral and written answer currently set out in Standing Orders should also apply to topical questions.

4.15 pm

Section 6 contains a number of recommendations dealing with the frequency of topical questions, to whom they will be directed, time limits and the selection process. The Committee considered the current mechanisms for asking questions of Ministers and how the introduction of topical questions could be built around those. The Committee agreed that topical questions should form part of the existing Question Time rota, with Ministers required to answer topical questions on the same day as they are scheduled to answer oral questions. The Committee has recommended that an additional 15 minutes be allocated to Question Time to each Minister to answer topical questions.

To simplify business scheduling and to ensure continuity in the Chamber, the Committee has recommended that the Minister in attendance answers topical questions in the 15 minutes preceding their regular Question Time slot. At the end of the 15 minutes, or when all topical questions have been asked, whichever is the earlier, business can then move on immediately to Question Time for the same Minister.

The Committee has also recommended that the starting times for Question Time should be synchronised. That means that questions to the relevant Minister, including topical questions and oral questions, would run for 45-minute slots from 2.00 pm to 3.30 pm on Mondays and Tuesdays. The Committee agreed that each Member who asks a topical question should be entitled to a supplementary question. However, to keep momentum, the Committee recommended that no other Members, including Committee Chairpersons, should be offered the option to ask supplementary questions.

The Committee also considered whether time limits should be imposed on responses to topical questions and agreed that those should reflect the time limits already established in Standing Orders for oral questions, whereby Ministers have up to two minutes to respond, which may be extended at the Speaker's discretion.

In considering the process to be used for the selection of topical questions, the Committee took into account the selection processes currently used for Question Time. The Committee recommended that all Members wishing to be considered for topical Question Time on a particular day should submit their names to the Business Office, where they will be included in a ballot and then in a shuffle to determine who will put topical questions and in what order they will be put to the relevant Minister. The Committee then considered the deadlines for submission of names and the notification of the names selected to Ministers.

The Committee concluded that Members should submit their names before 10.30 am, three working days in advance of the relevant topical Question Time. That would mean a deadline of 10.30 am on Wednesdays for topical Question Time on the following Monday, and a deadline of 10.30 am on Thursdays for topical Question Time on the following Tuesday. The ballot and shuffle will be held immediately after the deadline, and the top 10 successful names and the order in which they will be called for topical questions will then be provided to the Minister and to the successful Members before 1.00 pm on the same day. The Committee also agreed that Committee Chairpersons would not be offered an automatic opportunity to ask a topical question.

As I mentioned, no information on the content of the question would be required in advance. The Committee also agreed that no screening process would be required in advance of topical Question Time but rather that the broad admissibility criteria to which I referred will be applied, at the Speaker's discretion, in the Chamber.

The final recommendation is that the proposed process be trialled for six months, following which a review of the process and practices should be undertaken by the Committee on Procedures.

In conclusion, the introduction of topical questions provides a real opportunity to improve spontaneity and will give Members the chance to pursue issues that matter to them. The changes being proposed will provide an opportunity to make questioning more relevant, timely and more interesting for our constituents — we hope.

The Committee asks that the Assembly agrees the report and gives its approval to proceed with drafting Standing Orders to implement the report's findings and recommendations. I commend the report to the House and look forward to hearing the views of Members.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Chair for his very thorough and comprehensive outline of the Committee's report. The Committee, unusually in some respects, reached a consensus that everyone in the House can support.

The Committee approached topical questions with an open mind. I do not think that anybody had a closed mind. We felt that something was lacking in Question Time, in that too many questions were scripted, as were too many Ministers' answers. We wanted to inject a greater liveliness, spontaneity and topicality into Question Time. I think that our report gets that mixture right and will give rise to a much more interesting, lively and topical Question Time.

The report, if passed by the Assembly, and I presume that it will be, and the changes therein will last, at least initially, for six months. That gives us a real opportunity to examine how the changes have been put in place and how effective they have been, as the Chair said, in transforming Question Time. That is a fair bit of time for the Assembly to get used to the new procedures and a proper period to test whether the changes achieve what we want to achieve, which is the much better scrutiny of Ministers.

Ministers may not like the changes, and we accept that they may find answering questions a more difficult task. However, we are the body that holds Ministers to account, and this is an opportunity for ordinary Back-Benchers like me to hold Ministers to account in the Chamber. I look forward to that.

We did our work well as a Committee. I congratulate the Chair on giving leadership on the Committee on Procedures and arriving at a report that was agreed by its membership. We could have divided on some aspects of it, but that was avoided, which is to be welcomed.

I will leave it there. I welcome the report. I think that it is a good report, which has the potential to transform Question Time, and I look forward to that happening.

Mr Lyttle: There is a frightening amount consensus on this issue, but I also support the motion in my capacity as the Alliance Party member of the Committee on Procedures.

I initially raised the positive use of topical questions in other legislatures at the Committee on Procedures in November 2011. The Committee agreed to examine the issue, which will now, hopefully, lead to the introduction of that system at the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The Alliance Party submission to the Committee inquiry stated that we were in favour of the introduction of topical questions as we felt that it could improve the spontaneity of Question Time and increase ministerial accountability. It would also allow Members to table questions on matters that arise during the period between the current deadline for tabling questions and those questions being called on the Floor of the Assembly. The new procedure will, hopefully, also encourage more Members to attend and participate fully in Question Time.

I am sure that Ministers will be delighted and welcome the chance to answer more topical questions and avail themselves of the increased accountability that that will bring. It is vital that we continue to look at ways to improve how our legislature operates and make it more relevant and interesting to the public.

I pay tribute to staff past and present of the Committee on Procedures for their work on this proposal and to the Chairperson for taking it forward. The assistance that staff provided throughout the inquiry was invaluable in helping us to fine-tune the process that we will put in place in the Assembly.

Mr Clarke (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures): Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. I welcome the opportunity to conclude on this very short debate. I note the Chairman's remarks about how some Members might like the opportunity for spontaneity. However, when I look around the Chamber today, I do not think that anybody is enthused by it at all. *[Laughter.]* Let us hope that the enthusiasm for the spontaneous nature of questions that we had maybe hoped for arises in the next six months and that we see a different atmosphere in the Chamber.

The Chairman went into great detail on the nature of the topical questions and how we are going to implement them. As others said, that has been supported through the Committee, and that support has been useful in getting us to where we are today in presenting the report to the House.

Mr Maginness talked about the spontaneous nature of the questions and said that Ministers would, perhaps, not like the opportunity for spontaneous questions. I think that a similar theme came from Chris Lyttle. We should put on record that we got to the stage that we are at today with the agreement of even the Executive. The Executive were consulted on the topical question theme, and there was no resistance from the Executive on bringing that forward. I think that it is interesting to note that the Executive were keen to bring in the spontaneous nature of questioning at Question Time to make it more varying and more interesting.

I do not think there is anything else for me to say on the topic, Mr Deputy Speaker. I support the motion on the Committee report as moved by the Chairperson of the Committee.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly approves the report of the Committee on Procedures on its inquiry into topical questions.

Private Members' Business

Integrated Education

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes to propose and a further 10 minutes in which 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 to propose and a further five minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Lunn: I beg to move

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Education to acknowledge the expressed wish of parents to see their children educated in an integrated setting; to honour his Department's obligation to encourage and facilitate integrated education where demand exists; to make integration of controlled and maintained schools a specific objective of area planning; and to work, in particular with the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education and the Integrated Education Fund, to ease the process of the transformation of existing schools to integrated status.

Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. I am always pleased to bring an integrated education motion to the House. Before I move to our motion, perhaps I could deal with the DUP amendment. Had it been tabled as a stand-alone motion and subject to a wee bit of clarity on the term "single", I think that we probably could have endorsed it. In this case, however, the amendment changes the specific point that we want to get across in our motion, so we will vote against it.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

Before turning to some of the specifics of our motion, I will outline some of the main values of integrated education. The case for integrated education is relatively obvious to most people, which explains why over 80% of those polled consistently support it. It is quite obvious that if you divide children at the arbitrarily selected age of four until the arbitrarily selected age of 16 or 18, that division will remain. If that division already defines your society and has consistently led on the path to distrust, disruption and, ultimately, violence, it is obviously asking for trouble to perpetuate it. Yet, we do perpetuate it by lining our children up along those very same dividing lines in primary and post-primary schools. Frankly, if nursery schools and third-level education can be integrated in ethos, why on earth can primary and secondary-level education not be?

Let us also be clear about what integrated education is not. It is not some neutral option where children are sterilised of any identity, as some people like to argue.

On the contrary, the whole purpose of the integrated ethos is to deliver a positive sense of self-identity, while encouraging understanding and respect for other identities. If anybody has never visited an integrated school, I suggest that they do so and perhaps they will see what I mean by that.

4.30 pm

In recent months, it has been demonstrated fairly clearly that identity continues to be expressed, where it is expressed at all, in negative and even intimidating ways. That is a direct product of what Dr John Dunlop referred to as the sectarian pyramid. If people are brought up in ignorance of other identities, it will inevitably, among a minority, breed intolerance, fear and hatred and then, among a minority that is much smaller but is still significant, mayhem and, finally, violence. Although things have improved over the past 15 years, we need to be in no doubt that the seeds of conflict continue to exist; they are state-sponsored from the age of four.

In the motion, we have specifically included a reference to the "expressed wish of parents". That does not just come from opinion polls, although the evidence from them is consistent; it comes through expressed parental choice for integrated education. Parents who choose state or maintained schools are guaranteed that selection now and in the foreseeable future, regardless of the Education Bill that may or may not be passed in the Assembly at some stage in the future. However, parents who choose integrated schooling receive no such guarantee. Indeed, we have reached the stage where parents have raised money elsewhere — in North America and Australasia — to set up an integrated school. When was the last time that parents were forced to raise funds to set up a school with an obviously segregated ethos? There is also the reality of the legislative requirements placed on the Minister, notably since the Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989. The Department is not just morally obliged to meet parental demand, which is not currently the case; it is legally obliged to do so.

I turn to area planning. With the ongoing reform of the schools estate, there is a clear requirement for the facilitation and encouragement of integrated education to take place as part of that reform. There is a clear moral, legal and common-sense entitlement to integrated education. If that is not currently being met — it is not — any reform needs to have as a core aim changes designed to ensure that it is met in the future. Frankly, the current approach to area planning and education policy in general seems almost to be one of "anything but integrated". The recent decision in Moy to maintain segregated education in the same building is a classic case. Frankly, it defies all logic. It was, yet again, a meek acceptance of segregation, rather than determined moral and legal leadership to deliver on integration. Integration, not segregation, must be the default option. The fundamental problem is that the needs-based model inherent to area planning assumes and thus embeds segregation. The policy is, therefore, designed not to deliver reform but to continue to deliver the status quo in direct contravention of the Education Reform Order and parents' wishes.

We have seen good progress in integrated education since 1981, not least of which was Ulidia Integrated College's achievement of the best A-level results of any school in Northern Ireland last year. However, something that is pretty obvious, which we have not seen, is the merger of a controlled school and a maintained school into a single school. Workplaces have become integrated. In many areas, neighbourhoods have become increasingly integrated. Inevitably, some schools have, therefore, in practice, become increasingly mixed with regard to

the religious background of their intake. For all of that, however, we have not yet seen a single merger of what are, in effect, Protestant and Catholic schools. For all the mixing, it remains the case that over 90% of children attend schools whose intake is over 90% from a single religious background. That is in a country where the demographic split is actually 48% and 45%. Let us get over the pretence that there is no problem here and that gently trundling along with a system that inherently encourages segregation from the age of four is either desirable or feasible. That is why the merging of controlled and maintained schools, the absence of which thus far is the obvious elephant in the room, should be prioritised as a specific policy goal, not least as part of area planning.

There has been the temptation to suggest that shared schooling or general mixing is sufficient, but, for reasons that I have already noted, it just is not. Nevertheless, it is important to note that no one, not even the Council for Integrated Education, is interested in adding extra sectors to a system that is already administratively overcomplex. What is clear is that parents want integrated education, but the system literally legislates against it. Therefore, another aspect of our motion is to ask the Minister to consider how to make the overall transformation process simpler, something that would help the aforementioned objective of enabling schools to merge but would also enable non-merging schools to declare themselves of integrated ethos.

I have little doubt that the Council for Integrated Education and the IEF can come forward with ideas and proposals; indeed, I have worked with them to try to develop some. There is no doubt that the requirement on their side is being met. What is required, therefore, is a clear and demonstrable willingness from the Minister to work in partnership with them to deliver and to meet legal and popular requirements through merging existing schools and enabling existing schools to convert to integrated status more easily. This requires some clear steps to be accepted. First, the entitlement of parents is to integrated education, not segregated. The system should be designed to deliver integrated education as a default, in line with parental demand. The evidence that that entitlement is being met and that the system is working will be when controlled and maintained schools integrate with each other to form not segregated schools in single buildings but integrated schools in single buildings. Every aspect of education policy, not least area planning, should show demonstrable evidence of reform in this direction, not maintenance of a status quo that embeds segregation. A final objective would be the easing of the current transformation requirements for schools wishing to become integrated and their replacement with a much more straightforward system of conversion to an integrated ethos. At present, a request for transformation is treated in the same way as a development proposal for the closure or the establishment of a school. It is just not relevant.

I know that my time is up. I look forward to hearing the Minister's response and that of other parties.

Miss M McIlveen: I beg to move the following amendment: Leave out all after "educated" and insert

"in accordance with their wishes, including in an integrated setting; urges the Minister to guarantee parity of esteem for all sectors with the establishment of sectoral bodies to support parental choice; and

further calls on the Minister to encourage all sectoral bodies to promote the development of a single shared education system based upon equality of treatment for all."

Before moving to the substance of the amendment, I will outline the reasons why my party cannot support the motion as tabled. Unfortunately, the motion is, in practical terms, unworkable.

The DUP is supportive of parental choice. If a parent wishes to send his or her child to a school, whether it is integrated, controlled, maintained, voluntary or even Irish-medium, that parental choice will be respected as long as those sectors exist. What is fundamentally wrong with the motion is that it is a clumsy attempt to circumvent the principles of shared education in favour of one particular sector. Shared education and integrated education are not mutually interchangeable terms. Integrated education is a specific type of shared education, but shared education, taken as a whole, encompasses a wide variety of mechanisms of delivery.

In the vast majority of instances, a school will choose to transform to an integrated school not because of some principled position but as a means of last resort to save the school and offer it a stay of execution. While we support choice, transformation is often the politics of last choice. Easing the process of transformation runs counterintuitive to the principles of area-based planning and, ironically, to the aim of shared education. Area-based planning and the principle of shared education allow different schools to operate in a co-operative way, as a large number already do. Easing that process of transformation will mean that a school will effectively be retreating into a sectoral silo, maybe not through choice but as an unintended consequence.

Only schools from the controlled sector have transformed into integrated schools, and that, in itself, is no coincidence. It is a well-recognised fact that the maintained sector would rather close a school than transform it. So, for the motion to state

"make integration of controlled and maintained schools a specific objective of area planning"

is to ignore the reality of the situation. Making integration a specific objective negates the many potential benefits of sharing and co-operation, particularly given the fact that CCMS would run a mile from it. In effect, what that says to the controlled sector is this: as long as you choose to become integrated, your role in area planning is satisfied.

The overarching desire of my party is to see our children educated together. That is our long-term goal. However, the strictures of what exists in the integrated system are not the means by which that can be achieved. If we look at the 22 schools that have been transformed, we see that only eight meet the religion test. So, in respect of being integrated, they fail to meet their own criteria. I would be interested to know whether the Minister can provide figures for the other integrated schools to clarify how many of them meet the religious breakdown criterion.

Instead of easing the transformation process and affording schools temporary statutory protection, I would prefer to see schools looking to area planning as an opportunity to be part of the means to afford all our children the best education possible. Instead of children being taught in

composite classes in a couple of classrooms, which can be detrimental to their progress, they could take advantage of a wider school estate. The Alliance Party really needs to take off its blinkers in relation to integrated education as a panacea.

Schools in the Ards peninsula, which is in my constituency, are looking at local solutions and are coming together as cross-sectoral partners. They seek to take up the opportunity presented by area-based planning, but the Department needs to provide assistance to them because there is no legislative provision for that. The Minister has asked for creativity, but he must provide the means to allow for it. That may mean newbuilds, transport support, structural adaptation or, indeed, legislative change. Different areas may need different solutions, and not everywhere will require a Lisanelly-style campus.

I now turn to the specifics of our amendment. I would like to stress that it has been tabled to ensure parity of esteem for all sectors. Although my party ultimately wishes to see all our children educated together, we are not ignoring the reality of the current situation. Part of that reality is the necessity to ensure that there are —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is almost gone.

Miss M McIlveen: — representative bodies, which are created to represent —

Mr Speaker: I apologise. The Member has 10 minutes.

Miss M McIlveen: — and promote the interests of each diverse sector. It is important that there is parity of esteem going forward. Regardless of its size, a sector without a voice or an advocate is in a significantly weaker position. The maintained sector has CCMS, the integrated sector has NICIE and the Irish-medium sector has CnaG, but other sectors such as the controlled and voluntary grammars are not on the same footing. If we are to have discussions about shared facilities, shared services and the quality of education offered to our children, we need the valuable input of those bodies in formulating a way forward.

The importance of establishing bodies on a similar footing should not be underestimated. Despite being the largest education sector in Northern Ireland and educating the majority of our children, the controlled sector has been deprived of a voice for years and has suffered as a result. If there were school closures, they would inevitably have been in the controlled sector. We are entering a new and potentially revolutionary phase in education in Northern Ireland. It is absolutely fundamental that the controlled sector is treated with the respect that it deserves and is afforded the opportunity to have an advocate and a representative body such as the other sectors have been able to enjoy.

Given the magnitude of what is proposed and the potential ramifications, it is inconceivable that we would be expected to move forward without such a body being established. Although we welcome the establishment of the controlled sector support working group and pay tribute to those dedicated to the controlled sector, that body needs to be resourced and encouraged so that it is in a position to fulfil the need for an established body. Other sectoral bodies have existed for many years. Therefore, the controlled sector working group is, understandably, lagging behind. When it is established, it cannot be a

toothless organisation; it needs to be properly resourced to represent the schools in the sector, and it must have a key role in area planning. I look to the Minister to commit to that today. Even as a working group, it needs to be part of the ongoing discussions on area planning. That said, the Department must, as a matter of urgency, seek to establish it as a sectoral body.

4.45 pm

In the discussions around area planning, no favouritism should be shown to one sector to the detriment of others. Unfortunately, that is what is being sought in the Alliance Party's motion today. By showing favouritism to the integrated sector, we would create a stumbling block to sharing. We can look at the recent example of Moy, where St John's Primary School and Moy Regional Primary School will share a building. That is one vision of what sharing can look like: there is a shared gym, music and IT classes, but each school maintains its individuality and ethos. Both schools continue to exist, but costs are reduced and there is greater opportunity for children from different backgrounds to connect. A number of schools out there are in a similar position, where area planning should be seen as an opportunity to be grasped.

The Programme for Government saw the establishment of a ministerial advisory group to explore and bring forward recommendations to advance shared education. That advisory group is looking at options around shared education, such as sharing classes and campuses. Its report is due very shortly. I look forward to hearing what that group comes up with, and I hope that it contains the necessary vision that will lead to the ultimate aim of a more streamlined education system in which our children are not segregated.

The Programme for Government has a stated aim that all children should have the opportunity to participate in shared education programmes by 2015 and that the number of schools sharing facilities should substantially increase by 2015. The Alliance Party's motion today seeks to undermine what the party agreed under that programme.

Mr Lyttle: Will the Member give way?

Miss M McIlveen: I am running out of time, so I will not give way in this instance.

Instead of being tied to the integrated sector of the Alliance Party, we should encourage more shared schemes that will have a broader impact on cross-community contact. If the Alliance Party needs clarity on the difference between integrated and shared education, I say that it is evolutionary, not revolutionary. It is bottom-up, not top-down. It is organic rather than structural. It will mean different things to different people depending on specific communities. It should be based on respect for difference and founded on the partnership of equals.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. As has been outlined by Members who have spoken previously, integrated education plays an important role in the life of many of our children and young people. In a divided society such as the North, many educationalists and parents view an integrated setting as the best way to tackle the poisonous legacy of conflict and the enduring problem of sectarianism. In many integrated schools across the North, great progress has been made on that front as well as achieving very high educational

outcomes. In my patch of south Down, integrated schools such as Shimna Integrated College in Newcastle and Drumlins Integrated Primary School in Ballynahinch are great examples of integrated environments in which the educational achievements of the pupils match the ability of the school to create an environment in which integration is clearly having a positive impact on the wider learning process. The success of Drumlins is amplified when you consider the fact that it targets the underachievement of pupils from an area of social deprivation. Indeed, 32% of the pupils are entitled to free school meals, while 34% have special educational needs. Moreover, the success of Drumlins Integrated Primary School is all the more remarkable when you consider the challenges that the school has faced regarding suitable accommodation over the past 10 years. It still faces those in the months ahead as it works tirelessly to meet the increasing demands of the parents who value the school so highly.

It would, however, be wrong to suggest that integrated is the only educational setting that is able to promote such integration of our young people. Of course, it would be unwise to elevate the integration of our young people above the primacy of the need for sustainable educational achievement. Indeed, the most important dynamic of the debate must be the best way to educate our children, not the best way to promote or support one particular education sector or another. As I have outlined, integrated education is a very important facet of our system, but so are faith-based schools and the Irish-medium sector. While acknowledging the Department's obligation to encourage and facilitate integrated education where demand exists, we must acknowledge that all parents have the right to choose where and how their children should be educated.

The view that the Education Department is somehow not listening to the wants of the integrated sector does not stand up. In the run-up to the last Assembly election, the IEF published a report that outlined two main findings: first, the vast majority of people support schools sharing facilities, partnering or collaborating with other schools of different religious traditions; and the vast majority of the public want an independent organisation to review our education system, including a review of the future structures of sharing and integration. The Minister not only invited the OECD to carry out such an analysis of our system but established a ministerial advisory group to report on the best way to advance such sharing, integration and collaboration. As outlined by the previous Member who spoke, we look forward to seeing what will no doubt be a very challenging report next week and seeing what it will mean going forward.

We must remember and recognise that, rather than the crude process of assimilation that can sometimes take place in a rigid integrated framework, there is also a demand for the individual ethos of different sectors to be respected and protected at the same time as ensuring effective collaboration and integration. That is outlined especially in the potential of the Lisanelly shared education campus in Omagh. It is a unique opportunity for quite inspirational collaboration and integration for the young people of Omagh and the adjacent area, in which shared educational, social and environmental projects will have a huge impact on the local community for all the right reasons. With an investment of some £300 million in the economy and the knock-on effect of 3,000 jobs, you can

see the potential that that project could have not just for our education system but for the wider economy.

Although we recognise that the integrated sector is very important, it is not the only piece of the jigsaw. Of course, integrating our children in tackling the poisonous legacy of conflict and sectarianism is very important, but the primacy of educational outcomes must stay top of the list.

Mr Rogers: I apologise to Mr Lunn for missing the first minute of the debate. I will come back to it.

I welcome the opportunity to debate the ways in which integrated education can fit into and enhance our education system. Along with other education sectors, the integrated sector makes an invaluable contribution to the welfare of our young people. Locally, I am very aware of the excellent work of Kilbroney Integrated Primary School and Shimna Integrated College under the dedicated leadership of Denise Moorehead and Kevin Lambe respectively.

Since the Good Friday Agreement, the number of integrated schools has risen from 40 to 62, which is to be welcomed. In allocating funding, the Department of Education fulfils its statutory duty to facilitate the development of integrated education. The SDLP commends the vital contribution that the integrated sector makes.

I am concerned that the Alliance Party seems to suggest that integrated schools should be given priority by the Department of Education, almost to the detriment of other educational establishments. That mindset seems to eliminate the ability of parents to exercise choice when it comes to selecting schools for their children. Parental choice is arguably the cornerstone of any effective education system and should be fiercely guarded. I am concerned that pouring all our efforts into one form of educational institution is misguided.

Mr Lunn: I thank Mr Rogers for giving way. He referred to parental choice: that is exactly what the Alliance Party is demanding.

Mr Speaker: The Member has a minute added to his time.

Mr Rogers: Thank you, Mr Speaker. It is clear that the Alliance Party sees no role for faith-based education. That is a fundamental flaw in the motion. Indeed, where is mention made of what controlled schools do?

Mr Lyttle: Will the Member give way?

Mr Rogers: No, I am not giving way again.

Mr Lyttle: You are misrepresenting the case that we made.

Mr Rogers: I am not sure that Mr Lyttle heard what I said. He was having a conversation when I started to speak.

The real future for the education system is in building on the opportunities for a variety of school types, including faith schools. In an increasingly secular society, many of us see our faith as the foundation of everything that we say and do. I have experienced faith-based education as a pupil, a parent and a teacher. Mr Lunn referred to his visits to schools. I have not just visited schools; I have spent 30 years in them, and I resent the use of terms such as "segregated ethos". Over those 30 years, neither I nor my colleagues promoted a segregated ethos.

Respect is also central to faith-based education. Look at the mission statement of any of our schools and, more

importantly, just observe how they live their faith, and you will see that they promote tolerance of difference that allows students to expand their minds, share views and explore ideas in a community of shared respect and support. Building a truly shared future must include prioritising respect for the rights of and choices made by parents and young people. The terms of reference for area planning specifically require the planning authorities to consider and produce proposals for shared education, and that is welcome.

In Northern Ireland, we are challenged to confront segregation in all its forms, as was clearly highlighted by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. We can all point to a wide range of schools in the controlled and maintained sectors that already adopt a shared system for learning. Such schools, along with some quality integrated schools, are a real asset to our education system. Pupils from different backgrounds are being educated together right across the North, and I can point to good practice across the sectors, but we can do more to ensure that schools work collaboratively. Shared education, be it cross-community or cross-border, can become an opportunity for keeping education alive in our rural areas.

The bit of the DUP amendment that jumps out at me is its reference to "a single shared education system". I want some clarity on where in that there is a place for faith-based education. Our priority must be to strive for the highest standards in education and learning, and to give young people access to a broad range of high-quality education institutions. The Minister must avoid attempts to prioritise any form of education institution over another. The SDLP recognises the advances made in shared education, and we urge the Minister to ensure that the Department prioritises the promotion of shared and integrated education in all its variety of forms.

Mr Kinahan: I also welcome the chance to speak in this phenomenally important debate, which should frame the whole debate on our education system. It is a pity that it is squeezed into just an hour and a half.

The Ulster Unionist Party supports certain aspects of the motion, such as its call:

"to see their children educated in an integrated setting".

However, there is so much more to education than just that, and I find it slightly hard to listen to other schools being painted as the possible cause of violence, while ignoring the fact that many state schools do share and are extremely good examples of doing so. We need to congratulate all our teachers for their hard work, and particularly those in the integrated sector on its success. I also support the motion's call on the Department to honour its "obligation". There is an obligation to look at integrated education, but there is also an obligation to look further at shared education.

The Alliance Party's motion totally disregards the role that can be played by the controlled, maintained and voluntary grammar schools, and it will be hard work and persuasive argument, not the promotion of any individual sector above another, that will ultimately lead to a single education system. We know that there are now some 21,000 children in integrated education, up from 8,000. We also know

that some 500 were denied their choice of integrated education. Yet, as we have heard, in all of this, there is always the need for parental choice. That is not just the choice of integrated education, it is the choice of faith — Protestant or Catholic — mixed and all types of schooling. In the plethora of change that is today going through the education system, it sometimes seems as though all of that has been forgotten.

The Programme for Government purports to support shared education, yet we see little of it happening. Look at area planning, and we see two separate streams, with a little bit of integration but not enough. It is even worse if we look at ESA, where it is ignored again. No places on its board are reserved for the integrated sector, and there is nothing to encourage shared education. Yet, my statistics show that 70% of parents want integration, and Mr Lunn tells us that the figure is 80% — at the moment, we provide only 7%.

Mr Newton: Will the Member give way?

Mr Kinahan: Yes.

5.00 pm

Mr Newton: I take the Member's point about ESA, and so on, but does he agree with me that there is a huge deficit in the Belfast Education and Library Board and the South Eastern Education and Library Board in particular, where the voices of parents are not heard through their political representatives on either board? The Minister's failure to appoint eligible members who have gone through the sift for BELB, and, indeed, his failure to address the issue of three commissioners running the South Eastern Education and Library Board makes a great difference to the functioning of both bodies.

Mr Speaker: The Member has a minute added on to his time.

Mr Kinahan: Thank you very much, and I very much agree with the Member. I feel that, throughout the whole education system, we do not have a good method that allows us actually to listen to parents or, indeed, to teachers.

If we are to respect religious belief, we must also remember that we need to respect those who do not have the same strength in their religious belief. It is essential that, all the way through our education system, we set up something that leads towards the single shared education system that the DUP mentioned today and that we as a party have been pushing for a great length of time. We need to find a way of coaxing and massaging everything so that everyone works towards the single education system. However, you get there by sharing, not just through integration.

We have some 1,225 schools, yet, in my brief time in the Education Committee, I have seen only five or six examples of shared education coming through in area planning. There are good examples in Ballycastle, Crumlin, Moy and in Duneane, which is to the north of my patch, that are all looking very cleverly at different ways to move forward. What we really need from the Minister is an agreed framework — something along the lines of the Belfast Agreement. I have called for that before.

Mr Agnew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Kinahan: No, I would like to carry on, thank you. We should have consensus on the way forward and actually

sit down and discuss it so that we are all going in the same direction. That is what is really missing.

I cannot wholly support the Alliance motion, because its last three lines are impractical and do not suggest anything that we can put in place. I like the idea of where we are going, but I fully support the DUP amendment. I like the idea, as does my party, of parity of esteem and the need for sectoral bodies of all types. We need to get an education system that looks after everybody. As a party, we support the amendment.

Mr Storey: I support my party's amendment. At the outset, I declare an interest as a member of the board of governors of a controlled integrated school in Ballymoney. I may come back to that point in a moment or two. I commend my colleague Michelle McIlveen, who adequately set out the issues that we see as important.

Every time that we discuss education in the Chamber, it is a reflection of the importance that we place on our young people being educated in our schools. It would be only right and fair to concur with other Members who, without the segregation of sectors, said to all our teachers in all our schools that, despite the challenges and difficulties that have beset our education system over the years, they have continued, year on year, to do a job that is the envy of many other places in the United Kingdom and further afield. That is not to say that there are not issues or problems, but we need to place on record our appreciation to those in our education system, including teachers, boards of governors and all those who are associated with our schools.

One question needs to be posed as we come to the House today. It is 90 years since Lord Londonderry's Education Act in 1923, and we should remember that he wanted to go further than any in this House would perhaps like to. In fact, if we read the Act correctly and accurately, we see that he wanted a completely and absolutely integrated education system. We need to say that the reason why we are still having the debate about a segregated, separated education system is because the Catholic sector has ensured since then that its opposition to the Lynn Committee, its opposition to the appointments to the education committees in 1923 and successively down through the years has remained. It has said: we want to remain ourselves alone; we want to stay as we are; we want to have the power to control and do all that we do within our sector. It is not a case of others being asked why they should change; it is a case of us putting the challenge to the maintained sector as to why, as my colleague Michelle McIlveen alluded to, since the introduction of transformation, which allows a school to become an integrated school, not one maintained school has transformed, yet the controlled sector has. Why, at every turn in the history of our education system, has it been the controlled sector — the state sector — that has had to take the greater degree of hits, cuts, challenges and change, which has ultimately, I believe, been damaging to our system?

Mr Lunn: I thank the Member for giving way. I think that the answer to his question is that the parents in those controlled schools he talks about decided to go for transformation. It was parental choice.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an added minute.

Mr Storey: Thank you. I am glad that the Member has come to the issue of parental choice. I noted that Mr Hazzard made a comment about how and where their children are to be educated. I am glad that, when it comes to the issue of parental choice, that probably includes grammar schools, because you have to be consistent. Let me say this about parental choice, and I speak as a member of the board of governors of a controlled integrated school: it was not about the ethos and identity of the school; it was a numbers game. It was clearly done because the school's managing authority at the time felt that if it did not do it, an integrated school would open up down the road and it would end up in a situation where it lost parents and pupils. If the numbers go down, the finance goes down, and you end up in a situation where the school is challenged financially.

Mr Agnew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Storey: What has happened, not in all but in some cases, is that there has been an integration process and a proposal to transform driven by survival and the numbers game. I will give way to the Member.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Member for giving way. He has said that, effectively, the schools realised that if they did not provide integrated education, parents would demand it elsewhere. Parents are voting with their feet. They are going to integrated schools and, where none exists, they are demanding one. We keep hearing that there is no demand for integrated education, yet the experience that the Member outlines proves that there is.

Mr Storey: The figures clearly prove the opposite. Look at the most recent MORI poll. It shows that somewhere in the region of 88% or 90% of people will say that they are up for an integrated system. Remember that some of those figures were collated at party conferences. We have heard a lot today about statistics and surveys gathered at party conferences. One survey that was carried out at all our party conferences clearly indicated that, when people are asked, they will say that, yes, they are up for an integrated system. But what is the reality? Let us deal with the facts. Still only 6% of our school population —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is almost gone.

Mr Storey: — is integrated. Let us deal with the method that will ensure greater sharing in the future. The best way of doing that, I believe —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is gone.

Mr Storey: — is ensuring that shared education is part and parcel of the process. I would love to have more time to develop that, but unfortunately the Speaker has called an end to my time.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I would first like to apologise to Mr Lunn for not being in the Chamber at the start of the debate. I welcome the opportunity to speak. My party has actively supported, and will continue to support, those who wish to have their children educated in an integrated sector. Where demand for an integrated school is established, we will support that. My party believes wholly in secular education and multi-denominational schools. Good education from an early age helps to mould how we think. It affects us all in a manner of ways: how we interact with each other; how we relate to the institution where we are educated, which, in

its own way, depends on us and shapes our lives; and how we view the world at a social and cultural level.

The issue of the curriculum is central to any discussion on integrated education that takes place here today. A shared curriculum must embrace all identities and celebrate the diversity that enriches us all.

A report on attitudes towards integrated education, which was commissioned by the Integrated Education Fund, indicated that support and preference for integrated schools is high. In 2003, a majority of people surveyed, some 82%, personally supported integrated education here. In 2011, that figure increased to 88% of those who were surveyed. However, we cannot also ignore the fact that further surveys determined that a majority of people also supported sharing facilities, partnering or collaborating across the traditional sectors.

There are 46 integrated primary and post-primary schools with a total of 14,200 students from a number of religious and cultural backgrounds. As other contributors have said, we have to commend the teachers in those integrated settings who pride themselves on providing high standards of equality of education and on achieving exemplary educational outcomes for their students.

Teachers are expected to teach effectively across the different religious, socio-political and ability groups under the ethos of integrated education. Teachers in integrated education are also expected to work coherently and effectively in a team approach with parents, providing learning activities that constructively speak to diversity and to the contribution of mutual understanding and respect for all.

There are a number of schools that are in the early part of the process of moving to integrated status. I commend the hard work of the staff, the parents and pupils of those schools in fully achieving that aim, but I get a feeling from the proposer of the motion that that is not enough.

I want to speak about my personal story. I was educated in the Catholic sector. I valued that teaching experience and chose to pass it on to my children. I now have two grandchildren who are being taught through the medium of Irish, which was an option that my daughter chose for her children. It gives me great delight when I hear my grandchildren having little conversations and singing songs as Gaeilge. Being taught through the medium of Irish was never an option for my mother to choose for me, but, thankfully, that has changed.

The integrated sector, like the Irish-medium education sector, is a growing and demanding sector, and the demand for places is increasing. It is also important to note, as other contributors have said, that children are being educated together in the controlled and maintained sectors. Those advances are also welcomed. Our children and grandchildren now have the opportunity to be taught alongside others from different religious and cultural backgrounds. We are moving towards a non-segregated education system, which is to be welcomed.

Mrs Hale: I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak on the motion and welcome the debate so far. The integrated education sector has been a testament to perseverance, and I want to take nothing away from the dedicated people who established the sector and who,

at huge personal cost, have offered parents a different choice.

However, despite what the motion states, parents have not exercised the choice for integrated education. Today, some 22,000 children are educated through the integrated system — less than 6% of all children in Northern Ireland — so it is not right to say that integrated education is the wish of parents. That is why I welcome the DUP amendment to the motion.

Where demand exists, parents should be allowed to educate their children in an integrated setting, but the key is parental choice. That is why I support the amendment. All education sectors should be respected and given parity of treatment by the Minister of Education. No sector — controlled, voluntary, maintained or integrated — should be elevated above another. Parental choice in education should be respected, promoted and defended.

Integrated education is one of four sectors that are available to parents in Northern Ireland. If we are to move towards a truly shared education system, in which all children learn together, the integrated sector must understand that it is part of the problem. All education sectors need to work together towards a truly shared system. Shared education can only be achieved when all sectors are treated equally and all sectors understand that no sectoral interest can be used to trump another school.

The reasons for moving forward on this basis are clear: the current Education Minister seeks to punish voluntary and controlled grammars, calling them selective apartheid, yet, on the other hand, defends the maintained system, calling it parental choice. Either the Minister believes in parental choice or he does not.

5.15 pm

Lord Morrow: I thank the Member for giving way. I draw her attention to a comment that Mr Lunn made. Referring to the Moy experience, he said that the decision "defies all logic". Having listened to Mr Lunn, it strikes me that the Alliance Party wants revolution not evolution. Surely he should welcome rather than denigrate what is being attempted in Moy. Does the Member agree with me that this is but a step rather than a final goal?

Mr Speaker: The Member will have a minute added to her time.

Mrs Hale: I welcome Lord Morrow's intervention, and I agree fully, as does the party.

The protection of choice is being seriously diminished on a daily basis — many parents are not able to secure any schooling within the community in which they reside — by a Minister who plays politics with the education of our children. That is why I and my party welcome the establishment of a sectoral support body for the controlled sector, as outlined in the Education Bill. For too long, the controlled sector has been the Cinderella of education in Northern Ireland. The easy option has always been the closing of controlled schools, but the easy option is rarely the best option. Now is the time for bravery. Now is the time for leadership.

The problem is this: if the integrated sector really believed in full sharing and in moving towards a single education system, it would be prepared to give up its sectoral rights and work with others. The future of education in Northern

Ireland will not be solved by all schools moving sector and simply coming under the banner of the integrated system. Education will be transformed when we think much bigger than that. We need to be bold. We need to move to a new system that is shared by teachers, principals, parents and pupils. No one sector should be allowed or facilitated to move forward on its own. Education will not be best served if one sector is allowed to take over the others.

Equally, education will not be advanced while the Minister seeks to persecute certain sectors that fail to share his ideological outlook. That is why we have tabled the amendment. No sector or pupil can be left behind as we move forward. A truly shared future is within our grasp, but it can be attained only if all sectors are treated equally and if all sectors, including the integrated sector, are prepared to put sectoral interest to one side and to move forward together. That means respecting parental choice. That is why I support the amendment to the motion.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion. At the outset, I should declare an interest in that I am a member of the board of governors of Corpus Christi College.

Greater integration in our education system is a laudable objective. It would be good for children and good for education. However, I take issue with the motion on a number of counts. In our context, integrated education refers primarily to the integration of children from different religious backgrounds. If Members are serious about integration, they need to expand the concept beyond narrow religious parameters. It must include all our children. I am wholeheartedly in support of the maximum integration of our young people. I do not care if they are Catholic, Protestant, any other religion or none. It does not matter if they come from a British identity, an Irish identity or an ethnic minority or whether they are girls or boys, rich or poor, intellectually gifted or not. Every single one of them deserves, and is entitled to, the best start on their journey through life. We can help them on that journey by providing them with the best possible education system. I am sure that no one could disagree with those sentiments.

Nevertheless, the actions —

Mr Agnew: I thank the Member for giving way. I declare an interest — I should have declared it earlier — as I am a director of NICIE. The Member set out his vision and said that truly integrated education means socio-economic integration and integration of religion and ethnicity.

All those things are in the integrated sector and are encouraged. I accept that there may be some movement to be made in schools of all religions and none — I emphasise the “none”. At present, integrated education is the best option for that.

Mr Speaker: The Member has a minute added on to his time.

Mr Sheehan: I thank the Member for his intervention, but, nevertheless, the actions of some in the integrated sector run contrary to that all-inclusive model. A clear example is when so-called integrated schools practise segregation by academic selection. There is a correlation between socio-economic background and the results of academic selection tests.

Mr Newton: How does the Member square the fact that he indicated the type of system that he wants, and would

presumably say that parental choice is a feature of it, yet he wants to wipe out the grammar school system immediately?

Mr Sheehan: I thank the Member for his intervention. Of course I support parental preference. However, the grammar school system discriminates against a large percentage of our children — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order, order.

Mr Sheehan: As I was saying, we know that there is a correlation between socio-economic background and results in academic selection tests. That is most obvious among boys from working-class unionist backgrounds. In spite of that knowledge — this is the point that I made to Mr Agnew — some integrated schools continue to reject children who fail those tests. Therefore, it is more than a bit hypocritical to pontificate about bringing children together from diverse religious backgrounds while insisting on keeping them apart on the basis of a discredited test that has clearly been shown to be detrimental to wider educational attainment. As I said, nowhere is that more obvious than among boys from working-class unionist communities.

That said, it would be wrong to tar the whole integrated sector with one brush, and I acknowledge the excellent work done in other parts of the integrated sector. It is clear that many parents want their children to be educated in integrated schools, and where that demand exists, the Department should continue to encourage and facilitate integrated education, as is its duty under the Good Friday Agreement. It appears that it is doing just that, given that there is a surplus of places in integrated schools. However, it would not be right to try to impose the integrated model across the board, as suggested in the motion:

“to make integration of controlled and maintained schools a specific objective of area planning”.

Greater sharing of resources and greater co-operation is clearly desirable, but that should not be misrepresented as integrated education. No one seems to be arguing against parental preference — rightly so. When we give such importance to parental preference, we will always end up with a diverse school sector.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is almost gone.

Mr Sheehan: That is not necessarily a bad thing. In spite of my reservations, I support the motion.

Mrs Dobson: I welcome the opportunity to speak to the motion. I apologise to Mr Lunn for being absent from the Chamber for the beginning of the debate.

It is unfortunate that the Alliance Party motion is unimaginative. I strongly support the integrated sector, as do Ulster Unionist representatives at every level, many of whom, like me, have chosen to send their children to integrated schools. I support integrated education with both a capital “I” and a small “i”. However, I have to ask why the Alliance Party believes that it is appropriate that every school should be, as the motion states, eased into integrated status. For them, it is integrated with a capital “I” or nothing. How do they think that the controlled and maintained sectors would respond to reading that? What about the voluntary grammar sector and even the Irish-medium sector? It is also disappointing that only the

Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education and the Integrated Education Fund are referenced in the motion.

Mr Newton: Will the Member give way?

Mrs Dobson: Yes, I will give way.

Mr Newton: Does the Member agree that area planning is a very important feature of how we take forward education? Yet, in east Belfast, it is difficult to see evidence of any planning given that Dundonald High School is closing, the Orangefield High School closure has been delayed for another year and the Knockbreda and Newtownbreda merger is being rejected by one side while the other side is angry about the lack of investment. Does the Member agree that there is not an awful lot of evidence of area planning in that context?

Mr Speaker: The Member has a minute added to her time.

Mrs Dobson: I thank the Member for his intervention. I agree that it surely has not been thought through. He makes some very valid points, and I thank him for that.

There is no mention of consulting any of the other bodies across education, not least the controlled and maintained sectoral bodies. I hope that this was just an oversight in the drafting because, if not, it goes to show how out of step the Alliance Party really is.

It is hugely unfortunate that education remains highly segregated in Northern Ireland. It is simply no longer acceptable that young people can progress through the education system with little understanding or knowledge of other cultures. That inevitably adds to the divisions apparent in our society. There is no doubt that having a number of different sectors educating individual blocks of young people is counterproductive to community relations. That is why, as Danny Kinahan said, my party firmly supports the long-term vision of a single educational system that accommodates children of all faiths and none equally.

Unsurprisingly, the debate has been laden with statistics on the increase in integrated schools and the apparent widespread support for integration among the public. However, the Minister shows absolutely no interest in accepting widespread public support. We need only look at the responses to area planning, which showed overwhelming support for the retention of the Dickson plan in Craigavon, to see that. In spite of that support, the Minister continues to seek to undermine it at every single turn. He shows no interest in listening to the views of the public, choosing instead the comfort blanket of his narrow-minded political dogma. That stands as a barrier to ever achieving that single education system.

As mentioned earlier, when asked, roughly 70% of parents will say that they support integrated education — even more according to a recent poll for the 'Belfast Telegraph'. However, in reality, fewer than one in 10 of those parents sends their children to an integrated school.

Mr Agnew: Will the Member give way?

Mrs Dobson: No, I have already given way.

It would be interesting and revealing to conduct a straw poll on how many Members have done so because, in 2011-12, only 6.8% of the total enrolment was in the integrated sector. The reason for that apparent anomaly is relatively simple. As I mentioned, one of my sons attended

New-Bridge Integrated College and the other attended Banbridge Academy, which are both excellent schools in their own right. No doubt, the Minister is itching to join me in praising the excellent general standard of all schools across Upper Bann, especially those in Craigavon that operate under the Dickson plan. The decisions that we made for our boys were purely a matter of parental choice, but the fact remains that many parents prefer the ethos of local controlled and maintained schools. Nevertheless, it goes to show why motions effectively calling for a single integrated sector through the total disbursement of other sectors and without sufficient work being done in advance are not only naive but mischievous.

Transforming Northern Ireland's system —

5.30 pm

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is almost gone.

Mrs Dobson: — under what will hopefully be one central provider will take many years and hard work. I hope to see that in my lifetime.

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. First, I apologise to you, Mr Speaker, the House and, indeed, the proposer of the motion for being delayed in coming to the Chamber and for having to leave it during the debate. I assure Members that I will deal in writing with any points that I do not answer as part of my response.

I dtús báire, ba mhaith liom ómós a léiriú don obair chapail atá déanta ag scoileanna iomlánaithe le hoideachas a chur ar na páistí agus ar na daoine óga a fhreastalaíonn ar na scoileanna seo.

First, I pay tribute to the sterling work that a majority of integrated schools carry out in educating the children and young people who attend them. I acknowledge the expressed wish of parents to see their children educated in an integrated setting. I take very seriously my Department's statutory duty to encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education. Indeed, last year, I made funding of £628,000 available to the Council for Integrated Education to assist it in carrying out its work to encourage and promote integrated education. That has increased to £646,000 in the current year. Since the establishment of the Integrated Education Fund, the Department has provided £4 million to enable it to assist with the capital costs of new schools. Those are real and practical measures of support. I have also provided funding to assist schools in the initial stages of transforming to integrated status. That funding is in the region of around £200,000 each year.

The motion refers to making the integration of controlled and maintained schools a specific objective of area planning. My terms of reference for the area planning work explicitly state that it should "take account" of the Good Friday Agreement and the statutory position on integrated education. I recently established a steering group to support the Department in taking forward work to co-ordinate and oversee the continuing development of the area planning process and the area plans. The Council for Integrated Education is represented on that group. Although I have some sympathy with that aspect of the motion, I also have to take into account that parents have a statutory right to state a preference on how their children should be educated.

The last part of the motion calls for the transformation process to be eased. I appreciate that that process can be cumbersome, and I am willing to consider whether I can make the process easier. However, that would be within the context of my consideration of the report on shared education, which its authors will launch next Monday.

Greater sharing and co-operation between schools and across sectors is likely to be the key to delivering success in greater sharing in our schools estate. Members will be aware that the Programme for Government commits to advancing shared education, specifically to ensure by 2015 that all children have the opportunity to participate in shared education programmes. It also commits to increasing substantially the number of schools that share facilities. In July last year, I established a ministerial advisory group under the chairmanship of Professor Paul Connolly to explore and bring forward recommendations to meet those commitments. As I said, the ministerial advisory group will publish its report on Monday. I await with interest its findings and recommendations, and, indeed, I await with interest the public discussion and debate that it will stimulate. In setting the terms of reference for that work, I asked the members to take account of how shared education might address issues such as ethos, identity, good relations, respect for diversity and community cohesion.

Terms of reference for area planning explicitly encourage creative and innovative solutions, including opportunities for shared education across sectors, while recognising that the degrees of sharing may be different to reflect local circumstances. Area planning guidance that my Department issued also emphasises the commitment to shared education, highlighting the need for a willingness to develop more opportunities for sharing curricular provision and infrastructure in line with Programme for Government commitments. A number of schools and communities have risen to that challenge, and my officials and I have engaged with a number that are proposing innovative solutions. Those include schools in Fermanagh that wish to explore joint-faith models and schools in Moy that have proposed a single-campus model.

By its nature, shared education provides for a more integrated educational approach that includes integrated schools. It is not a case of one or the other. While doing so, it reflects the desires of parents and communities to maintain the kind of ethos that they value and that many Members referred to in the debate.

We also need to remember that there are many controlled and maintained schools that have mixed intakes from the two main communities, but do not have integrated status. However, in many cases, they have a more representative community balance than some integrated schools. Indeed, during her commentary, Miss McIlveen referred to the number of schools that fell below the religious balance in the guidance and legislation. I will provide her with a full list of schools and balances, because she posed that question to me. Parents make a conscious choice to send their children to such schools, even where integrated schools are available. The truth is that although some communities are ready to embrace integrated education models, others are identifying alternative shared education models that better suit their local circumstances. What is important is that any proposal must meet the sustainable schools policy, align with area plans and their impact on other

schools in the area and, importantly, have the support of parents and the wider community.

We know through experience that imposing solutions on communities simply does not work. Parents vote with their feet when making choices about their children's education.

Mr Storey: I thank the Minister for giving way. In light of the point that he makes about imposing solutions on people, does he not conclude that the Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989, which places a duty on his Department to facilitate and promote two particular sectors over and above and to the disadvantage of others, is clearly to the detriment of our education system and creates a playing field that is not level?

Mr O'Dowd: I do not accept the Member's interpretation of the provisions that he refers to in relation to Irish-medium and integrated education. Those provisions are there to facilitate and react to demands from communities. The Department does not go into communities and say: you shall have an integrated school or an Irish-medium school. Communities come to the Department and say: we have sufficient numbers to provide for a school of either sector. The community then has to bring forward development proposals, and the Department investigates whether there is sustainable demand.

Mr Lunn: I thank the Minister for giving way. Just for clarification, the order does not say "promote", which would be a highly evocative term. It says "encourage and facilitate".

Mr O'Dowd: I accept that the Member is absolutely correct in his definition of what the order says.

Where the community consensus is to establish an integrated model, the process is already in place to facilitate that. In that regard, I support the general principle to further integration of schools across all sectors, including controlled and maintained. However, I do not support any implication to make integrated models the only solution. To do so would be to impose solutions on communities. We need to move forward on reacting to and facilitating demand. I agree that there is a greater demand in communities for shared education. Where that leads to fully integrated education, I have no difficulty in supporting that. However, we have to lead, support, encourage and facilitate community demands to move towards shared education.

Mr Lyttle: Will the Minister give way?

Mr O'Dowd: Let me finish this point and then I will.

Many of the models coming forward under shared education are radical, and they see an entirely new beginning to education within many communities and, indeed, see a new beginning to community attitudes within many of those areas. I think that we should be supportive of them.

I am happy to give way to the Member.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Minister for giving way. He knows that one of the targets in the Programme for Government is to:

"Substantially increase the number of schools sharing facilities by 2015".

How exactly will he achieve that goal when he is not aware of how many schools currently share facilities?

Mr O'Dowd: Information on that is difficult to ascertain accurately because schools run varying programmes and much of that information is school based. However, one of the drivers towards facilitating shared education will be the shared education report. If we have to carry out an audit to ascertain the exact degree of sharing, what type of sharing is going on and how we can build on it, the Department would be willing to do that. It is a Programme for Government commitment, and I intend to live up to it. There are a number of options available to me, but I have to emphasise that the shared education report is the start of what I would like to see: a robust and informed public debate as to how we move forward with shared education. Then the challenges that the Member presents — there are challenges for my Department in monitoring this — can all be overcome.

Lord Morrow: I thank the Minister for giving way. I am interested to hear him say that there is a rising demand for shared education. Will that be reflected in the Education Bill that he is bringing forward, and does he propose to promote it in the Bill?

Mr O'Dowd: The Bill does not prohibit sharing in education, and it does not replace other legislation that allows for sharing in education. ESA will be tasked with the area planning process, and I see no reason why ESA will not move forward with the similar terms of reference that I have with regard to promoting shared education. There is nothing in the ESA Bill to prevent shared education, and I would argue that there is everything in the ESA Bill to help us to assist in moving forward towards shared education when we have the main educational bodies around the one table in a decision-making body.

I think that I understand the sentiments —

Mr Newton: Will the Minister give way?

Mr O'Dowd: Just give me one second, and then I will.

I understand the sentiments of the motion, although I believe that it can be interpreted in a number of different ways. A number of Members have said that it promotes only integrated education, which the Department cannot do, as there has to be a range of providers out there. I fully support the sentiments behind the motion, although there are concerns about its wording.

Mr Newton: I thank the Minister for giving way. I take you back to a phrase that you used. You talked about radical plans coming forward, which you were pleased about, and I commented on the lack of planning as I perceive it. Why is it that the only situation that can be perceived in East Belfast is the closure of Dundonald and Orangefield and the merger of Knockbreda and Newtownbreda? Why are they the only options being considered? Why is it that you failed to visit the schools prior to the decisions being taken? Why is it only now that you, I hope, are going to listen to what their principals have to say?

Mr O'Dowd: I have not made any decisions in relation to Orangefield, Newtownbreda or Dundonald. I have not been involved in the decision-making process at all, and the reason is this: it is first and foremost a matter for the Belfast Education and Library Board to bring forward a development proposal. If a development proposal is published around any of those schools, I will, as I have done with all other schools, be happy to meet and engage with political, public and school representatives about

those schools. I am not aware of having been invited to any of those schools, although, recently, I received an invitation from a parent support group — I am not going to name the school, because I am not quite sure which school it was — and I have signed off on it in the positive. I am more than happy to visit the school, I am more than happy to engage with the parent support group, and I am more than happy to meet the pupils, because I think that that is the right thing to do. There is no point having a local Administration if our citizens cannot talk directly to the decision-makers. I have no difficulty in engaging with any sector out there or any school anywhere across the areas of my responsibility.

In conclusion, I once again apologise for not being present for the entire debate. I welcome the opportunity to debate and discuss issues such as integrated education. With regard to shared education, I assure the sponsors of the motion that I am serious about integrated education. We have made substantial public resources available to the integrated sector to carry out the work and bring forward proposals in and around the integrated sector and to advance it. However, the final decision-makers as to whether any child will attend an integrated school will be their parents, and I do not think that we can force a choice on them with regard to that matter. Let them be the decision-makers in this. In the realms of wider societal issues, I believe that we are making changes. I believe that the sectors also realise that, even with regard to their own future, the best way forward, not only for education but for the well-being of our entire society, is for greater sharing of resources, facilities and education.

Mr Craig: I support the amendment and find myself, like others in the House, unable to support the motion. We really need to discuss today the whole concept and ideals of parental choice.

I was brought up in an era where parental choice was key in all forms of education. I chose where I sent my children to school, and, ultimately, I made those choices for my own reasons. That leads us to this very hard question: do we believe in parental choice? I find that all political parties tend to pick and choose what they want with regard to parental choice. Others —

Mr Lyttle: Will the Member give way?

Mr Craig: Sorry, Chris.

Others seem to have difficulty around the grammar school sector and the choices that parents make around that. Others seem to have difficulties around the fact that people do not choose integration and the integrated sector, but that is what parental choice is all about. In fact, one of our colleagues in the SDLP raised the issue of faith-based education: parents make choices around that as well, and those choices need to be respected. There are consequences to making parental choices. We are sitting with five sectors in Northern Ireland because of parental choice. That is what our amendment is about. It is not about doing away with the concept of integration and integrated education because that has its place in Northern Ireland. Many parents make the choice to send their children to integrated schools.

5.45 pm

It is interesting that a lot of integrated schools do not meet the Department's criteria. In fact, 28 out of 62 do

not. Some of those schools include less than 5% of the other community. It leads us to ask why schools become integrated, and the Chair of the Committee touched on that. Is it for the right reasons? Was it because they believed in the ethos of both communities working together, or was it purely an act of financial survival? I will leave that question open. I think that we all have the wit to know what is going on there. In fact, 32 of those 62 schools have pupils who are predominantly from one community. In this case, they are predominantly Roman Catholic, which is surprising.

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for giving way. One point that we have failed to comment on in this debate is that the other sectors, particularly the controlled sector, are not integrated but their door is open, whatever religious denomination or persuasion children are. There is no sign across the door of a controlled school that says that Catholics need not apply. In the voluntary sector and in the controlled sector, there is a mix of children from different religious persuasions.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an added minute.

Mr Craig: I thank the Member for raising that issue.

I have to ask this: is the integrated sector the only way through which we can deliver mutual understanding in education? Speaking as a parent, I can say that that is not the case. There are many cross-educational programmes and visits in all sectors. Like many parents, I have had to answer awkward questions from a 10-year-old daughter, such as "What is a nun?" and other questions like that, which were very enlightening. There are classes that work together in different sectors and go to other sectors and join with them. I firmly believe that respect for other faiths is in the teaching ethos of all our schools. An understanding is taught in our schools today about respecting other people's faiths.

Shared education is a different concept altogether. It is about sectors sharing facilities with each other, sharing teachers and sharing resources. In fact, from the area-based plans and some of the hard questions that have been brought up in education, it is abundantly clear that we will not survive the way we are unless there are more shared resources right across the board. That, in itself, will lead to a lot of mutual understanding in those schools, purely because they are on one site and have to speak to one another.

We need to understand that integration is not the only way forward in getting mutual understanding into our education system. That is why, as a party and a group, we cannot support the original motion, which would put one sector at a great advantage over other sectors. That, we feel, is just wrong and improper.

Mr Lunn: We have had a sensible debate, and most people managed to stay on the subject, which is quite unusual in education debates. With one or two honourable exceptions, everybody talked about integrated education.

I did not hear one Member say that they did not support the concept of integrated education. Nor, as far as I can remember, did I hear anybody say that they did not support the concept of parental choice. Jonathan and others said that the purpose of the motion is to promote integrated education above all others and that the Alliance Party is after one school system that is entirely integrated, with

people forced into integrated settings to the exclusion of all others. Mr Rogers made a fair point about faith schools, but he has been sitting beside me long enough to know that I support the concept of faith schools. However, there is absolutely no reason why a faith school should not integrate. Bishop McAreevey said — Mr Rogers was sitting beside me at the time — that Catholic schools were just that: they were not schools for Catholics. He also said that he did not have any problem with the way in which matters of faith were dealt with in integrated schools. So, there is no problem there.

Lord Morrow: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lunn: Yes, sure.

Lord Morrow: The Member directs his point at Mr Rogers, who decided that he wanted to teach in a school that was perceived and understood to be Catholic. If it is then the case that a Catholic school is or is not a faith school — whichever way you want to put it — what is the ethos of that school?

Mr Lunn: If Lord Morrow is asking me to explain the ethos of a Catholic school, he would probably be better to ask somebody who has been through the experience.

Lord Morrow: What is your perception of it?

Mr Lunn: My perception is that the school is faith-based, has a Catholic ethos and there is a Catholic emphasis. Up until two days ago, there was a requirement for a Catholic certificate of education, which, thankfully, has now been partially swept away. I do not believe that I could explain it any better than that, nor do I feel the need to.

I will not have time to go through what everybody said, so I apologise in advance. I will give a few statistics first of all. One or two people mentioned surveys and polls. I think that the Chairman cast a wee bit of doubt on the validity of some of the polls and the fact that they were conducted at party conferences; I think that Mervyn said that. A lot of polls are conducted at party conferences, as we all know. However, the 'Belfast Telegraph' poll, conducted by LucidTalk and commissioned by the IEF, was not, I believe, directed at party conferences.

I will give Members a few statistics from that poll. To the question "Would you support or oppose a request to transform your child's school?" 79% of those who responded were for and only 12% were against. Among the under-45s, the figures were starker; frankly, the younger generation appears to be running ahead of us. On the question "Should integrated schools should be the main model for our education system?" 66% agreed and 18% disagreed. On the question "Is a single education system the best way to deliver education in the future?" — you will love this one — 71% were in favour and 16% were against.

Mr Storey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lunn: Maybe in a little while. Since the Chairman is asking me to give way, I will mention his comment that he wished that he had more time to discuss the issue — don't we all? He is the Chairman of the body that could make time to discuss this properly. As other Members have said, being limited to five minutes and being told that your time is up and so on is not satisfactory. It is an important topic, and it will not go away. I would certainly support any attempt by the Education Committee to spend a bit of time

on this. Now that we have finished with the ESA Bill for the time being and maybe, frankly, for ever — *[Interruption.]* If that is the case, let us be honest and say that we will have time on our hands, so let us talk about something that matters.

There was a lot of talk about shared education as an alternative to integrated education. Some of us just do not see that one is the alternative to the other. When we talk about integrated education, we have in mind the societal benefits of bringing children together at an early age and keeping them together through their education and the benefits that that would bring.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he agree that teaching children in the same building, as shared education does, but giving them different uniforms, teaching them in different classes and having different principals teaches them that their differences are a cause for division, whereas integrated education teaches them that their differences are a cause for celebration?

Mr Lunn: That is a nice way of putting it. He tempts me to comment again about the situation in the Moy. I hope that I do not touch another nerve, in the case of Lord Morrow, but, frankly, the Moy primary school experiment, if I may call it that, is certainly not something that I think will lead anywhere. It is, in fact, accentuating division, not trying to do something about it. Children going into the same school with different uniforms? Where are we going with that? That is not the answer.

Sharing education has its place; I do not discount it completely. Some of the area learning communities work very well. Last year, the Education Committee went to Limavady, where it had a good day and was given a good explanation. It works there because there are a number of successful and sustainable schools in one area that may have had problems delivering the full curriculum. That is what sharing education was meant to be about initially. It was about allowing schools to deliver their full potential. If a school did not have enough pupils in one class to sustain it, it could combine with another school, and any societal or spin-off benefits would be a bonus. If you read Sir Robert Salisbury's report on the common funding formula, you will see what he thinks of it: he is not at all convinced that it is a long-term bet. It is certainly not a replacement for proper integration.

Before I run out of time, I will refer to one or two things that Members said. Everybody was so positive about the motion that I cannot understand why you are not all supporting it. It was remarkable to hear such support, even from the Ulster Unionists. Like everybody else, Mr Kinahan spent his first two minutes praising the motion and the last three rubbishing it. That is the way it is.

The Chairman, among others, congratulated teachers. I do not know how many times I have stood in the Chamber and congratulated teachers working in any setting. I do not think that there is any need to congratulate teachers in an integrated setting specifically. They are no different from anybody else and get on with their job in very difficult circumstances. Mervyn Storey referred to his experience in Ballymoney. I am sorry that he is not listening to me, but he told us that he is now a governor of an integrated school there. I guess that he is a governor of an integrated school having fought long and hard to prevent that situation coming about.

Mr Storey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lunn: OK.

Mr Storey: The reason for that was that the basis on which the school was proposed had nothing to do with integrated education; it was to do with a letter from a parent who said, "I would like to send my child to an integrated school". The school transformed, but what did the parent do? The parent sent the child to the local controlled primary. So it was a numbers game, and it was proposed on the wrong basis.

6.00 pm

Mr Lunn: The Chairman was not the only person to cast doubt on the reason why schools decide to transform; his party colleague who moved the amendment also did so. I do not buy that at all. Maybe somebody could point to one case that had a defensive aspect but not in the cases that I am familiar with. Jonathan Craig referred to this, but he will be familiar with Fort Hill integrated college in Lisburn: there is no fear of closure there. That is parental choice at its very best, and the motion calls on the Minister to acknowledge that choice. I will not be talking out of school to say that NICIE and IEF will bring forward proposals shortly.

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

Mr Lunn: You said, Minister, that you are prepared to look at those to find some way to ease the process, which is, in your own words, cumbersome.

My time is up, Mr Speaker. I hope that all Members will support the motion.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 71; Noes 23.

AYES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Ms Brown, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Elliott, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Ms McCorley, Mr I McCrea, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr M McGuinness, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKay, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Lord Morrow, Mr Mouray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Ms S Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Craig and Mrs Hale

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dallat, Mr Dickson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs D Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr McCarthy, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mrs McKevitt, Mr A Maginness, Mr P Ramsey, Mr Rogers.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Dickson and Ms Lo

Question accordingly agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Education to acknowledge the expressed wish of parents to see their children educated in accordance with their wishes, including in an integrated setting; urges the Minister to guarantee parity of esteem for all sectors with the establishment of sectoral bodies to support parental choice; and further calls on the Minister to encourage all sectoral bodies to promote the development of a single shared education system based upon equality of treatment for all.

Adjourned at 6.16 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 16 April 2013

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Matter of the Day

Boston Marathon Explosions

Mr Speaker: Mr Alex Attwood has been given leave to make a statement on the explosions at the Boston marathon which fulfils the criteria set out in Standing Order 24. If other Members wish to be called, they should rise in their place and continue to do so. All Members who are called will have up to three minutes to speak on the subject. I remind Members that I will not take any points of order or discuss any other matter until this item has been dealt with.

Mr Attwood: On behalf of the House, I thank you, Mr Speaker, for facilitating the House to make comments and express condolences to the people of Boston on what happened last night. On behalf of the SDLP, I convey sympathy and condolences to the Boston Mayor, Tom Menino, the governor of Massachusetts, Deval Patrick, the people of Boston and the marathon participants and their families.

There has been a particular relationship not only between Ireland and Boston but between Derry and Boston, Belfast and Boston, and the people of Northern Ireland and the people of Boston. All of us who have been to Boston will know that the city is at once American, European and Irish. Consequently, the images on our screens last night, which showed what happened in Boston yesterday, seem all the more chilling and telling.

Many of us will have heard the interview with Kevin Cullen, the Boston journalist who is very well known to the politicians and people of Ireland and the North. He told the story of a young boy who greeted his father as he passed the marathon finishing line. The child then returned to his mother and sister, only to be caught up in the bombing, and he lost his life. Kevin captured the awfulness and the loss that happened on the streets of Boston yesterday.

When I was a little younger, I had the great opportunity to run the Boston marathon on two occasions, and there is nothing like it, coming down that finishing stretch with a sense of achievement, fun and, for many people, contributing to charitable causes. All of that is in sharp and chilling contrast to the images of Boston that we saw yesterday. The achievement, the fun and the fundraising are the measure of the Boston marathon, and nothing takes away from that.

We should remember today not just the people of Boston but the people of other countries and places who yesterday similarly lost people in tragic and sudden circumstances as a consequence of terror. We should also remember that

the scenes and means of terror in Boston yesterday were previously visited on us and were our experience — bombs in a crowded street in refuse bins leading to the death of a child. In remembering the people of Boston, we should also remember that there are others for whom the pain and poignancy of what happened yesterday are relevant to their own life.

Mr Spratt: On behalf of my party, I extend sincere sympathy to the people of Boston and, indeed, the United States on the tragedy that unfolded yesterday. As Mr Attwood said, on a day when there was fun in the city and folks were enjoying themselves, suddenly, mayhem and terror struck. This morning, I listened to that journalist tell the very poignant story of the eight-year-old boy being killed and his sister and mother being injured after the father had just run the marathon.

As Mr Attwood also said, terror has struck our streets many times, and similarly innocent people have paid the price. From no matter what quarter terrorism comes, it is wrong and cannot be condoned in any circumstance or situation. So I extend our sympathy, prayers and thoughts to the mayor and people of Boston and to the wider communities that have been affected because I am sure that, as the day unfolds, we will find that people from, perhaps, many parts of the world have been seriously injured or whatever. Our thoughts are with the injured — some very seriously injured, with limbs missing and all the rest of it — and with the heroic people who are dealing with them. It shows you the heroic way in which the emergency services go in and get started at a very early stage.

Mr Hussey: On behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party, I express deepest sympathy to the people of Boston, its mayor and governor on the loss of life at this event. There is no doubt that the people who carried out this evil are terrorists. You cannot describe them as anything else. Their intention was to terrorise, and they have succeeded.

As I drove up here today, I heard the reports on Radio Ulster, which started by playing the sound of the bombs going off. That terror will be revisited on people who live in Northern Ireland. I almost froze as I drove up the road because I immediately thought of Omagh on 15 August 1998, when my town was visited by evil people. The fear came back to me that we could see that visited on us again. On 15 June 1988, in Lisburn, six soldiers were murdered at a similar event by terrorists. No excuse can be made for that type of activity. I listened to the story of the father crossing the line and his eight-year-old son running into his arms. I am not a father, but, if I were and I could hold my eight-year-old son and share that moment with him, it would be a moment I would never forget. However,

some evil people decided that they were going to detonate a bomb. How can any human being do that to another? The father's love for his eight-year old son was clearly there for all to see; then he was told that his son was dead — just like that. Nothing can justify that. It could never be justified anywhere. It could not be justified here, and it cannot be justified in Boston.

My thoughts will be with the people of Boston over the coming days, but my thoughts will also be with those who have lost relatives in similar circumstances, particularly the families of the soldiers who were murdered on 15 June 1988. They were six soldiers who needlessly lost their life in a similar situation. Terrorists copy each other, and I hope that the American president's vow that these people will be caught will be carried through. It is unfortunate that that did not happen here. Let us hope that the American president can follow that through.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. In the first instance, on behalf of Sinn Féin, I send our condolences to the families who lost loved ones yesterday in Boston. All of us saw the television footage last night of what is obviously a massive sporting event — indeed, a massive civic event for Bostonians — being interrupted in this way and people losing their life. Our condolences and thoughts are very much with those families. I also send our best wishes to all those who have been injured. We wish them a very speedy recovery.

Alec Attwood referred to the great connection between Derry and Boston. Many people will remember Derry Boston Ventures and recent initiatives between the people of our city and of Boston. Indeed, many former mayors, even some who served in the House, have visited Boston on behalf of the city. I know that the current mayor, Kevin Campbell, has been in contact with his counterpart in Boston this morning to send condolences on behalf of the people of Derry and, no doubt, the people of Ireland.

As we think of that — again, Mr Attwood referred to this — there were other people in other places who yesterday lost their life as a result of sudden or tragic death by explosion. They should also be in our thoughts this morning. Tá siad inár smaointe.

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Attwood for bringing this matter to the Assembly this morning. It is very appropriate that we in Northern Ireland who have established such strong links with the United States, particularly with Boston and Massachusetts, should stand here this morning to express our sympathy with those who have lost their life, been seriously injured or have suffered trauma from what has happened and to express our solidarity with the people of the United States.

It was not just an attack on the people of Boston or Massachusetts; it was an attack on the international community. It was the Boston marathon, which is one of the most prestigious — if not the most prestigious — marathon races around the world, attracting participants from a range of countries, including Northern Ireland and elsewhere in these islands. It was perhaps the softest of soft targets, when people were trying to relax, enjoy and appreciate a sporting competition and to appreciate people having fun and having a good time with their families. At no time should people have to have any sense of guard or vigilance about terrorist threats, but, particularly in those

circumstances, people really should not have to be alert and worried about things going on around them.

Of course, it brings things close to home as well, given that we have gone through such episodes in our own recent tragic history. We are, therefore, well placed to understand the feelings that are there in Boston this morning.

As others have said, it is also important that we recognise that many other sad and tragic deaths occurred yesterday, including those that resulted from bomb attacks, most notably in Iraq. The victims of those attacks are also very much in our thoughts.

Obviously, Boston has a certain poignancy for us all. Many of us have been there; I was there only last November in support of the Derry-Boston-Donagall link through Atlantic Bridge. I have no doubt that I walked past the site of the bomb on many occasions, which brings it home that a normal city doing a proper day's business has been very badly disrupted. I hope that those responsible will be brought to justice as soon as possible.

10.45 am

Mr Allister: Those of us from this part of the world know all about the random horror of terrorism, which strikes where and when it is least expected and adds greatly to the shock and horror that results. Therefore, we can truly empathise with the people of Boston and the victims of this savage terrorist attack.

Mr Hussey rightly reminded us not only of the generality of the great swathe of terrorism to which Northern Ireland was subjected but of specific incidents, such as the Lisburn attack when, again, wicked terrorists took advantage of the gathering of people on a fun occasion to wreak havoc and leave a trail of death and destruction.

My hope is that, in the United States, those who perpetrated this dastardly deed will be hunted down and, unlike on so many occasions in this part of the world, they will be made amenable and made to pay the price for their crimes in full. At no stage should those terrorists, whoever they may be, be rewarded for their terrorism. I trust that that will not happen, as, sadly, it has happened here.

Mr McCallister: I am grateful to Mr Attwood for bringing the matter to the House. Like all my colleagues, I was absolutely appalled and shocked when I learned of the events in Boston, and, like my colleagues, I listened to that very moving interview on Radio Ulster this morning. It brings it home to us as individuals or as parents the absolute pain and agony that random acts of terror can inflict in the blink of an eye. Suddenly, someone's life is changed forever, with the sadness that that brings.

I agree with Mr Hussey that thousands of people across Northern Ireland and, indeed, the UK, will have been reminded today of their experiences in the past number of years here and the pain that was visited on them. Other families around the world will be reminded of how their lives changed so dramatically and painfully in the blink of an eye. So, we have to think about the victims and send our good wishes to those who have been injured for their recovery. Today and in the weeks and months that follow, we have to remember in our thoughts and prayers the families that are suffering and have lost a loved one, because their pain will stay with them for a great many years. We must all be reminded of that and of how quickly

that change was visited on them on what should have been a fun day.

People from my constituency, as well as people probably from neighbouring Newry and Armagh, were in Boston raising money for the Southern Area Hospice. Such events, which people go to to raise money to help and support others, bring out the very best in human nature. That it should end in such horror has truly shocked and appalled each and every one of us.

I hope that those responsible are brought to justice speedily and dealt with accordingly. We cannot tolerate this type of random act of terror that threatens lives and visits pain on people. I associate myself with the comments of colleagues who have expressed their sympathy and condolences to the families, and I wish those who are injured a full and speedy recovery.

Assembly Business

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Questions for priority written answer that Members from my party put to the Minister of Finance and Personnel were answered in a disrespectful and discourteous way. We expect higher standards from our Ministers. I would like the House to be aware that we are concerned about this.

Mr Speaker: As the Member will know, I have no responsibility for how Ministers answer questions. However, let me say that I do have a responsibility to the House to allow Members to raise such issues of concern and to get them on the public record in the hope that all Ministers are listening. The issue has been raised by all parties in the Chamber from time to time, when they have felt very vexed that Ministers are not answering questions in the way in which Members feel they should be answered. It is only right that I, as Speaker, allow Members to raise issues that are of deep concern to them. The Member has it on the record now.

Executive Committee Business

CRC Energy Efficiency Scheme Order 2013

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): I beg to move

That the draft CRC Energy Efficiency Scheme Order 2013 be approved.

This is a small element of the wider agenda and ambition that we need to have to deal with climate change, global warming and energy efficiency. My view is that we got an insight into the public appetite for dealing with global warming and energy efficiency from the very strong public response in favour of the single-use carrier bag levy that commenced in our shops last Monday, 8 April. Although that is a relatively small matter in the grand order of things — it is very relevant to the businesses affected — it is an example of where we need to go and how we need to escalate our energy efficiency and climate change responses. I hope that, across a range of initiatives in government and the Department of the Environment (DOE) in particular, there will be more manifest evidence of going in that direction.

I bring the motion before the Assembly with the approval of both the Executive and the Environment Committee. I acknowledge the work of the Environment Committee on the matter. It is very technical and can be a bit of a fog at times. Nonetheless, the Executive and the Environment Committee have both come to the place that I recommend. The carbon reduction commitment (CRC) scheme has been simplified and improved from its original format. That is what is behind the efficiency scheme order. In order that scheme participants throughout Britain and Northern Ireland can benefit from the significant financial savings and the reduction in the administrative burden that will be provided by the changes to the scheme, it is necessary for the 2013 CRC order to be approved formally by each of the devolved Administrations before it can be made at Westminster.

I will explain some of the background to the CRC scheme. It is a mandatory trading scheme aimed at improving energy efficiency and cutting carbon dioxide emissions in large public and private sector organisations that typically spend more than £500,000 a year on electricity costs. There are a number of schemes rolled out by government to encourage businesses to deal with energy efficiency. This is one of three types of scheme, and it targets large public and private sector organisations that have electricity spend on that scale.

In Britain and Northern Ireland, there are 2,126 organisations in the scheme, accounting for around 10% of the carbon emissions of Britain and Northern Ireland. In Northern Ireland, there are only 48 participants: 29 from the public sector and 19 from the private sector. The scheme was introduced in April 2010, and since then stakeholders have argued that it is too complex and administratively burdensome. I have some sympathy with that when it comes to the practice of the scheme, although I believe that, in principle, the scheme is appropriate.

The scheme, as it currently operates, required participants to monitor and report energy usage and pay Treasury an allowance of £12 per ton of carbon dioxide associated with their energy use. So, at the end of each year, those 48

businesses and public sector organisations in Northern Ireland account for their energy usage. They then have a multiplier of £12 per ton of carbon dioxide, which they then pay the Government as a tax in order to deal with energy efficiency and encourage them to reduce their use of energy, thereby reducing the tax that they pay per ton of carbon dioxide used.

The scheme fell out of favour following the decision by Treasury in October 2010 to discontinue the recycling of the revenue it generated to the scheme's participants. That decision effectively changed the scheme into a tax measure, where the proceeds would be retained by Treasury as a revenue stream to assist with government finances. Taxation is an excepted matter, and therefore it is not within the competence of the Assembly to decide to leave the scheme. There has been discussion on that, but, given that tax is an excepted matter, it does not fall within our competence to say that we are not going to stay within the scheme.

In recognition of those concerns, the Chancellor announced that the London Government would seek major savings in the administrative costs through simplification of the scheme and that, if those savings could not be found, he would bring forward an alternative environmental tax. In his autumn statement on 5 December 2012, the Chancellor announced that the scheme would continue but in a more simplified and cost-effective format.

What does that mean? The simplifications that are being proposed, following an extensive consultation in 2012, to which there were seven Northern Ireland responses, and a DOE stakeholder event, are significant and will reduce the administrative and financial costs to the scheme's participants by, we believe, about 55%. The key changes include a reduction in the number of fuels covered by the scheme from 29 to two. That will particularly benefit NI participants involved in quarrying. They use a lot of kerosene, which is now exempted from the scheme. For the final two years of the first phase of the new CRC, 2012-13 and 2013-14, the allowance costs will be significantly reduced. The simplification of the scheme is being rolled out in two phases, starting now in April 2013 and accelerating in March 2014. We are doing that with the agreement of the scheme participants, 70% of whom said that it should be rolled out in two phases.

Secondly, the simplification also involves the removal of overlap with other schemes, namely climate change agreements and the EU emissions trading scheme. Those were the other schemes that I referred to earlier as the family of three to deal with the energy efficiency challenge.

Thirdly, there will be an abolition of performance league tables, which will be replaced by an annual publication of participants' aggregated energy use and emissions data. There was criticism of the performance league table for being confusing, if not misleading, and the annual publication of energy use and emissions data is a more rigorous way of ensuring the accountability of those who are involved in the scheme and allowing those involved in the scheme to use the reputational benefit of a reduction in energy use to the benefit of their organisations and businesses.

Fourthly, there is a commitment to monitor the impact and cost-effectiveness of the scheme and for it to be subject to review in 2016.

In his autumn statement last October, the Chancellor said that there will be a full review in 2016 and added:

“the tax will be a high priority for removal when the public finances allow.”

I am not necessarily in sympathy with that assertion, and I may have a difference of view on that matter, but that appears to be the ambition of the Chancellor.

11.00 am

What are the benefits of the scheme? It has been assessed that the simplifications will radically reduce the administrative cost to participants by more than half, which equates to savings of around £272 million up to 2013 across Britain and Northern Ireland. For Northern Ireland companies, the removal of kerosene and light fuel oil from the qualifying fuels will bring overall average cost reductions of over 12%. However, that change will particularly and disproportionately benefit Northern Ireland companies involved in quarrying, which will see, in our view, a reduction in their costs of between 50% and 70%.

Mr Elliott: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Attwood: I will. Am I allowed to give way during a statement?

Mr Speaker: Yes.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for that. I have a query about that last aspect. Is that a saving on current costs to those Northern Ireland businesses, or a saving on what the proposed costs may have been?

Mr Attwood: I believe that it is a saving on current costs. That has been affirmed by somebody sitting on the right.

I am sure that the quarrying industry, which has made representations to me and to the Department of Finance and Personnel, will welcome the fact that, at a minimum, the savings will be 50% and, at maximum, maybe 70%. I have not picked up in recent conversations on the scheme that the quarrying representatives are challenging that or raising further queries about the new simplified scheme.

Overall, it is estimated that the simplified scheme will reduce emissions from participants in Northern Ireland by 5% up to 2013. In the grand order of things, 5% is not a lot, but I am great believer that the aggregate of diverse acts from businesses in the public sector contribute to ambitions, including the ambition that Northern Ireland should be a world leader in carbon reduction, which, in my view, is an ambition that we should shape and scope as we go forward. That is the ambition of the Scottish Government, and it is one that we should share.

In closing, and before I respond to any points that are raised, I thank my Executive colleagues for their support for the CRC scheme. There was a bit of discussion on it, but given that it was a tax and, therefore, an excepted matter, we did not have much flexibility to go down certain roads that some might have aspired to. I also record my thanks to the members of the Environment Committee who have provided helpful comment on the development of policy and legislation. Their observations are welcome. I thank the Chair and the previous Chair for their diligence as I have sought to bring the legislation to the Assembly. I am pleased that we are having this debate today and that

I have been able to explain a little more about the benefits of simplification of the CRC scheme.

This is the critical point: the revised scheme will continue to exert pressure, and that is a driver for large energy-intensive organisations in the public and private sectors to deliver cost-effective energy efficiency improvements. That will not only help to reduce their energy costs and improve their business competitiveness, but will, in turn, lead to a reduction in carbon dioxide emissions, which is what we all desire. The scale of energy costs in public and private organisations in the North is a very significant environmental and economic challenge. More will have to be done to deal with the issues of energy costs and energy security, and a reduction in energy usage. In a significant but small way, the CRC scheme is a contribution to the latter ambition. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

Ms Lo (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment): I rise as Chair of the Committee for the Environment to support the motion. The Committee has been supportive of the scheme, formerly known as the carbon reduction commitment scheme, since the Department first outlined proposals way back in April 2008. In the interim, the Committee has continued to receive regular updates from the Department on the scheme's progress and operation, and the benefits to Northern Ireland.

Last July, the Department informed the Committee that, since its introduction, the scheme had attracted considerable criticism. Participants felt that the scheme was unnecessarily complex, costly to administer and that aspects of the scheme overlapped other climate change and energy efficiency policies. In response, the UK Government committed to simplifying the scheme.

The Committee shared the Minister's concerns that, as a result of changes made during the comprehensive spending review, the CRC scheme would no longer be recycling revenue raised to participants but diverting it to public finances instead. Committee members expressed concern that the scheme had become very different from that originally agreed by the Committee, the Executive and the Assembly in 2009. The Committee sought clarification from the Department on the possible implications resulting from the withdrawal of participation in the scheme by the Northern Ireland Executive. The Department advised that, because the nature of the scheme had changed through the removal of the revenue-recycling element, it was now regarded as a tax, which is an excepted matter. The Minister mentioned that.

On 22 March 2012, the Committee considered the Department of Energy and Climate Change UK consultation on a simplified scheme. The consultation contained proposals aimed at creating a leaner and refocused scheme that would deliver its energy efficiency targets while making compliance easier and less burdensome for participants. The Minister advised the Committee that he fully supported the scheme and would wish it to continue. The Minister outlined that the new simplified scheme had the potential to provide a real reduction in costs of over 12% on average for participating Northern Ireland companies. This would be achievable because the number of participating fuels would be reduced from 29 to two, and the scheme would now cover only emissions generated from the consumption of electricity and gas.

Another benefit outlined by the Minister is the reduction of administrative costs across the UK. Savings in Northern Ireland would be brought about through a variety of measures such as the removal of footprint reports and measuring electricity using only half-hourly meters. In addition, practical measures such as reduced requirements on maintaining records and simplifying allowance sales would help to reduce the administrative burden for all Northern Ireland participants.

The Committee formally considered the draft statutory instrument at its meeting on 28 February 2013, and it has been noted that the House of Lords and House of Commons Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments passed a motion to approve it on 25 March.

The Committee for the Environment supports the motion, but it will continue to seek departmental updates on the operation of the CRC, its impact and the compliance costs of CRC on participants.

I will speak very briefly to add a few thoughts as an individual MLA and not as the Chair of the Committee. As we look back at the past few weeks of severe weather and frequent flooding all over Northern Ireland, we really need to think seriously about carbon emission to mitigate the difficulties that come from the effects of climate change on Northern Ireland. This is a good scheme, although it is very disappointing that the revenue gathered will now go back to the Treasury and will not be retained in Northern Ireland to be ploughed back into schemes to help with measures to mitigate the effects of climate change.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom cúpla focal a rá. I want to say a few words to welcome the scheme.

I have had the privilege of representing my party on the Committee over the past number of years. We were genuinely concerned when the scheme came before the Committee because the original scheme was designed to divert moneys back to support companies and help them to meet their targets. Though I support some of the measures in the new scheme and the order before the Chamber today, I say to the Minister that, in setting targets, we must ensure that we make the resources available to help those people to achieve them.

I know that this is an excepted matter and that the money will go back into the centre, but I ask the Minister to bid for some of those moneys, reclaim them and use them to support those companies. Also, as we set targets in the future, whether they are European targets or our own, as a small region doing its bit to tackle climate change and assist in carbon reduction, money should be ring-fenced. It is unfair that we bring in new measures and regulations without giving companies and people the tools and resources to achieve them.

I support the order, but I would like the Minister to recognise those points.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Minister for opening on the issue and outlining some of the detail of what is, ultimately, a complex scheme.

The carbon reduction commitment energy efficiency scheme is, for me, an example of regulation driving innovation. As a member of the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee, and indeed as an individual MLA, I have visited a number of businesses, including users

of high volumes of energy that would be covered by the scheme, a recent example being when the Committee visited Bombardier. The company was rightly very proud to show us its new building and explain to us how energy efficient they had made it. I have no doubt that this regulation was one of the drivers for that, but so was the business case because, as well as helping us to reduce carbon emissions, encouraging businesses to go down the line of increasing their energy efficiency makes them more competitive on a global scale. As we well know, and we know only too well, energy costs are among the highest costs to businesses and one of the key issues in trying to reduce costs. This scheme encourages businesses to move in the right direction.

I have to say that I regret the removal by the current Government of the recycling of revenue, which was mentioned by all Members who have spoken so far. I am on record as saying at the time that I thought it a retrograde step. It is a shame that the Finance Minister is not here because he often talks about green taxes as though I am responsible for them all. As will be noted, our Environment Minister is not responsible for this measure, so the one Green Party MLA in the House is certainly not responsible for it. Though I support many aspects of the CRC energy efficiency scheme, I do not think that anyone can claim that it is here thanks to me.

The removal of the recycling of revenue is regrettable because we now have a stick approach to business. I suppose that the carrot is increased competitiveness and a reduction in costs through improvements in energy efficiency, but what we could have done, by recycling the costs from the tax back in through the businesses, was speed up the process of change.

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr Agnew: Certainly.

Mr Beggs: Does the Member accept that, though the scheme drives energy efficiencies, there is a danger that it could also drive the exportation of jobs, particularly by companies that use high volumes of energy? It is equally important that the European Community place the same high standards and similar pressures on energy users elsewhere so that we are not simply exporting jobs to other parts of the world.

11.15 am

Mr Agnew: I take the Member's point. We will not achieve the purpose of reducing emissions if we simply export the problem of climate change and of emitting vast amounts of carbon and other greenhouse gases and allow other countries to do it. We have to look at ways of ensuring that that does not happen, and that is the point that I am making with the approach of driving the resources that come from the tax element of the scheme back through businesses. That would have given those businesses not just an incentive for change but a further resource to help them through that change. It would speed up the process, drive innovation forward in the UK and improve the competitiveness of businesses even further.

Today's order will allow the changes that are needed. It is right that the scheme has been reviewed. We have looked at its impact — the UK Government, essentially, have looked at its impact — on businesses, and, where the scheme was not working, we have come back with

changes. Largely, I support those changes, because it is an energy efficiency scheme but the order is about making the scheme itself more efficient.

However, I would like to ask the Minister a question. In the original proposals, it was reduced down to include four fuels, because those four fuels were said to make up 95% of fuel use. I am concerned that it is now being reduced further to two fuels. Is the Minister aware of the impact on the percentage of fuel use of taking out those other fuels? I see that he is smiling: he may not have the information there. I am happy for him to provide it at a later date. I am happy with the reduction from 100% coverage of fuels to 95%, and I can see the sense in reducing the burden on businesses. However, I want to know what that impact will be.

Overall, the Green Party supports the scheme. It is an example of where the green agenda and the business agenda can complement each other, as happened when we worked together on the green new deal, which, unfortunately, the Executive rejected. However, we are seeing more and more where the business agenda and the green agenda can complement each other, and the scheme is another example of that.

Mr Attwood: I thank all Members who contributed. I will respond to the points that have been raised.

As the Chair of the Environment Committee said, the scheme has, under Treasury rules, been deemed to be a tax, and, consequently, you cannot withdraw from it. That said — in order that I do not mislead the House in any way — the Department for Education in London has withdrawn from the scheme, because Michael Gove, the Education Minister in London, has, as people will be aware, various views on the world and, for good or ill, the determination to see them through. Somehow or other, he has been able to negotiate with the Treasury so that English schools will not be captured by the new scheme. However, there is a kick in that: as I understand it, because of Michael Gove's approach and the Treasury's consent for his schools to withdraw from the scheme, the English schools will have to pay a contribution out of their budgets, assessed at 2012-13 figures, towards payments into the Treasury as an alternative means of making a contribution. As a consequence, and as I understand it, the English schools will pay more in their contribution under this scheme than the Northern Ireland Departments will pay under the order. It does not seem to me to be a very wise approach to seek to opt out of a scheme if the consequence is that we would pay more to the Treasury or suffer consequences for the block grant. Therefore, I did not think that that was a feasible way to proceed.

The Chair also touched on the challenge of energy efficiency. Last week, I chaired the most recent meeting of the adaptation subgroup of the cross-departmental working group, which is made up of all the Departments seeking ways that we can adapt our policies and practices to deal with climate change and lowering emissions. I think that we still have a mountain to climb when it comes to energy efficiency in the Government's estate. As officials will know, I expressed frustrations that, although we gather and talk, we are not driving things. I will not deny that that comment is as much about me, as the person who chairs the group, as it is about any other Department.

Mr Boylan raised a number of questions, one of which was about targets. Late last month, a pre-consultation

went out — it was not even a consultation — about the potential scope and shape of a climate change Bill. London has climate change legislation, and the devolved Administrations in Scotland and Wales have Climate Change Acts, but we do not have one here. We need to have one here to capture in our domestic law our contribution to climate change. We will have to get our heads around how we are going to deal with targets and whether we should proceed with a voluntary approach or, as I believe we should, proceed with putting challenging emission targets in a climate change Bill.

I am not anticipating the outcome of that debate. We have not had a proper consultation yet, proposals have not gone to the Executive yet, and no Bill has been drafted yet, but, in testing the public mood in this pre-consultation, we have to get our heads around whether we are seriously up for having challenging targets in a climate change Bill.

The point that Mr Boylan made about targets is that we have to get our heads around the fact that a low-carbon economy is the only sustainable way forward and that it is the best way forward for economic growth in the North of Ireland. If we do not embrace the concept that sustainable development based on reductions in carbon emissions is the best economic model, we will not be able to compete on this island, never mind globally. Businesses and farmers, as well as the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and other Departments, have to get their heads around that.

I say all that because three international visitors to Belfast are with the new chief executive of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) over yesterday, today and tomorrow, and he is taking them to meet the Department of the Environment (DOE), the NIEA and the business community. Part of the purpose of those conversations is to escalate the understanding of what a low-carbon economy might look like.

A former vice-president of DuPont Global is one of that triumvirate, and I met him yesterday afternoon. He told me that people have to understand the connection between what he referred to as the “denominator” and the “enumerator”. I do not know what those words mean, but he explained what they mean for DuPont's business practice. I do not know whether DuPont is a world leader in business for carbon reduction, but he said that the denominator is reducing carbon reduction and that the consequence is the enumerator of more competitive business. That is the broader agenda that is touched on in the contributions to this order, and it is the broader agenda that our Government and the DOE, in my view, have to lead, push and sponsor.

If you look at best practice in energy efficiency in the North and consider companies such as Bombardier, Delta Print and Packaging and a number of other US investors, you will see that that is the business model that they are increasingly adopting. That is because it is the successful, ethical, economically productive model to use in the future.

Steven Agnew, as is his nature when he questions Ministers, always asks the question that the Minister does not have the answer to. Why have we reduced from four fuels to two? I do not know, but I will get back to him on that matter.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the draft CRC Energy Efficiency Scheme Order 2013 be approved.

Parental Leave (EU Directive) (Maternity and Parental Leave) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning):
I beg to move

That the Parental Leave (EU Directive) (Maternity and Parental Leave) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 be approved.

I seek the Assembly's approval for the Parental Leave (EU Directive) (Maternity and Parental Leave) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013, which were made on 6 February 2013 and came into operation on 8 March. The regulations are subject to the confirmatory Assembly procedures, which require that a plenary debate be arranged to approve the regulations no later than six months after the regulations — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Clear the Gallery. The House is suspended for two minutes.

The sitting was suspended at 11.26 am and resumed at 11.28 am.

Mr Speaker: Order. I ask the Minister to continue.

Dr Farry: Thank you, Mr Speaker. The regulations implement the 2010 Council directive on parental leave, which stipulates that all European Union member states must provide unpaid parental leave for at least four months. The 2010 directive also sets parameters for considering the applicability of the right based on a child's age.

The directive states that any worker returning from parental leave should have the right to apply for flexible working. Although that requirement is already largely met by existing flexible working entitlements, which are the same in Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the right does not currently exist for those who have a temporary contract of employment with an agency.

The primary aim of the revised directive is to provide working parents with greater flexibility to balance their work and family commitments. The directive also seeks to promote equality between men and women in labour market opportunities and treatment at work.

As employment legislation is a devolved matter, the Department for Employment and Learning was required to transpose the directive on behalf of the Executive by 8 March 2013. On 8 October 2012, my Department published a public consultation document that sought the views of stakeholders on the merits of introducing the minimum changes required by the directive. The document also sought views on the possibility of introducing changes beyond the minimum requirements that had already been explored by the UK Government as part of their modern workplaces consultation.

Although it was clear from the response to the consultation that there was an appetite for a more extensive examination of working parents' rights, there was no strong consensus on what changes should be made to parental leave entitlements beyond the minimum requirements of the directive.

As with the Great Britain consultation, it was apparent that there is a need for a much broader review of

working parents' rights in Northern Ireland before any decisions can be made to effect changes to parental leave entitlements that would go beyond the minimum requirements of the directive. I therefore decided to implement the minimum requirements of the directive at this stage and to defer any decisions on any further extension to working parents' rights, pending a more comprehensive review of parental rights. I have just secured Executive approval to consult on proposals for a more fundamental sharing of parental leave rights. I intend to launch the shared parental leave consultation in early May.

11.30 am

The regulations before the Assembly today give effect to the minimum requirements set out in the revised directive. It may be helpful if I set out the general rights that are available to working parents and explain how the existing entitlements have been enhanced through the regulations before the House today. The right to unpaid parental leave is available to any employee who has been continuously employed for at least a year and who has or expects to have parental responsibility for a child or is registered as the child's father. It permits working parents to take parental leave up until the child's fifth birthday or until the child's eighteenth birthday, if the child has a disability. Qualifying employees who are adoptive parents have a comparable right. They are entitled to take parental leave in the five-year period following the adoption or until the adopted child turns 18, if that is sooner. Parental leave, which is unpaid unless otherwise agreed, is limited to four weeks in any 12-month period unless more favourable arrangements are agreed between the employer and employee.

In line with the decision to address the minimum requirements of the directive, the regulations have now increased the maximum parental leave entitlement for all qualifying parents from 13 to 18 weeks. The Assembly's approval of the regulations fulfils the Executive's obligations to transpose the directive. The regulations make no other changes to the amount of parental leave available, and the general qualifying criteria remain unchanged. The entitlement to unpaid parental leave will continue to be available to both parents for each qualifying child. There will be no change to the maximum age of a child whose parents are entitled to take the leave. It will remain at the fifth birthday or the eighteenth birthday for a disabled child. The statutory entitlement to four weeks' leave in a 12-month period is also unchanged.

In seeking the Assembly's approval of the regulations, I think that it is appropriate for me to make reference to a second set of regulations that address a further requirement of the directive that employed parents returning from parental leave must have the right to request flexible working. Many employees who are parents and carers already have that right. However, until recently, agency workers with a contract of employment or an employment relationship with a temporary agency did not. As the directive required a change to that position, my Department made the Parental Leave (EU Directive) (Flexible Working) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013, which also came into effect on 8 March. Those regulations, which were subject to the negative resolution procedure, extended the right to request flexible working to employed agency workers who are returning to work from a period

of parental leave. The two sets of regulations together ensure that Northern Ireland addresses fully the minimum requirements of the 2010 directive.

I am grateful to the Committee for Employment and Learning and the Examiner of Statutory Rules for their scrutiny of this amending statutory rule. I am also grateful to the Committee for its recommendation that the regulations be confirmed by the Assembly. I hope that I have provided the House with a sufficient explanation of the purpose of the regulations. In my closing remarks I will of course respond to any points made by Members.

Mr Swann (The Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning): I thank the Minister. For anybody who said that employment and learning is not exciting, that showed you.

I want to first make a declaration that my wife is currently on maternity leave and so is affected by the regulation.

The Committee for Employment and Learning considered the proposals for the Parental Leave (EU Directive) (Maternity and Parental Leave) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 on 23 January and agreed that it was content with the proposed statutory rule. The regulations implement Council directive 2010/18/EU on the revised framework agreement on parental leave, which establishes minimum standards designed to allow working parents to take periods of unpaid leave from work to care for their children. They amend provisions relating to parental leave in the Maternity and Parental Leave etc. Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999. At its meeting on 20 February, the Committee agreed to recommend that the regulations be confirmed by the Assembly, and we have not changed our mind since then.

Dr Farry: I thank the Chair of the Committee for his comments and remind him that he has to declare an interest not only on behalf of his wife but on behalf of himself, because he will be subject to the changes. Of course, that did not detract in any way from the objectivity that the Chair deployed in scrutinising what was before the Committee and, indeed, the Assembly today.

It is worth stressing, while I have the opportunity, that this is part of a much wider review of employment law that we are undertaking. What is before the House is the minimum requirement that the Executive and Assembly have to meet under the EU directive, and, hopefully, we will establish that in the next few minutes with the approval of the statutory rule. However, it is part of a much wider landscape. In due course, we will consult on whether we wish to go beyond the minimum requirement. I stress that that will be a decision for the Assembly to take in due course, after a period of consultation.

Members are also aware that there are moves in Great Britain with respect to the sharing of parental leave. Again, I stress that, last week, the Executive gave their approval for my Department to take forward a consultation on that matter as it relates to Northern Ireland. After we have briefed the Committee in the next few weeks, I hope that we will go out to consultation in the early phase of next month. In due course, we will come back to the House with the outcome of that process. That is part of a much wider review of employment law of which maternal and paternal rights are one aspect.

Although the Chair may reflect that, at times, these subjects can be very dry, I think it is important to acknowledge that they have an impact not only on business — it is important we take its views into account — but, most critically, on parents across Northern Ireland. We have a philosophy that the more you invest in and respect people in the workplace, the more productivity you will get on the far side. As we look to compete internationally on the basis of the quality of our people and their skills, the more we respect people in the workplace the better. Having the necessary flexibilities and respecting the views of business and investing in people at the same time, we stand to be able to punch above our weight internationally.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Parental Leave (EU Directive) (Maternity and Parental Leave) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 be approved.

Assembly Business

Lord Morrow: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I am not quite sure about this, so maybe you could clarify it for me. There was a disruption in the House, and, like everybody else, I was watching what was going on in the Public Gallery. When I turned around, there was no one in the Chair. I am not sure what state the House was in at that stage. Were we in recess? Was the House adjourned? Was it just a state of flux?

Mr Speaker: Unfortunately, the Minister was in full flow as well. I had suspended the House, and I had left the Chair. There certainly will be an investigation into what happened in the Public Gallery.

Private Members' Business

Civil Service (Special Advisers) Bill: Further Consideration Stage

Mr Speaker: Mr Allister has advised that he is not in a position to move the Further Consideration Stage of the Bill today. However, as it still stands as an item of business on the Order Paper, it will need to be disposed of formally.

Mr Allister: I will give a brief explanation, if I may. Members will recall that, at Consideration Stage, an amendment was accepted by the House according a role to the Northern Ireland Civil Service Commissioners. The commission is now seeking engagement on resulting issues. If the Further Consideration Stage proceeded and was completed today, there would be no further opportunity to make any adjustments to the Bill. Therefore, in order to make engagement with the commission meaningful, it seems necessary to me that we do not proceed with Further Consideration Stage today. I hope that that explanation makes sense to the House. I would say that, in any event, the stage would have been very brief by virtue of the dearth of amendments.

Not moved.

Mr McKay: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Order. I will take a very quick point of order. Let me say to all sides of the House that I have no intention of opening out the debate. If there is a point of order to clarify any issue that Mr Allister raised, I will happily take it, but let us not widen out the debate.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Can you clarify whether changes made at Consideration Stage cannot now be undone? Furthermore, at what stage would you inform the Assembly that the Bill is invalidated —

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr McKay: — as it is clearly incompetent as it now stands?

Mr Speaker: Order. Mr Allister has gone some way to clarifying why he cannot move the Bill this morning. I am worried that we could end up opening up the whole debate on a Bill that has not been moved in the Chamber. I am being careful here. I think that we should move on. I am trying to be fair to all sides of the House. The Member who sponsors a Bill, especially a private Member's Bill, controls it. He or she decides at what stage a Bill should be moved in the House. In the past, Ministers have come to the House and not moved Bill stages. I am being careful in guiding the House that we should not open up debate on a Bill that has not been moved. I really believe that we should move on.

Mr McCartney: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Is it on the same subject matter?

Mr McCartney: It is about the business of the House.

Mr Speaker: OK.

Mr McCartney: Thank you very much, a Cheann Comhairle. We are tasked with having full business in the House. In the past, we have been lectured about having half days and not enough legislation. Indeed, the person who lectures us about having half days and not enough

legislation has come to the House today and afforded us a half day. He had a chance to bring legislation, and he failed. It reminds me of the old Irish proverb "Is fada an bóthar nach bhfuil casadh ann": it is a long road that has no turn.

Mr Speaker: Once again, it is a much wider issue than that which the Member has raised this morning. Yes, in the past, all sides of the House have raised issues about the business of the House. The Business Committee has responsibility for the business of the House. Those issues should be raised there and not on the Floor.

Further Consideration Stage of the Bill has not been moved. The next item of business will be Question Time. I propose, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm. The sitting is, by leave, suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 11.42 am.

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

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Education

Mr Deputy Speaker: Questions 1 and 2 have been withdrawn and require a written answer. Trevor Lunn is not in his place for question 3.

Education and Skills Authority: Rural Schools

4. **Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Education whether he will consider placing additional requirements similar to those in the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 on the Education and Skills Authority when considering any rural school closure. (AQO 3792/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): I have no plans to replicate the legislation that the Member refers to. However, I recognise the importance of viable rural schools to the sustainability of local communities, and that is reflected in my Department's sustainable schools policy.

The Education Bill includes powers for my Department to make regulations and issue guidance on the area planning process, including consultation. I will keep the matter under review, and, if necessary, I will use those powers to place requirements on the Education and Skills Authority in relation to consultation in respect of rural schools.

Mrs Overend: Does the Minister accept that rural schools, despite the fact that they often have a smaller enrolment size, serve as an advantage to his Department in keeping otherwise exorbitant transport costs down? Does he also accept that school closures may, in some cases, lead to any subsequent savings being consumed by the ensuing increases in school transport costs?

Mr O'Dowd: I accept the Member's points. However, she needs to be aware that, from the outset of the area planning process, I have said that it is not budget-driven. I could continue with the budget that I have and keep open all the schools that we have across the board, but I do not believe that that would be a proper use of resources, and it certainly would not benefit the education of our young people either. Before I make a decision about any school — in this instance, you refer to rural schools — based on the development proposal, I will take into account all the criteria that the Member refers to. The educational well-being of the child will be first and foremost, but we will also consider which alternative school pupils will travel to, transport arrangements etc. I believe that I have the flexibility to do that and to take such decisions, and I will take decisions based on those criteria in the future.

Mr Storey: The Minister will be well aware of the widespread concern in the rural community following the publication of the area plans for primary schools. That has caused concern out there, and I think that it was unnecessary. Sir Bob Salisbury made a recommendation in his report about the development of a policy for small rural schools, which the Minister has previously referred to in the House. Has he not put the cart before the horse?

Would we not be in a better position if we had that policy first in order to determine the future shape of our rural primary schools?

Mr O'Dowd: I note the recommendation in Bob Salisbury's report. I will respond to the report in the House in a number of weeks' time.

Any small schools policy that is arrived at will be based on my departmental policy and where we are at this time. In relation to a small schools policy, there is a need to bring all the policies together on the one page and to look at the information and intelligence that we have garnered from area planning.

I think that a lot of the concerns about the information published in the area plans arose from the way in which the media published the information. They published lists of schools, particularly in rural communities, that did not meet the criterion of 105 pupils. I am already on the record as saying this, and I will put it on the record again: this is not a numbers game, and it is not an economic equation. This is an education equation that I am involved in. There are rural communities out there that require and will continue to have very small schools in their vicinity because that is what is right for them.

Mr McAleer: Will the Minister explain how the area planning process will improve attainment across all schools?

Mr O'Dowd: I want to see a network of sustainable schools that concentrate on the educational needs of our young people rather than on the survival of the school. There needs to be a number of pupils in a school to ensure that the curriculum is being delivered. There also needs to be a significant number of pupils in a school to bring in resources. We want to ensure that there is sociability and so on in a school, because young people learning from each other is an important part of the learning experience.

The six criteria that we have set out for area planning are based on educational needs and the needs of communities in relation to education. I am confident that, if we continue to work at area planning, we will end up with a group of sustainable schools going into the future that are concentrating on the education of young people rather than on whether the school will survive into the next year.

Mr Dallat: I listened carefully to the Minister. I know that he is awash with reports and all sorts of things, but will he tell the House how he measures the likely impact of the closure of a rural school on a community? If we knew that, we might better understand the other issues that he discussed with us today.

Mr O'Dowd: I measure it through the development proposal process, which is a statutory process with two stages. First, there is a pre-consultation process, whereby the school's managing authority will engage both with the board of governors to discuss its future and with other interested parties. If the managing authority decides that the best way forward is to publish a development proposal for closure, a two-month consultation process begins in which I take written and verbal representations from interested parties — elected and unelected — and from schools, community leaders and so on. I have been through this process with several schools; indeed, I was with a school only yesterday to discuss a development proposal. So, I take all that information on board, I assess it against the sustainable schools criteria, one of which

is strong links with the community, and I make a decision based on that.

We see everywhere the measure that we have of keeping unsustainable, unviable, educationally unfit schools open. We see young people leaving schools without proper numeracy and literacy and without proper examination results. They have not been given the opportunity in school to achieve their full capability. So, I need to take two measures into account: the sustainable schools policy and the development proposal; and the measure that, I have no doubt, Mr Dallat is perfectly aware of, which is the young people who, through no fault of their own, were allowed to attend unsustainable schools throughout their educational career because no one had the courage to make the decision to close them.

Irish-medium Education: Peripatetic Teachers

5. **Mr McGlone** asked the Minister of Education what plans he has to address the deficit in the number of peripatetic teachers in the Irish-medium sector. (AQO 3793/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Responsibility for providing peripatetic services to all grant-aided schools rests with the education and library boards. The boards have advised me that they are not aware of any shortage of such teachers for Irish-medium schools. The establishment of the Education and Skills Authority will allow for a strategic view to be taken of the provision of peripatetic services to all schools in the future.

Mr McGlone: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire chomh maith as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for his response.

An n-aontódh an tAire liom gur chóir do mhúinteoirí san earnáil sin bheith líofa sa teanga Ghaeilge? Does the Minister agree that, in cases where peripatetic teachers are involved, particularly in the Irish-medium sector, they should be fully fluent in the language?

Mr O'Dowd: That is ideally the case, particularly where children are learning through the medium of Irish. I asked my Department to check whether any representations had been made on the issue either by Members or the sector. No representations have been made to date about shortages of such teachers. I will take the Member's comments on board and ask that further enquiries be made about the matter. Our Irish-medium sector is an integral and equal part of our education system, and it should receive services that are equal to the rest of our education system.

Mr Brady: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he give us an indication of the growth of Irish-medium education over recent years? How many teachers are currently employed in the sector?

Mr O'Dowd: I do not have the full figures in front of me for teachers in post in the Irish-medium sector, although it has grown over the past seven years in particular. We have seen significant growth in Irish-medium education and the provision of Irish-medium teachers. We also have courses running in our teacher training colleges for Irish-medium teachers to deal with the demand from the community.

I can give the Member the increased intakes to the Irish-medium postgraduate certificate in education courses for the primary and post-primary sectors. There were 22 in

total in 2007-08. To the end of the most recent academic year available — 2009-2010 — it was up to 28, so there has been an increase in those years. I will, however, provide the Member with the detailed figures that he requested.

Mr Hussey: I thank the Minister for his responses so far. Does he agree that it is vital that no sector be given a privileged position in our education system, including the Irish-medium sector, and that resources should be prioritised to where there is the most pressing need?

Mr O'Dowd: The Member will be aware that, under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement, we have a legislative duty to facilitate the Irish-medium sector. The sector has grown, and my Department reacts to the demand from the communities, pupils and parents. We will continue to do so. No sector is prioritised over any other. My Department reacts to need and to our statutory obligations in these matters.

Schools: Non-selective Systems

6. **Ms McCorley** asked the Minister of Education, in light of recent commitments by Catholic trustees to move away from academic selection, what assurance he can give to parents about the performance internationally of non-selective systems. (AQO 3794/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: International evidence supports the case for removing academic selection to improve outcomes for all. Parents should be assured that a move away from academic selection is in the best interests of all our children. International evidence shows that it is key to raising standards across the whole education system. The best performing education systems internationally, such as that in Finland, are all mixed-ability systems that do not use academic selection as a criterion for entry into a school.

Poland's education system has been a rising star in international rankings. In 2003, Poland ranked 24th in the programme for international student assessment (PISA) rankings for 15-year-olds. By 2009, it had risen to 14th place, ahead of countries such as the USA, Sweden, France, Germany and the UK. Those startling improvements in performance were achieved by a system that operates mixed-ability schooling. A former Polish Minister commented:

"The weaker pupils did better and the strongest ones carried on getting stronger."

We do not need to look abroad to see how standards can be maintained and improved in a mixed-ability environment. Our primary schools cater for all abilities. As was seen in the recent international comparisons, our education system at primary school level is among the best in the world. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for our post-primary system, but I am determined to change that.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagraí go dtí seo. I thank the Minister for his answers to this point. Does he accept that there is a role for streaming or banding in mixed-ability schools?

Mr O'Dowd: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhairle. There is. Indeed, there is streaming and banding in many of our

highest-performing non-selective schools. It is part of the system.

In recent days, it has come to my attention that some Members opposite and some of those who are involved in education discussions think that my view is that there should be no selective process at all once a child enters a school. That is not my objection to academic selection: my objection is that we select children on the basis of a number of questionable tests of the child's ability. Those tests then put them into a school. That is the wrong way to go. Children should enter a good school. When they enter that school, the school is quite right to set whatever testing regime it sees fits to identify the educational needs of the child and to teach to that child's needs. You will have different streams in those schools. That is only right and proper, because the school is not choosing pupils to meet the needs of the school; it is ensuring that pupils come through its doors and that it teaches to the abilities of those pupils. They challenge pupils of all abilities to move forward, and that is an excellent way forward.

2.15 pm

I used the example of our primary schools. No one objects to all-ability primary schools; no one objects to all socio-economic backgrounds in our primary schools; and our primary schools are some of the best in the world. The secret of that is that, in that all-ability situation, children learn off each other, they challenge each other, and, as the Minister from Poland said, the weakest get stronger and the stronger get stronger again. That is what education is all about.

There needs to be greater clarity about the different positions on academic selection. We need to remove the emotiveness from the debate. We need to remove the political rancour from the debate. We also need to allow all the people who have an opinion on this matter to express it and debate it without being labelled as one thing or another or a party supporter or whatever it may be. I have challenged many organisations that have a position of wanting to end academic selection —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Minister's time is up.

Mr O'Dowd: — to come out and say so.

Mr McDevitt: Another area where there is an awful lot of international evidence that we are not doing things right is the age at which we start children in school. Does the Minister agree that international evidence suggests overwhelmingly that we start our children too early in compulsory education? What steps is he taking to follow up on that evidence?

Mr O'Dowd: There needs to be a debate about that matter. It is certainly a subject that will require cross-departmental discussions. The school starting age of a child bears down on many factors of family life, but let us look at the education issues and what the Department has been involved in over this last number of years. As regards a child starting formal education, we have our preschool education setting, which is age-appropriate and deals with the needs of a child in that preschool year. When a child enters formal education in primary school, they now enter at what is known as the foundation stage, which is a less formal regime than many in the Chamber would recognise from their days in primary school. Those with younger children will understand better the foundation stage if their

children are going through it. It has a greater emphasis on learning through play and association than would have been the case in the past, and there is no longer the rigid regime that was once in place for children. That is proving, in my view, to be a very effective way to teach our young people through age-appropriate education. We are beginning to see the benefits of that through our education system. So, although there are repeated concerns about school starting age, the foundation stage has gone a long way to dealing with many of those concerns. I think that our preschool settings are dealing with those concerns, but I would not stymie the debate about school starting stage. It would, though, have to be a cross-departmental debate. There would have to be a lot of investigations carried out, because it affects many different factors of our daily life. The most important equation in that, however, is the child. So, I am happy to take part in the debate.

Mr Dickson: Minister, can you tell us what you are doing today and in the days to come to break the deadlock on post-primary transfer so that no more children in Northern Ireland will be labelled as failures at the age of 11?

Mr O'Dowd: What am I doing? I am engaging with different sectors and discussing the issue with them to see how we can move forward on the basis of international best practice and reassure parents that the way forward will ensure that their children have a pathway that will meet the needs of and, indeed, place demands on each child. As Education Minister, I support academic excellence. Of course I support academic excellence; it is the way forward. I support the challenging of young people in academia. I support a wide and varied curriculum. I think that the entitlement framework has changed the educational landscape going forward, allowing all young people to be challenged in relation to their abilities and allowing them to promote even abilities within themselves, whether they be academic or otherwise or a mixture of both.

I bring the challenge back to the Member: what is the Alliance Party doing? The Alliance Party's manifesto says, "End academic selection". This is why I say that all interested parties in the debate should be free to come out and debate it without being labelled as a supporter of the Minister or an objector to the Minister. You should come out and stand by what your education research, your policies and your social policies have shown you and encourage others to do likewise. We have to show the parents of young people of all age ranges that the vision we have for education can and does work. Indeed, many of our best performing schools are non-selective. You do not have to go to a school with the word "grammar" on the gate to go to university. In fact, I was talking to a senior university figure the other day, and I asked her how many of her young people came from non-selective school backgrounds. She told me that it was between 40% and 45%. You do not have to go to a grammar school —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Minister, your time is up.

Mr O'Dowd: — to go to university. You have to go to a good school to achieve.

Mr Cree: I notice that, in his response, the Minister failed to refer to one of the most basic fundamentals of our education system: the regard given to parental choice. Whether he likes it or not, thousands of children still sit examinations every year, and I am deeply concerned that there is complacency from some parties about the

unregulated nature of those examinations. Will the Minister assure us that, as long as there is parental demand for selection, whether he likes it or not, the option will remain open?

Mr O'Dowd: There is not parental demand for selection; there is parental demand for excellent education. I fully support parents in that, and I have spent the past five or six years with the education brief for my party and the past two years as Minister of Education ensuring that we drive towards that. The results coming out of our primary schools and the improved results coming out of our post-primary schools show that our policies are bedding in and beginning to work.

Where is the parental choice when a letter arrives from a school that sets an unregulated academic selection test telling parents that their child is not getting in? Where is the parental choice there? That is not parental choice. The child has been asked to sit a test that is very questionable in respect of its capacity to decide a child's ability and the school has decided that the child is not getting in.

Mr Storey: Nonsense.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr O'Dowd: There is no parental choice there. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr O'Dowd: There is greater parental choice when a parent brings their child to a non-selective school and the school says to the parent, "Regardless of the abilities of your child, we will ensure that we do everything we can to ensure that your child achieves everything they can". Those schools may ask children to go through a number of tests to see what their ability is. It is not the fact that thousands of children are sitting tests; it is that thousands of children are sitting the wrong tests, at the wrong time and in the wrong place for their educational well-being.

Mr Allister: With the wrong Minister.

Mr O'Dowd: If the Member opposite ever gets enough votes to become Minister, he can take the job up. Until he gets enough votes to be Minister, he would be safer sitting in the corner and being quiet. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr O'Dowd: The evidence is there. You may not agree with the evidence, but do not dismiss it with snide remarks from the opposite Benches or the corner. Take the evidence on, debate it and let parents —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Minister's time is up.

Mr O'Dowd: Let parents —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Minister's time is up.

Mr O'Dowd: — listen to a reasonable debate about the issue.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I ask that all questions and answers are made through the Chair.

Gregory Campbell is not in his place to ask question 7.

Schools: Rural Areas

8. **Mr Lynch** asked the Minister of Education, with regard to area planning, whether he can give an assurance that

small schools in rural or isolated areas which are required going into the future but which are experiencing low enrolments will be protected. (AQO 3796/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Area planning is the mechanism for delivering the sustainable schools policy. Enrolment trends are only one of a full set of six criteria specified in the policy against which a school's sustainability is assessed. The policy is not used mechanistically to close schools that fall below enrolment thresholds. The policy also includes an accessibility criterion that provides guidance on home to school travel times. That recognises the particular needs of isolated rural communities. Where school managing authorities determine that a small school should be retained, the sustainable schools policy states that support should be made available, if required, to ensure that the school is educationally sustainable.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I welcome the Minister's reassurance. Will local innovative solutions across the sectors and geographical boundaries be part of the process?

Mr O'Dowd: Sorry, Chair, I missed the last part of the Member's question. Is it possible for him to repeat it?

Mr Lynch: I will just repeat it all, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's reassurances and further ask whether local innovative solutions across the sectors and geographical boundaries will be part of the process.

Mr Deputy Speaker: And I remind Members that they should not read their questions. *[Laughter.]* Order.

Mr O'Dowd: My response to the Member is that, without doubt, they will be part of the solutions. Local communities know best the situation in their area. Now, they will have to be educationally sound local solutions. They will have to be tested against those criteria. The primary purpose of a school is — if you excuse the pun — education. Primary and post-primary schools are not there for any purpose if they are not achieving the educational well-being of young people. Rural communities deserve excellent education in the same way as urban communities do. I have engaged with rural communities and rural schools about innovative solutions, a number of which attract me very much because they are based on education. They are based on the understanding of the issue of education and the understanding of communities, particularly with regard to shared education. There are fine examples of that in the Fermanagh area, and I will visit Fermanagh tomorrow to discuss a number of those proposals as well. So, where local community solutions come forward, I will engage with them and, where they meet the criteria, they will be part of future plans.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for his answer so far. In saying that he will make his decisions purely on educational standards, does he not agree that the rural community may sometimes get to a point where that is the weight you need to take into account in making the decision? So will the Minister follow the Scottish system or look at the presumption against closure before he makes decisions?

Mr O'Dowd: I do not make any presumption when I come to a development proposal: I am open-minded in regard to all these matters. However, it is unfair to turn round to a rural community and say, "Well, you are small and isolated; I will give you a second-rate school. We will forget about

you". If you want to decimate rural communities, give them poor education; give them substandard education; do not give them the same education as urban communities are used to.

My colleague, the Chair of the Education Committee, referred to the small schools policy. The small schools policy will be most tested on this area of how we deal with sustaining a school in an area where there is such a small community, perhaps within a broader one. I am keen to look at that area, and I think that there is a sound argument there, but we have to put the resources into that area to ensure that there is good education in it. We have to back it up. We have to back up our statement with resources for the school and not simply say, "Well, that's a small school; we will leave that there". So, let us back it up with resources and a policy that identifies the needs in those circumstances. The sustainable schools policy allows us to do that. Indeed, that is how I will look at it as I interpret it and make decisions around the sustainable schools policy.

Miss M McIlveen: Further to my comments yesterday in the debate on integrated education, particularly in relation to the role of the controlled sector support working group, will the Minister give serious consideration to that group being able to attend the area planning steering group? Can he confirm that representatives of CCMS and the new sectoral body for Catholic education attended the first meeting of that group?

Mr O'Dowd: Representatives of CCMS were there. An individual who is going onto the new sectoral body was also at the meeting, but he was there in his CCMS role.

I will give this serious consideration. I noted your comment yesterday on the working group and its role and functions in area planning and meant to respond to it in my speech. I will seriously consider whether we can facilitate them on the area planning working body, which may well be a good introduction for them into that field of work. I will take it into careful consideration and come back to the Member.

Primary Schools: Intake

9. Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Education, given the recent publication of the draft area plan for primary provision, what consideration is being given to the potential intake in primary schools over the coming years and the birth rate of specific areas, rather than just current roll numbers. (AQO 3797/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Education and library boards are the statutory planning authorities in their areas. They have adopted a needs model as the means of assessing the need for places. The model projects the need for places over a 15-year planning horizon at board and district council level up to 2025. It uses the most up-to-date, complete and reliable data available at any point in time. The boards' draft area plans use the projections from the model, as well as the current enrolments at existing schools.

The needs model provides information on the overall number of places likely to be needed at district council level. It is not designed to be used as the basis for making decisions about the siting, opening or closing of individual schools. Such decisions must take account of the local context, the individual circumstances of a school and the overall number of pupils to be catered for.

2.30 pm

Employment and Learning

Mr Deputy Speaker: Questions 2 and 12 have been withdrawn and require written answers.

Further Education: Visually Impaired People

1. Mr Wells asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what steps his Department is taking to make further education more accessible to visually impaired people. (AQO 3804/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): Through the additional support fund, my Department provides £3.5 million each year to further education colleges for support and assistance to students with learning difficulties or disabilities. Students with a learning difficulty or disability are assessed to determine the level of support they require. For visually impaired students, adjustments may include technical aids, specialist software, learning material in alternative formats and personal support.

My Department provided funding for an information resource hub to signpost services for both existing and potential learners in order to improve access to information about college provision, services and the support available. The Department also provided funding for the development of online guides for disabled students. Those guides were developed by Disabled Go, the UK's leading provider of disabled access information. The guides provide information on campus layout and on hearing systems, lighting levels and signage. They help disabled learners, visitors and staff to access college premises and to make the best use of facilities.

Newly enrolled visually impaired students are offered orientation visits to allow them to become familiar with the layout of college buildings. Personal assistance is available to ensure their safety while transferring between classes. Students with a visual impairment are encouraged to make use of a buddy arrangement for campus navigation, especially in the event of an emergency. Other support includes the adaption of performance assessments to formats tailored to suit students' individual needs.

Further education colleges continue to liaise with the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) to determine how best to encourage and support enrolments from blind and visually impaired students. For example, the South Eastern Regional College is working on a project with the RNIB in the Lisburn area. Under that project, the institute identifies prospective students and trains them in the use of specialist software before they embark on their further education studies.

Mr Wells: I thank the Member for his answer, but does he accept that, for those who pass through further education in Northern Ireland who are visually impaired, the employment outcomes are extremely bleak? Indeed, in a recent survey, the RNIB has shown that only 25% of blind and visually impaired adults in Northern Ireland are in full-time paid employment. That is a dreadful indictment of the system that —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Can we have a question, Mr Wells?

Mr Wells: Is it not a dreadful indictment of the system that it allows so many capable people to end up with no form of paid employment?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Wells for his question and for highlighting that issue. The first thing to do is to stress that anyone who comes through either the further education system or the higher education system with a qualification is a peer and is of equal standing to anyone else with the same level of attainment, and should be viewed as just as employable. Obviously, we still have issues and barriers within the wider employer network in that regard, but I believe that many employers now recognise that blind or visually impaired people have a lot to offer to their workforce. My Department has a disability employment service, which has a number of programmes to assist people with a range of disabilities in the workplace. It is important that we continue to highlight that those are available, and if there are issues that we need to address around individual needs that have not been met, I am more than happy to do so for any person so affected.

Mr Swann: I am sure that the Minister is aware that there is a large decrease in the number of students with a hearing impairment now accessing further education. Will the Minister indicate what he is doing to address that situation?

Dr Farry: I thank the Chair of the Committee for highlighting the issue of hearing impairment. It is something that we are conscious of, and I know that there was some concern expressed about the drop in the number of enrolments in the higher education sector in particular, although I imagine that that concern also extends to the further education sector. Our provision is open to everyone, irrespective of the circumstances that they are coming from. We provide funding to the further education sector and the higher education sector to ensure that they can make the adaptations to facilitate the particular needs of individual students. In particular, we have managed to double the provision of training for sign language interpreters for deaf people in Northern Ireland over the past couple of years. That is a particular investment in ensuring that we have a strong cohort of trained professionals who are able to assist not just in the education sphere but in other aspects of life in Northern Ireland.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answers. What discussions or engagements has he had with voluntary organisations that campaign on behalf of visually impaired people?

Dr Farry: The Department has had a number of discussions with a range of organisations that represent disabled people. There are two aspects of the Department's work that are of most relevance, the first of which is that it directly funds the further and higher education sectors. Again, I stress that we provide significant funding to the colleges and universities, and that funding is available for them to deploy to support people.

The second aspect is the disability employment service, which is part of the wider employment service. Again, we have a number of programmes in that. We are constantly seeking to review what we offer, based on the advice that comes back from the community and voluntary sectors. I very much value their opinions and the front line

experience that they can relate of the people whom they come across.

Mr P Ramsey: Following on from the question from the Member who is also the chair of the all-party group on visual impairment, will the Minister commit to meeting RNIB to look at more creative and unique ways of ensuring that visually impaired people are not further marginalised and isolated from employment opportunities? That subject is always on that all-party group's agenda.

Dr Farry: I assure the Member that I am more than happy to arrange a direct meeting with RNIB to discuss any particular issues that it wants to raise with me. That offers stands to any other bodies, and a number of them have had discussions with me over the past two years.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 2 has been withdrawn. I understand that questions 3 and 7 have been linked. Caitríona Ruane is not in her place. I call Fra McCann.

Youth Unemployment

3. **Mr F McCann** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the success of schemes to tackle youth unemployment. (AQO 3806/11-15)

7. **Ms Ruane** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many people have taken part in the youth employment scheme in South Down to date. (AQO 3810/11-15)

Dr Farry: With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I was going to group questions 2, 3 and 7 together, and I will continue to do so, but I will focus on Mr McCann's supplementary question. I request an additional minute for my answer.

Since the launch of the youth employment scheme in September 2012, over 900 employers have signed agreements to participate in it. As of the end of March 2013, those employers had offered a total of 1,685 opportunities, to which 3,626 young people had been submitted. To date, 517 young people have taken part in the scheme, and, of those, over 200 have secured full-time permanent jobs. In addition, 354 young people have started temporary jobs under the First Start initiative.

Members asked questions about South Belfast and South Down. In South Belfast, 74 employer agreements have been signed and 119 opportunities have been made available to young people. In South Down, 174 employer agreements have been signed and 265 opportunities have been made available to young people.

In addition to the youth employment scheme, my Department is funding a number of new initiatives under the Executive's Pathways to Success strategy to increase the opportunities that are available to unemployed young people in South Belfast, West Belfast, South Down and elsewhere across Northern Ireland. Those initiatives include a collaboration and innovation fund that will fund activity to help 2,800 disadvantaged 16- to 24-year-olds from Belfast to improve their employability by gaining work-related skills. Similar activity will take place in South Down to help over 1,100 young people.

We also have the local employment intermediary service, more commonly known as LEMIS, which provides personalised assistance to help unemployed young people who live in West Belfast, South Belfast and other areas

to overcome their barriers to work. The service is also available on an outreach basis in South Down

My assessment is that we have the right measures in place. Forty per cent of participants on the youth employment scheme have found full-time, permanent employment. However, we must do more to encourage young people to participate. So far, young people have taken up only 30% of the opportunities that are available. I am actively considering how we might improve uptake going forward. I ask Members to continue to promote the youth employment scheme to businesses in their areas and to encourage their young unemployed constituents to avail themselves of the opportunities that are on offer.

Mr F McCann: I thank the Minister for his response. If the rate is 40%, that means that 60% do not go any further. There is a belief out there that, to date, the schemes have not provided the type of training required to bring people, especially young people, into employment. Does he not believe that, at this time, we need one effective scheme that deals with all young people and provides effective training that, at the end, allows them to go into the types of jobs that may be available?

Dr Farry: I want to say a number of things in response. First, a 40% rate of placement into employment is good compared with other schemes that we have. For example, the rate for the mainstream Steps to Work scheme for the general unemployed population is below 30%. You can see that there is a very significant uplift in performance in that regard. In an ideal world, we want to have all our unemployed young people in jobs as quickly as we possibly can.

I would not say that we need just a single scheme. We have to acknowledge that people are coming forward with a whole range of issues that need to be addressed. The various projects under the NEETs strategy are the most appropriate for people with particular barriers to engagement with the labour market. The youth employment scheme is there primarily to address those young people who, if it were not for the current economic situation and the recession, would expect to be in employment today. They have gone through a degree of skills and training but often just lack the employability skills to compete with older, more experienced workers for scarce jobs. That is why work experience placements are so important in trying to address the vicious circle that many young people find themselves in today.

Mr Durkan: Is the Minister satisfied that his Executive colleagues are doing all that they can to help to support the scheme?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question. As Minister, I have written to all my Executive colleagues and the mayors or chairs of the councils across Northern Ireland about the youth employment scheme and taking placements under Steps to Work. I am pleased to say that a number of Executive colleagues and a number of councils across Northern Ireland have very much risen to the challenge and are engaging with those schemes. I am happy to provide the Member with more detailed figures on the level of engagement. There are a number of very good examples of Departments taking this forward. It is also important to stress that, given the profile of the labour market and economy in Northern Ireland, the private sector is not yet big enough to sustain this by itself

and offer all the required work experience opportunities. Therefore, we need buy-in from the public sector and the community and voluntary sector.

Mr Lyttle: How does the scale of investment in the youth employment scheme in Northern Ireland compare with the rest of the UK and Ireland? How do young people gain information on the scheme online?

Dr Farry: Investment per capita in the youth employment scheme and NEETs collectively is bigger here than in any other region of the UK. That is a reflection of the Executive's commitment to investing in the future of the young people of Northern Ireland. There is an appreciation in the Executive and the wider business community in Northern Ireland that we have to invest in young people. We cannot afford to have a lost generation. That term is often overly dramatised, but, at the heart of this, we are talking about having invested in people's skills and training through colleges and universities or on-the-job training. If those skills are not applied within a reasonable period — say, 18 months — there is a real danger that those skills will be lost. That is of consequence to us as a result of the public expenditure that we have issued to date. There is also a wider issue for the young people themselves. If they feel demotivated from lack of opportunity, they will slip through the net. Indeed, some of them may choose to emigrate and leave these shores, and we do not want to see that happening.

2.45 pm

South West College: Additional Students

4. **Mr McAleer** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether he plans to allocate additional student places to the South West College. (AQO 3807/11-15)

Dr Farry: Every year, my Department manages the college development planning process through which the recent performances of individual colleges are reviewed and their targets and budgets for the coming year are agreed. Over the past five years, South West College's overall budget allocation, which includes further education provision up to level 3, essential skills and higher education provision, has increased from £15.5 million to £16.2 million.

South West College delivers higher education provision for 434 full-time and 987 part-time students. Those figures have increased every year for the past five years, from a base of 230 full-time and 825 part-time places in 2008-09. I previously announced that the MaSN — maximum student number — allocation for full-time higher education across further education regional colleges will increase by a total of 140 additional places by 2015.

My Department is also conducting a review of existing demand for higher education opportunities in further education colleges to determine this year's allocation of the new places. I am committed to making higher education more accessible to those in rural areas who wish to avail themselves of it, and the further education colleges are ideally located to serve higher education students throughout Northern Ireland.

The Department is working with the higher and further education sectors to develop pilot schemes for the creation of university bases in further education colleges. South West College has expressed an interest in being involved

in that innovative project, and I look forward to considering proposals that the college is developing.

In November 2012, I launched a pilot higher level apprenticeship programme at the South West College. That two-year programme provides the opportunity for people who are already in work to gain new qualifications by undertaking knowledge-based modules alongside practical elements, leading to a foundation degree in computing.

Mr McAleer: I thank the Minister for his answer. He previously referred to a rural university presence in the context of his higher education strategy. Will he expand on the likelihood of the South West College being part of that? What impact might that have on the number of third-level places available?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question. First of all, the rural bases are one of the key projects in the Department's higher education strategy, Graduating to Success. Two colleges have expressed interest in hosting those pilots: South West College and Southern Regional College. We may go for two pilots, depending on the way we look at it. Both of the colleges are working on proposals in that regard. I expect to receive them next month and hope to make a decision quite soon after. Of course, we will have to give proper scrutiny to what we have received.

The wider issue of the availability of university places will not itself impact on the number of places, because we will still have the two universities with their places across Northern Ireland, and they will have students coming from a range of different backgrounds and locations in Northern Ireland. Also, higher education is a presence in each of the further education colleges. So, HE in FE is something that we are very keen to expand. The Member will be aware that there was a major advertising campaign around uptake of foundation degrees. So, we are very keen to develop higher education across all six of the FE colleges across Northern Ireland.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for his answers. Does he accept that increasing the number of higher education places in the regional colleges provides value for money? Does he further accept that many students, beyond their education maintenance allowance, then have a greater opportunity to avail themselves of college courses at an affordable price for their families?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Byrne for his comments. Further to the case that he has made, I stress that, often, the foundation degrees that are taught in the FE sector are more practical and more related directly to the needs of employers. So, there is a greater chance that employers will find students who have the right skills to take part in their workforce. Also, the students themselves will have the skills that will lead to them having better prospects of sustainable employment.

It is also worth making reference to the fact that we are working on a review of apprenticeships in Northern Ireland. I expect one of the outworkings of that to be a much greater uptake and offering when it comes to higher level apprenticeships. There will be a very clear linkage between those and further progression into foundation degrees.

Higher Education: Online Degrees

5. **Mr Gardiner** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the likely impact on local universities and higher education institutions of the increase in the number of degrees which can be studied online. (AQO 3808/11-15)

Dr Farry: That leads on nicely from the previous question in some respects. The need for a more flexible learning environment is a key theme of the higher education strategy, Graduating to Success, and the use of online learning is expanding in traditional campus-based and distance-learning settings. A number of factors are driving change in the delivery of higher education, including projected decreases in the traditional learner population of 18- to 21-year-olds and increasing demands for flexibility from those who wish to upskill and reskill while in the workplace. I welcome any innovation that provides increased student choice and allows students access to higher education that meets their individual learning needs.

One of the projects in the higher education strategy aims to pilot the establishment of university bases at FE colleges, including providing the opportunity for students to undertake distance learning with access to university resources. Northern Ireland's local institutions recognise the opportunities provided by online learning and are responding accordingly. In 2001, the University of Ulster established Campus One, which has some 1,100 students registered on fully online courses. The Open University has been a world-leading provider of distance learning since 1969 and is very active in Northern Ireland, offering a blended learning environment that utilises online components. Queen's University is one of 17 UK higher education institutions involved in the Open University's Futurelearn initiative. Futurelearn will bring together a range of free, open and online courses from leading UK universities, drawing upon the Open University's expertise in delivering distance learning and pioneering open education resources. The Futurelearn initiative does not lead to formal qualifications but is an innovative supplement to existing traditional higher education provision. Technology is changing the traditional campus-based provision, and I am encouraged by developments in online learning, which are enabling our higher education institutions to collaborate, compete internationally and offer students flexibility and choice.

Mr Gardiner: I thank the Minister for his response. Will departmental action promised by 2018 not be a case of shutting the stable door after the horse has bolted because so many universities already offer online degrees?

Dr Farry: The very specific target that the Member is referring to in the higher education strategy is one whereby, by 2018, modular learning will be expanded to all students in higher education. That is, essentially, the backstop by which we expect that every student in higher education in Northern Ireland will have access to online learning opportunities. However, as we move towards 2018, I expect the universities to move rapidly in that direction, and we are more than happy to work with them in that regard. As I have outlined, we have made significant progress. That works for the universities and for students, and my officials are pressing ahead with that project under the strategy.

Mrs D Kelly: Will the Minister outline the financial support that is available to students who undertake online degree courses?

Dr Farry: As I said in answer to the main question, it is important to recognise at this stage that online learning is a supplement to the existing offering, and students are still traditionally enrolled in either the higher education or further education sector. The same basic funding regime is there to support those students as it is for other students across Northern Ireland. It is important that we roll out the flexible learning that is offered through online media because it provides greater flexibility to students. I have no doubt that, for students who are facing difficulties, notwithstanding the support that we offer in Northern Ireland, that flexibility will enable them to engage in their learning in a more efficient and flexible manner. In particular, it may enable those who have caring responsibilities to participate even more fully in either higher education or further education.

Ms Lo: Will the number of students enrolled under this project in online studies be included in the overall cap of student numbers?

Dr Farry: As I said in answer to Mrs Kelly, online learning is a supplement to the traditional forms of learning, so this will be a subsection of the existing enrolments in the higher education and further education sectors. Where MaSN applies, it remains. It is important to stress that a review of MaSN is one of the other key projects under the higher education strategy, and that is scheduled to be completed in 2014. I look forward to engaging with that and reporting that back to the House. We want to review MaSN because, as we move to having people from a range of backgrounds and age groups participating and to having much more part-time and flexible learning, the traditional approach to MaSN, which is no more than simply a means of controlling costs in the sector, needs to be reviewed in light of the shifting patterns of engagement.

Youth Unemployment

6. **Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the most recent youth unemployment figures. (AQO 3809/11-15)

Dr Farry: Latest estimates show that approximately 24,000 young people are unemployed. This equates to around 24% of the economically active population aged between 18 and 24. This does not mean that about one in four of our young people are unemployed. Rather, it means that almost one in four of young people who are actually looking for work are unemployed. It is important to emphasise that another section of our young people are technically in the "economic inactivity" category, but for more benign reasons, as they are in full-time education. The skills that they pick up will be personally beneficial to their future employment prospects and will be good for the economy overall. Therefore, overall, one in seven of the total population aged between 18 and 24 is unemployed.

It is also important to emphasise that although our current youth unemployment rate is higher than other UK regions, it is lower than that of the Republic of Ireland, at 30%, and is around the same level as the EU average, at 23%. Of course, in certain EU countries such as Greece and Spain, the rate is over 50%. I set out these figures not to excuse our current challenge but rather to present it in

its fullest context. I take little comfort from that, however. The numbers have doubled since 2008, and too many young lives are blighted by unemployment. That is why we are taking decisive action to help young people. The Department's Training for Success programme helps to maximise their chances of getting a job by guaranteeing a training place to every 16- and 17-year-old who is not at school, in training or in employment. Already during Question Time, we have discussed the youth employment scheme and the NEET strategy, and these initiatives, among others, demonstrate a very significant commitment on the part of the Executive to improving the life chances of young people who are not in work.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for his answer. Given that these figures are absolutely appalling, even if they are not as bad as in Ireland, has the Minister worked with other Departments and even considered such things as enterprise loans or forms of funding that would help young school leavers to start up their own businesses?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Kinahan for his question. We are not running away from these figures, and I assure people that we are being transparent with them and are setting out the scale of the challenge that faces us in Northern Ireland. It is important that we recognise, however, that we are part of a much wider context where there are difficulties in the UK, on the island of Ireland and across the wider euro zone.

We can make a range of different interventions to assist young people, and, indeed, enterprise loans are one such initiative. That was a particular aspect of the jobs and economy initiative last autumn, and support is also available from Invest Northern Ireland for people who want to set up a business. So, yes, there is support for the particular strand of people who want to start their own business, but, of course, we have to maintain the other programmes that we have in place and consciously review those and ensure that they are acting as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. Given that one third of those who are economically inactive have no qualifications, how does the Minister propose to close the skills gap and ensure that people who are on registered courses have access to employment?

Dr Farry: The Member is right to draw a correlation between economic inactivity and skills deficits. If you recall, we had a statement last week setting out the baseline study that is informing the drafting of an economic inactivity strategy for Northern Ireland. That sets out in very stark terms some of those conclusions. That strategy will be a very central document for the Executive, and it is a priority not only for me but for other Ministers.

3.00 pm

We will be looking to refresh, within that, the various policies and programmes that are available to address economic inactivity. However, the central message is that we have to invest in skills for people across a very broad front. In doing so, we must give the message that there is no right or wrong answer for young people; it is not about saying that everyone has to go into higher or further education. There are other types of training, most notably apprenticeships, available for people, and it is important that we try to point them in the right direction. That is why

individual mentoring is a key element in the NEET strategy. We have to sit down, talk to people, find out their individual needs and then signpost them to the most appropriate support.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Time is up. That is the end of questions to the Minister. I ask Members to take their ease for a few moments.

Ms Ruane: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. First of all, tá brón orm. I am very sorry; I was not aware that my question 7 had been grouped with question 3. I meant no disrespect to the House or to the Minister. Mar sin, tá brón orm.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I appreciate the Member's comments. Members may take their ease for a few moments while we change the Table.

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

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. —
[Mr Deputy Speaker.]

Adjournment

G8 Summit: Security

Mr Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the Adjournment topic will have 15 minutes. The Minister will have 10 minutes to respond, and all other Members who wish to speak will have approximately five minutes.

Mr Elliott: Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker, for allowing this Adjournment debate to be taken. The coming of the G8 summit to Northern Ireland, and to County Fermanagh in particular, is a huge opportunity for us to sell Northern Ireland and County Fermanagh in a very positive light to show the world that we are in the business of putting on the types of exhibitions and events that it will bring with it, and, indeed, of hosting world leaders. We are extremely supportive and thankful that it is coming to Northern Ireland and County Fermanagh.

I understand that this is the 39th annual G8 summit. The decision to hold it at the Lough Erne golf resort — I assume that it was probably the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom who took it — is an excellent one that will be borne out as time goes on.

There will be a huge focus on the local community and on local security. By and large, local people are very content with it taking place. However, some concerns and queries are raised on a daily basis as to how businesses will continue to operate during that time and in the time immediately prior to it. Local people are concerned that it may have a significant impact on the running of their businesses. I am keen to hear from the Minister about the security aspect.

I should put on record that I am grateful to those who are helping with the organisation of the summit and, in particular, officials from Whitehall, the Northern Ireland Office and indeed local police officers, who have been helpful in telling us, as far as possible, some of the aspects that may affect the local community.

I have heard on a number of occasions that the summit may require the input of 3,500 police officers. I assume that they will not all come from the PSNI. Recently, I read in a leaflet from the police that the PSNI will have what they call "mutual aid". That is quite an unusual term. Apparently "mutual aid" means that the PSNI will be getting policing support from England, Scotland and Wales. It will be interesting to hear from the Justice Minister exactly how that will work. Will those officers be here for a time prior to the summit to be trained in specific areas or aspects of their potential work? Obviously, there will be a cross-border element, because a number of the delegations will be staying in the Republic of Ireland. The gardaí will need to co-operate with the Police Service of Northern Ireland, and I am sure that that will happen without too many questions.

Another aspect is the budget for the entire security situation. Who will meet that budget? Will it be met by the

United Kingdom Government? How much of it will come from the Northern Ireland Executive and how much of it will come from the other nations that will be involved in the G8 summit? It is important to get some perspective on it and know how much will be required, particularly from our local Executive.

I am also led to believe that a significant fence will be going up around the resort. There are all sorts of rumours in County Fermanagh, as I am sure that you, Deputy Speaker, and others will appreciate. Some of those rumours suggest that the fence will be so high that they may have to put out warnings because it may affect flights going over it. *[Laughter.]* It will be interesting to hear from the Minister about some of those aspects.

There are obviously concerns about protests as G8 summits bring protesters. What level of protests do the security services believe will happen in County Fermanagh, or how much of the protests will be focused in Belfast or other areas of the Province? Maybe the Minister can enlighten us on that.

With regard to public order offences, I know that when legislation went through the Assembly recently in the form of the Criminal Justice Bill, I pointed out some reservations about having the courts open on a Sunday. Although I am not opposed to that in principle, I have some concerns in that the courts can already open on a Sunday to deal with indictable offences, and those offences may be more serious than those that are in the legislation that went through recently. I hope that the security services here are not planning to charge people over the period of the G8 summit with less serious offences than they could charge them with. Spending an extra night in custody, as opposed to getting bail on a Sunday, may not do them too much harm. It would allow them time to cool off.

We must also look at the convoluted mechanism to trigger that Sunday court opening. The Justice Minister has to seek the agreement of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister, and there might be a question as to whether those two actually trust each other at the moment. Clearly, they do not trust the Justice Minister to take that decision. Not only does the Justice Minister have to consult the First Minister and deputy First Minister, but he has to consult the Lord Chief Justice and the Chief Constable. God help us if any of those people have to take a break on a weekend when they are required to sign any of those documents. We may not see the courts opening at all at the weekend if that is the case. However, those are some of my concerns around the public order aspects.

We have quite a number of questions, and the most immediate one is the impact that the G8 summit will have on the local community. I have no difficulty with heightened or increased security to make sure that the local citizens and those coming to visit are protected. We want to see an acceptance from the community that there will be some disruption. However, we also want to ensure that all those taking part and all those in the area at the time are given the utmost protection.

Lord Morrow: I, too, welcome this debate, and I welcome the fact that the G8 summit is not only coming to Northern Ireland but to no better place than County Fermanagh. I feel that it is no mean achievement for Northern Ireland and, in particular, County Fermanagh to be hosting this world event. Once again, it demonstrates how Northern

Ireland is moving forward, and I strongly feel that the whole of society will welcome this important event coming here to Northern Ireland.

Regrettably, events such as the G8 summit also attract all the malcontents and anarchists not only from our own society but from right across the world, and I suspect that this will be no different when it arrives here in the very near future. They see it as a window of opportunity to express their worst excesses. We just have to look at the despicable behaviour of a loud minority who have raised their heads since the death of the former Prime Minister Baroness Thatcher. I would just like to take this opportunity to denounce unreservedly those who engage in such low-life activity.

It behoves all of us to show our support for the police and the security services on an occasion such as this. There is a challenge here for everyone who holds public office in Northern Ireland, at whatever level, to show in clear and unequivocal terms that they are on the side of the security forces and the police in their endeavours to maintain law and order when the G8 summit comes.

Undoubtedly, many of us will be inconvenienced as a result of this world event coming to Northern Ireland, but I suspect that the inconvenience will not be on the same scale as we have been inconvenienced over the past 35 years when there was a war of genocide and terror being waged here in Northern Ireland, not least in border counties such as County Fermanagh. It will be an opportunity for those who stood on the side of the terrorists on those occasions to stand up now for law and order and declare their position. We will look to them, and we will listen very carefully to what they have to say, not only today but in the weeks and months that lie ahead.

Mr Flanagan: I thank the Member for giving way. Perhaps the Member will want to make sure that there are no parades taking place during the G8 summit so that he may not have to question his own stance on the rule of law during that time.

Lord Morrow: If I had known that he was going to be so frivolous, I would not have given way to him. Let me say — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Remarks must be made through the Chair. This is an important issue, and I strongly recommend that we return to it.

Lord Morrow: We will endeavour to comply as we always do.

As I said earlier, it is good to see this good news world event coming to our shores, and I trust that this House in its totality will throw its weight and support behind our security forces in taking whatever action they deem necessary to maintain law and order. That is a big ask sometimes, but I believe that it is not too big an ask. It is the least that the police and our security forces can expect from us.

Sinn Féin will be challenged on this, as it is when it comes to law and order issues, and I make no apology for challenging the party here today, particularly in light of its weekend events and some of the things that its members said. A sizeable section in the party now say that, to all intents and purposes, they support the dissidents in what they are doing — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I will not allow Members to shout across the Floor, and I repeat my earlier advice, which is to confine the debate to the Adjournment topic.

Lord Morrow: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I have listened intently to what you have been saying, and I am trying to do that because I believe that these things are very relevant to the G8 summit. This House should be put on alert, and its Members, representing the various strands of political opinion here in Northern Ireland, should be ready to declare unequivocally where we stand on law and order issues. Unfortunately, and sadly, there is always a lot of ambiguity when it comes to declaring that.

3.15 pm

The G8 summit will bring many benefits to Northern Ireland. I believe that it will bring much benefit to County Fermanagh in particular. I understand, for instance, that on both sides of the border, you can hardly get accommodation now because it is all booked up in preparation for the G8 summit. I welcome that, and that must be a positive spin-off for Northern Ireland.

I hope that all parties and representatives will see to it that they will not be saying or doing anything that will make the job of the security forces much more difficult. We had an opportunity for this House to support the creation of the National Crime Agency but, sadly, it turned it down. The National Crime Agency would have been a great asset had it been established in time for this summit. However, this House decided that that was something that it could not live with —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is almost up.

Lord Morrow: — and those who made that decision should be ashamed of themselves. Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. My time is up.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. As somebody from Fermanagh, I say that it is hard not to notice already, with increased security and police patrols, that the G8 summit is coming to the county. We also have a bit of a better surface on the A4 — or on most of it — on the way to Belfast, and some buildings have been painted that had not seen paint for many years.

There is increased security, as we know and understand. The security and safety of those taking part in the summit is paramount. Who will be paying for that? I think that Mr Elliott also asked that question. Will that cost, in part or total, come out of the policing budget? A multiplicity of services will be involved because we have some of the biggest states in the world and their security services taking part, so are there clear lines of accountability?

Lord Morrow: I thank the Member for giving way. I would like the Member to tell us whether he welcomes the G8 summit coming to Northern Ireland and is he in full support of whatever initiatives the security forces deem necessary to maintain peace and law and order?

Mr Lynch: Yes, I welcome it; the G8 is coming to the most beautiful county in Ireland. I said that the security and safety of all those taking part was paramount, including those who may want to come on genuine protest. In that sense, I agree with the Member.

Going back to the issue of accountability, have clear lines of accountability been established between the different services that will be taking part in the G8? Will every police officer on the ground be accountable to the Police Ombudsman? In conjunction with what Mr Elliott said, because Fermanagh is geographically sited beside Leitrim, Cavan and Donegal, and we now learn that many of those participating in the G8 are staying in those counties, some as far down as Sligo, has contact and co-operation been established with an Garda Síochána? Has the PSNI been established as the sole liaison between itself, an Garda and all those who will be participating?

There will be disruption to the local population. We think that that should be lessened by local police commanders being in contact with political and community representatives in the area. It is also important that the PSNI gives out as much information as possible about road closures, etc, as well as creating awareness about which roads will be closed. That will also go as far away as the international airport, which is in the constituency of the Member on the opposite Benches. It is not just about Fermanagh.

Finally, all I will say is that I hope that it goes well.

Mr McDevitt: I appreciate the opportunity to participate in the Adjournment debate. I declare an interest as a member of the Policing Board. As a member of the Policing Board, I think that it is very helpful to hear the concerns that colleagues may have about a lot of the operational issues. I think that the House should know that the Policing Board has been receiving briefings and discussing the operational implications of the G8 summit for about six months now.

Many of the issues that have been raised here — I am sure that the Minister will want to address those in his response — are matters that the Policing Board has considered and that have been raised in and discussed by the board. I say that as much by way of assurance to colleagues that we are attentive to a lot of the practical outworkings of this, not least who is going to pick up the bill.

I trust that the Minister will have a similar understanding of this, but, on that point and as stated on three occasions to the Policing Board, it is the Chief Constable's view that the British Government are going to pick up the bill because it is their gig. That is basically that. The great privilege of being able to welcome the leaders of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, the United States, Russia and Japan here to this island, along with, of course, the Prime Minister, as well as the Taoiseach, who will participate in the G8 summit because Ireland holds the presidency of the European Union, is not one that I think anyone in this House would want to turn down. When you look at those countries, you will see that it is interesting to note that many of them have significant opportunities for foreign direct investment in our region. Very many of them are also priority markets for Tourism Ireland. I trust that, and from what I hear, the Executive are well advanced in their planning to ensure that the few days that the leaders of those significant economies spend with us are maximised to market and raise awareness of our region and its potential as an inward investment and tourism destination.

I found some of Mr Elliott's observations about the fence a bit curious. Mr Hussey, who sits on the Policing Board, has been very quiet about the fence. Maybe you will encourage

him to talk about the fence more when he is at the Policing Board so that we can get to the bottom of the matter. I have to confess that that is a new one on me; I have not heard anyone yet complain about the fence or its height.

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for giving way. He will be aware that the Policing Board recently agreed to purchase drones for use at the G8. Is it his view that those drones will be important not only for the security of the G8 but, beyond that, for the security of the citizens of Northern Ireland? Can that security dividend as a result of the purchase be assured?

Mr McDevitt: A decision was made to support the purchase of, I think, nine unmanned aerial vehicles, which are quite small things that can be operated only in the line of sight. That decision was made with the strong caveat that it be fully reviewed after one year. There are three issues that we need to think about in that regard. One is a technical issue. If you go on the internet, you will see that the jury seems to be out on whether these things fly when they are meant to fly or, like the best kit that we all played with when we were kids, where they are meant to fly.

The second issue is the equally important and probably more serious matter of the legislation under which they will operate. That legislation is likely to require the Office of Surveillance Commissioners to report on the use of drones every time that they are used.

The third issue is value for money. If we make this investment and get use out of the drones, and if they assist in the detection of crime or in the management of large public events, that is great. However, if, as it happens, they do not really work out, I think that we would all need to be big enough and grown up enough to say that we should not commit further expenditure to them.

I will make two further points on the G8, which I think are important to make. The Policing Board has paid a lot of attention to the question of mutual aid and police officers from Great Britain spending time here. They will not be here for a huge amount of time. Most of the training has been done in GB, for obvious cost reasons, and they will come here to spend the duration of the summit here, give or take a few days. One of the issues that Mr Lynch rightly raised, and that we have been very concerned about, is the question of accountability. It is clear to the Policing Board that those police officers will be accountable to the Chief Constable when they are on the ground here. It has also been very clearly stated to the Policing Board that none of them will be operating outside of the direction of the PSNI. In fact, all officers from outside our jurisdiction will be led by a PSNI officer on the ground and none will have any command role in the operation. That is important, because we are policing a rural community. It is our own country and our own region, and we want the certainty that it is going to work out well.

Any complaints will go to the Police Ombudsman, who will investigate and produce a report. However, an issue may arise if the ombudsman recommends discipline or further action. That falls to the Chief Constable of wherever an officer comes from. Some 40-odd constabularies in England, Scotland and Wales are volunteering people, so there is a bit of ironing out to be done. Perhaps the Minister can update us on that —

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

Mr McDevitt: — to assure us, and on this point I will conclude, that if someone needed disciplined in England, Scotland or Wales, and let us hope that that does not arise, they of course would be.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I am glad to take part in the debate, and I thank Mr Elliott for securing it. It is very timely, and it is welcome, in that it gives us, as local representatives and those who have an interest in this area, the chance to raise our concerns directly with the Minister and put them on the record. I declare an interest as a citizen of Fermanagh.

Our position on the G8 has been fairly clear since the start. The most important aspect of the G8 summit is not its location. Although that is important to us, as citizens of Fermanagh and as people who live in the area, the location is not the big, important part of it. The most important aspect of the G8 summit is what it actually delivers for people around the world and how its main players and those involved deliver on eradicating poverty, creating sustainable growth and jobs around the world and enhancing the rights of citizens. That is what the important part of the G8 summit needs to be.

However, there is a very important aspect outside the G8 for those who have a message that they want to send to the leaders. It is important that they be given the opportunity to engage in sensible, peaceful and lawful campaigns from which they can send a clear message to the world media and the G8 leaders and that they can be facilitated in doing so. I think that many people's big concern about the G8 is that the legacy and the message that goes around the world will be based on how the genuine campaigners who come to Fermanagh, or who may stay in Belfast, are treated. Not everybody who is coming to campaign or protest at the G8 wants to engage in violence. The vast majority of people who are coming to send a clear message want to send that message using peaceful and lawful means. They have to be facilitated. I would like to hear from the Minister what efforts are being made to ensure that that is the case, because we still have not received any information about where demonstrators, campaigners, protesters — whatever word you want to apply to them — will be based or facilitated, nor do we know what types of activities will be organised to try to make their stay in Fermanagh or Belfast as productive and peaceful as ever.

That having been said, the G8 is coming to Fermanagh. We need to live with that reality and try to militate against any potential disruption for local people and those involved in business in the county as far as possible. A considerable amount of work has been done behind the scenes, involving a wide range of statutory agencies, since the date on which the summit was announced, and probably from before it was announced. It is important that that work continue, but it is also important that those in the local community be clearly informed about what is happening with the G8 and with such minor issues as what roads are being closed and how people are going to be facilitated to move around the county. That is the big fear for people at the minute, and those concerns need to be addressed.

3.30 pm

I have had some engagement with local police. They have made considerable efforts to reassure me and others that

they are in control of the situation and that it will be local police who are to the fore in the policing operation at the G8. They are involved in all the discussions about that, so it was good to get that reassurance from them. However, how they plan to police potential protesters, demonstrators or campaigners has not been clearly outlined. That is one of the main areas of contention that still needs to be clarified.

One of the other big concerns is that the week of the G8 is in the middle of exams for GCSE and A-level students. There is a very tight time frame for people to get to exams. If people arrive at a school and go into the examination centre more than half an hour after the exam has started, they will not be able to do the exam that day. They could be faced with repeating a year because of that. I know that considerable work is going on involving library boards to provide transport to a range of schools in Fermanagh, particularly for those from the west of the county, from where a substantial number are transported into Enniskillen. It is important that action is taken to resolve that matter, so that buses and people can travel around freely during that week, when people are doing exams at a very important time in their life.

Mr Givan: Will the Member give way?

Mr Flanagan: I will, surely.

Mr Givan: I am waiting for the Member to follow the lead of his constituency colleague, who has welcomed the event. Does Mr Flanagan welcome it? Does he think that it should be embraced as an opportunity for the constituency that he represents, rather than majoring on what he views as a lot of negatives around it?

Mr Flanagan: I thank the Member for intervening, because he said that he was waiting. My five minutes have just run out, so I am glad for the extra minute to actually get to that point in my remarks. I am grateful to the Member for that. I have a number of minor points to make, and then I will get onto the positive aspects.

The accountability mechanisms have been raised. The Minister told me last week that he had no doubt that they would be in place in time for the summit. Perhaps he will give us another update on that. It has been reported in the media that farmers with livestock in the area have engaged with the police. I would like to hear from the Minister how farmers with farm holdings or livestock in the area will be dealt with.

I come back to the Member's point about the positive aspects of the G8. It is a huge opportunity for the people of Fermanagh to send out a very positive message about how our county operates and how great it is. There is also an opportunity to create a lasting legacy from the G8. It is important that that opportunity is taken. None of us wants to see scenes of rioting going round the world and being the lasting legacy of the G8. It is important to major on the positive aspects of all these things coming to Fermanagh. That is what we need to work towards.

Mr Lunn: I also speak as a member of the Policing Board. I do not, in any way, want to overshadow what the Minister might say in response to the many questions that Members have raised, so I will follow Mr McDevitt's lead and try not to do that.

Mr Elliott raised the point about mutual aid. I will just say that it is the same as if the Metropolitan Police needs

reinforcement from Yorkshire. It works across the country. I believe that the figure of 3,500 that was mentioned is, more or less, accurate. That is 3,500 extra policemen coming into Northern Ireland, but they will operate under the operational control of the Chief Constable. We have had that confirmed. The situation about the ombudsman, if he is required, I will leave to the Minister.

The fact that the G8 is coming here really has to be the biggest opportunity for Northern Ireland — Fermanagh, in particular — that I can remember. You could start to compare it with the Titanic year, the World Police and Fire Games, the City of Culture for Derry or the Italian cycle race that Mrs Foster was so pleased to get —

Lord Morrow: Or Her Majesty's visit here.

Mr Lunn: Fair enough. None of them comes even close. In terms of exposure, the world media follow these people around the world. The fact that David Cameron, who, I am sure, made the decision, chose Northern Ireland and went beyond that and chose Fermanagh is a terrific vote of confidence in this country and in the ability of the PSNI, in particular, to deal with all eventualities.

The Chief Constable has assured us that he is confident in the resources that he will have and in the venue. Until today, I had not heard about this fence, which is an intriguing prospect. Is it a fence around the Lough Erne resort or round Fermanagh? I would like to know.

Mr McDevitt raised a point about the drones. What are they called? Unmanned aerial —

Mr McDevitt: Vehicles.

Mr Lunn: Vehicles. To my mind, a vehicle is something that carries somebody. These things are like small model aircraft. The point about them is that they cost only about £150 an hour to run, whereas it costs 20 times that to run a helicopter, which is the alternative. The PSNI has contracted to buy nine of them. They must be flown within the operator's line of sight, and an intriguing question is what happens if they happen to go out of the operator's line of sight. There is some apprehension about what would happen then, because they would be of control and would eventually fall. These are not the type of drones that the Americans can control from Omaha and use to drop nasty things on Afghanistan. They are operated purely by somebody who can see them and are an invaluable tool for observation but nothing else.

The Chief Constable and ACC Finlay have had only seven months from the announcement to prepare for this. The normal run-in time to prepare for a G8 summit is probably two years. However, they are perfectly confident that they can deal with it. This will be an opportunity for people from around the world to observe the PSNI's expertise, which has been widely called on in the past number of years. The PSNI has probably exported that expertise to most of the countries that will be represented and an awful lot more besides.

I am glad that this short debate has been so positive. After being probed a bit on their views, Sinn Féin Members welcomed the fact that the G8 is coming here. I cannot imagine why they, as constituency representatives, would do anything else.

I will leave it at that. I am glad of the opportunity to say a few words about this and to welcome it absolutely. I look

forward to hearing the Minister's answers to some of the questions that have been asked about security.

Mr Givan: My interest in this is more related to my role in the Justice Committee, but, obviously, I am not speaking in that capacity.

This obviously has implications for all of Northern Ireland, beyond County Fermanagh, and I would be interested to hear the Minister's assessment of that. What preparations are being made to ensure that any protests are minimised and our main arterial routes across the Province are not disrupted? It would be helpful if the Minister could outline some of that information for us. Can he also reassure us that the necessary training is taking place and is ongoing? Obviously, Northern Ireland police officers have particular skills and abilities in dealing with rioters, but we need to be assured that those from across the water who are coming here as part of the mutual aid will also have sufficient skills and abilities to deal with the difficulties that all of us hope will not occur. It is prudent that preparations are made for any eventuality.

Also, will the Minister outline whether, in a scenario where there is significant disruption, there is enough capacity in our custody suites and prison establishments to keep individuals where they need to be? Obviously, there are significant pressures on the prison establishment because of capacity issues, so, if significant numbers were required to be kept in our prisons, what would the implications be? What contingency plans are there in the event that pressure is placed on the prison establishment for cells to be used?

Will the Minister also outline what work is taking place to prevent anarchists who are not remotely interested in any form of legitimate protest in respect of some of their beliefs and just want to come here to cause trouble coming to this jurisdiction from within the United Kingdom and to thwart those who want to come into Northern Ireland through the Republic of Ireland? It is one thing to recognise the legitimate right of people to protest; it is another to facilitate those who are well known to the police forces as having the sole intention of causing violence. What efforts are being made to ensure that they are not allowed to enter Northern Ireland and cannot carry out the activity that they would wish to?

I note the comments from Sinn Féin and the SDLP about seeking assurances that police officers will be held accountable for all their actions. Of course, police officers should never be a law unto themselves. However, it is important that we get the balance right. People who join the Police Service of Northern Ireland and police officers from across the United Kingdom do not join the police to break the law; they join because they want to uphold the law. The incessant focus of Sinn Féin and the SDLP on the actions of police officers does not do them much justice in where the focus should be, which is on the perpetrators and those who will cause problems.

Mr McDevitt: Will the Member give way?

Mr Givan: Yes.

Mr McDevitt: The Member clearly has not been listening to the Chief Constable. At the last public meeting of the Policing Board, he stressed the need to ensure that there was a clear and visible accountability mechanism. Having in place a good and robust accountability mechanism for

police officers is about doing what the police want to do, which is to encourage everyone to live within the rules, whether they do so at work — policemen and policewomen have much more power than your average citizen — or in society.

Mr Givan: I agree with the Member: police officers should be held accountable. However, the SDLP and Sinn Féin go on ad nauseam about that issue. In doing so, they imply that they do not trust the police. People on this side of the House have a natural confidence in the police to do their job; the default position of the Members opposite is that they do not trust the police. They need to move beyond that and recognise that the police will do a good job; that is always their starting point. I have confidence in the Chief Constable. Members opposite —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The Member is straying very far from the subject under discussion. Continue.

Mr Givan: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. The police are preparing for the event. I have confidence that the Chief Constable will make the proper preparations to protect the citizens of Northern Ireland. Other Members need to reflect on their position.

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for giving way. One of the preparations for the summit was last week's meeting of the G8 Foreign Ministers. One of the resolutions that they passed was very clear: they stated in absolute terms their condemnation of terrorism. Given that the G8 is coming to County Fermanagh, it is to be welcomed that, before coming, they have made it very clear, particularly in light of yesterday's events in Boston, that terrorism, from wherever it comes, cannot be clothed in anything other than what it is: terrorism. That is why the G8 —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr Storey: — is welcome in County Fermanagh.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry, Mr Givan; Mr Storey has used up all your time.

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): I will endeavour to respond to a variety of points that have been raised from all round the House. First, I congratulate Tom Elliott on securing the debate, which has attracted more interest than is normally the case for an Adjournment debate.

As the Prime Minister indicated when he made the announcement on 20 November — he certainly claims that it was his decision — the fact that the G8 is being hosted in County Fermanagh reflects well on the county and on Northern Ireland as a whole. It illustrates the massive changes and improvements that have been seen in recent years. I am acutely aware of the potentially huge benefits to the Northern Ireland economy and our international reputation that hosting the G8 brings. I am well aware that the Chief Constable and his senior team share that view and are committed to making it successful. The Adjournment debate is focusing on security, but I note that the Executive as a whole and many others are working to make it a success in every sense.

3.45 pm

Ordinarily, the host police service would have a number of years to plan for such an event. In comparison, the PSNI has had a few short months to address the mammoth police undertaking associated with the G8 summit

alongside its other responsibilities this year. I congratulate the Chief Constable and his officers at every level on stepping up to the task, grasping that responsibility and taking on the challenge in such a short time. There is certainly more work to be done, but they are rising to the challenge.

As Members will be aware, the development and delivery of policing plans for the summit is essentially an operational issue for the Chief Constable, but I know from the regular updates that I receive from ACC Finlay and from my recent visit to Fermanagh to hear at first hand the scale of the plans from the local police commanders that the police are well aware of the importance of the task and have a comprehensive police strategy in place. I noticed that local Members, I think, universally praised the district commander and her team for their work. Regrettably, we have also seen recent security alerts in Fermanagh and beyond that highlight the fact that there are those who remain determined to drag us backwards and to cause disruption and worse, with no thought for the local community or, indeed, for the efforts being made by so many people across Northern Ireland to get the maximum benefit from the summit.

Alongside praising the commitment of the PSNI, I reflect on the fact that, as Members highlighted, there is a cross-border element and continuing excellent co-operation with an Garda Síochána, which is undoubtedly helping to make people safe in Northern Ireland and in the Republic.

Let us look briefly at the preparations in practice. It is assessed — this has been referred to here today — that the summit and various events are likely to attract some mass protest groups, and there are already some indications of that planning. Police are planning for major security operations at the summit venue, Belfast International Airport and other locations. Planning is well advanced for each of those locations, although the final itineraries of each of the world leaders are not yet fully established. Indeed, we are not aware of the precise likelihood of protest arrangements at this stage. I can assure Mr Elliott, however, that the plans do not include fences high enough to disrupt the operation of St Angelo Airport, nor even the UAVs that some Members referred to.

The Police Service has been engaging with a broad range of members of the community, the business sector and partner agencies to mitigate the potential for disruption to community life as much as possible. That effort is particularly well developed in Fermanagh, around Aldergrove and at Belfast City Airport, and it will continue. In response to Mr Flanagan, although he is no longer in his place, I say that that will also include the facilitation of lawful, peaceful protest by those who have a point to make.

Mr Storey: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Ford: Yes.

Mr Storey: Will the Minister clarify something on that point? Surely, for the citizens of Northern Ireland, we have the draconian Parades Commission, which requests and requires notification of protests. Will those who are going to protest at the summit have to fill in a form and apply to the Parades Commission?

Mr Ford: The Member would not expect me to agree with his description of the Parades Commission as draconian. Of course, anybody who wishes to organise a parade is

required to submit the 11/1 form. Those, however, who engage in static protest are not required to submit the form. We have all seen demonstrations on a variety of causes — for example, at Belfast City Hall — and those do not require notification to the Parades Commission. We certainly recognise that there are many who will wish to engage in legitimate and entirely peaceful and lawful protests, and those will be facilitated.

Previous G8 summits have seen the closure of city centres and major airports. I reassure Members and the wider public that it is the intention that both our airports will remain open to the travelling public throughout, and significant effort is being expended to ensure that security arrangements cause as little disruption as possible. The likely primary cause of disruption remains the unlawful activities of those who would seek to disrupt the summit.

Mr Allister: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Ford: I will give way to the Member briefly.

Mr Allister: I note what the Minister said. Can he say whether any property is being sequestered and taken over by the authorities and what are the arrangements for compensation in that regard?

Mr Ford: I will deal with that in a minute or two, but I need to push on given how the clock is running down.

Members referred to mutual aid, which, as Trevor Lunn highlighted, is an entirely normal concept among police services in GB. It is unusual in Northern Ireland, but, because of the scale of what is planned, approximately 3,500 mutual aid officers will deploy to Northern Ireland from forces in GB. All of them will be under the direction, control and operational command of the Chief Constable. Work is also ongoing to ensure that the Police Ombudsman has the ability to investigate complaints made both against the PSNI, as usual, and against those providing mutual aid. A very significant logistics operation is being set in place that includes, for example, the training of mutual aid officers in GB, with armoured vehicle driver training having taken place for 800 officers. Although public order officers are trained to a common UK national standard, the PSNI is also delivering the additional training that takes our local officers beyond that standard.

The PSNI has already begun security operations at most sites essential to the delivery of the operation. The impact has been minimised as far as possible, and consultation has taken place with those who may be affected. That engagement has been led by local police with the local community, but the details of how it will impact on points such as land requisition are being worked through between my officials and the police. They are also liaising with schools in the Western Education and Library Board area to ensure that any disruption to exams is minimised.

The Chief Constable has submitted a detailed resourcing plan for the operation, and my officials are working closely with the PSNI, the Northern Ireland Office, DFP and the Home Office to review those resource requirements, finalise costs and determine where the additional funding will be sourced. I am committed to ensuring that the PSNI has the resources that it needs and that that funding is not a charge on its normal budget. At this stage, it is not possible to state what the costs will be, but there should be no additional costs to the PSNI because those should be picked up by the national Government.

I am sure that Members will agree that the security preparedness required is a significant challenge for the PSNI in the time available. However, it has been grasped and is being worked on. I have no doubt that policing will be delivered in a professional manner.

Work is also being done to deal with the courts. On Mr Elliott's earlier point, most people who are charged with public order offences are charged with relatively minor offences such as obstruction and disorderly behaviour. That is why provision has been made to allow for Sunday courts if they are required. We have to face the fact that, at Gleneagles eight years ago, there were over 300 arrests on the first day. That is why arrangements are being made to ensure that there is sufficient accommodation in prisons and there are additional temporary detention facilities under police control. On Mr Givan's point, the issue of who is allowed to travel is very much an intelligence-led operational issue for the police.

Members also need, however, to look at the significant opportunities that hosting the G8 gives us. DETI is leading the Northern Ireland Executive's co-ordinating group to ensure that we facilitate a successful summit. It has been collaborating with Invest NI, the Tourist Board and Tourism Ireland to ensure that all its agencies capitalise on the unprecedented opportunities that the summit presents not just for trade development but for changing perceptions, creating awareness about Northern Ireland, stimulating a sense of civic pride and driving up visitor numbers. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment is keen that we get the opportunity to look beyond the immediate needs of the G8 and encourage a more permanent legacy. It is looking at issues such as the telecoms infrastructure to seek to improve the long-term position for Fermanagh and urge the relevant telecoms providers to review their investment plans.

I believe that the G8 summit will give Northern Ireland enormous and unprecedented exposure. The association with the G8 sends out a clear signal about our capability, ambition and stature, and it highlights what Northern Ireland, its people and its business have to offer the global community. I share Tom Elliott's wish that the people of Fermanagh will be able to witness the events in safety as they showcase the best of their county.

Adjourned at 3.53 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 22 April 2013

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Mr Campbell: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I seek your guidance about a possible misleading of the House by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. On Tuesday 9 April, the Minister made a statement regarding the extreme weather conditions. After her statement, Mr Ó hOisín from Sinn Féin indicated that the visit:

“gave great succour and reassurance to the farmers of the East Derry and West Tyrone constituencies.”

I will set aside the mispronunciation there. I then asked the Minister about her visit, and she said that she had:

*“informed all MLAs when I was going into their area”.—
[Official Report, Bound Volume 83, p245, col 2].*

I then put down a question for written answer to ask how many MLAs had been informed of her visit to the two constituencies. Her reply stated that she notified “all MLAs within that constituency” and outlined only the Members for West Tyrone. I seek your advice, Mr Speaker; perhaps you would look at the Hansard report and inform us as to whether the Minister did mislead the House?

Mr Speaker: Let me say to the Member and the whole House that these issues are sometimes for Ministers themselves, but let me look at Hansard. The Member now has it on the record as well, which is important, but let me look at Hansard and come back to the Member.

Mr Swann: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I ask you, on behalf of the House, to write to the Executive to ask them to show the House and its Members the due dignity that they are to be afforded when they table motions. We, in the Ulster Unionist Party, have tabled a motion for the repeal of the exception for teachers in the Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998. We have been informed that none of the four Ministers in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister will respond to it, which is nearly as many times within the past few weeks that that Department of the Executive has failed to respond to private Members' motions.

Mr Speaker: I hear the Member's point of order. As the Member knows, although I do all that I can to encourage Ministers to come to the House, and especially to hold the Executive to account, Ministers and the Executive decide this particular issue. I know that the Member has raised the issue with officials and that the Member and his party are quite annoyed because an indication was given that Ministers would be here. Maybe the Member wants to raise the issue with the Business Committee, because that is where it rests. The Business Committee is

responsible for preparing the Order Paper, so maybe the Member needs to raise it there at the next meeting of the Business Committee, which is on Tuesday. I understand the Member's annoyance.

Speaker's Business

Public Petition: University of Ulster Day Nurseries

Mr Speaker: Mr Pat Ramsey has sought leave to present a public petition in accordance with Standing Order 22. The Member will have up to three minutes in which to speak on the subject.

Mr P Ramsey: I thank the Business Office and the Business Committee for facilitating the petition today. I present the petition on behalf of a number of students and staff at the Magee and Jordanstown campuses who are very opposed to the plans by the University of Ulster to close down day-care provision at both campuses. Parents are worried because nursery provision provides a vital social investment in both areas for the future, not only for their children but for future generations of children, and clearly the job losses will have an impact.

I have continually met and spoken to a number of parents in Jordanstown and in and around the city council area of Derry about their worries and concerns about those campuses. Parents believe that the services are vital, and closure would cause them serious inconvenience.

In particular, it occurs to me that, with an increasing emphasis being placed on early years intervention and the need for stronger childcare provision, alongside, in my constituency, the anticipated expansion of the Magee campus, it would be a retrograde step to downgrade the day-care nurseries. I earnestly request that senior management at the University of Ulster look at the proposals again. A key element of the Programme for Government is widening participation, but these proposals will mean that single mothers, in particular, around Belfast and Derry will be more socially disadvantaged and will face a barrier to third-level education.

Mr P Ramsey moved forward and laid the petition on the Table.

Mr Speaker: I will forward the petition to the Minister for Employment and Learning and send a copy to the Chair of the appropriate Committee.

Executive Committee Business

Renewables Obligation (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013

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

That the draft Renewables Obligation (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 be approved.

The statutory rule is being made under powers contained in the Energy (Northern Ireland) Order 2003, which prescribes that the order must be laid in draft for approval by affirmative resolution of the Assembly. The changes that I bring forward in the draft order relate to the Northern Ireland renewables obligation (NIRO) and were subject to statutory consultations during 2011 and 2012. Following the consultations, the order introduces important changes to the NIRO that will continue to make it more effective and capable of delivering our targets for renewable electricity at least cost to the consumer.

As Northern Ireland's main policy measure for incentivising renewable electricity generation, it is crucial that the NIRO is able to react to the needs of Northern Ireland while also keeping abreast of developments in the rest of the United Kingdom and beyond. The large majority of proposed changes in the order mirror those contained in the other two renewables obligations in Great Britain. However, it has also been necessary to make some Northern Ireland-specific changes.

The order contains a number of amendments to the NIRO, some of which will take effect from 1 May and others that will come into operation later in the lifetime of the NIRO. Before I go into more detail on the changes, I will put the NIRO's performance to date into perspective.

Since the NIRO's introduction in 2005, consumption of renewable electricity has increased from 3% to just under 14% now. The previous Programme for Government target of 12% by 2012 has been met, and the proposals in this draft order are intended to ensure that we continue on the path to meet the strategic energy framework target of 40% renewable electricity consumption by 2020.

The NIRO has been successful in supporting investment in renewables generation across a range of technologies and sizes. At present, there are over 1,300 generating stations accredited under the NIRO, with a total installed capacity of 530 MW. Previous amendments to the NIRO reflected changing requirements, such as the need to provide more support to small-scale technologies, and the changes introduced in this latest draft order are intended to reflect present and future changes to technology costs.

The draft order will extend the end date of the NIRO from 2033 to 2037 and bring the NIRO end date into line with the other two renewables obligations in the United Kingdom. Importantly, that will give assurance to Northern Ireland generators accrediting until March 2017 that they will receive the full 20 years' support under the mechanism. Were the NIRO end date not to be extended to 2037, it could have a significant impact on investment potential and jeopardise the overall aims and principles of the NIRO.

The NIRO consultation included a proposal in line with the other two renewables obligations to introduce

transition arrangements for combined heat and power (CHP) projects, which would see the ending of the half renewables obligation certificate (ROC) uplift for such projects after 31 March 2015. Instead, projects that accredit after this date would be required to take the relevant ROC level for electricity-only generation together with the relevant renewable heat incentive (RHI) tariff in place at that time.

Work is under way in Northern Ireland to determine an appropriate RHI tariff for biomass over 1MW. Although that is intended to be in place by 1 April 2015, my Department is unlikely to be in a position to consult on the proposed tariff before mid-2013. That presents a difficulty for large scale biomass CHP projects already in development or nearing financial close, which may accredit after 1 April 2015 but do not have a clear indication now of the appropriate RHI support level that will be available at that time. It is for that reason that the draft order will introduce a six-month extension until 30 September 2015 for CHP projects accrediting under the NIRO. To be eligible for the grace period, projects must be commissioned and accredited under the NIRO by 30 September 2015.

At present, electricity generated from landfill gas is second only to onshore wind. Support for this technology in Great Britain, where it is a well-established and mature technology, has now ended. However, there are still potential generation opportunities for landfill gas projects in Northern Ireland, which by their nature are smaller in size with fewer economies of scale and, therefore, require continued support. The draft order, therefore, retains the current one ROC support for open and closed landfill sites until 31 March 2015. There is, however, a case for continued support beyond 2015 to improve methane collection and electricity generation at closed landfill sites based on the additional costs for those projects. As such, and consistent with the other two renewables obligations, my Department intends to provide support at 0.2 ROCs per MW hour for generating stations that are accrediting or adding capacity from 1 April 2015 and which use gas from closed landfill sites only.

Waste heat to power generates further electricity from landfill gas through an organic Rankine cycle process, giving up to 10% higher efficiency. It is particularly suited for sites such as landfill, where CHP is not an option as there is no local heat customer. The fitting of waste heat to power on new and existing landfill sites could be a cost-effective way of contributing to our renewables target and would also make the most efficient use of landfill gas resource.

In line with the rest of the UK, we have decided to introduce support at 0.1 ROCs per MW hour for electricity generated by new waste heat to power from landfill gas. That support will be available for waste heat to power fitted after 31 March 2015 to existing stations as well as new stations using gas from any landfill site.

I now want to focus on the other key amendments that are consistent across all three renewables obligations following a UK-wide review of ROC banding levels.

12.15 pm

I am sure that Members agree that it should not be the Government's policy to support renewables at any price and that renewables should ultimately become competitive

without the need for subsidy. The banding review and subsequent amendments in the order will reduce support where that can be done while bringing on the deployment that we need from key technologies, such as offshore and onshore wind and biomass, to achieve our aims.

As Members will be aware, in October 2012, the Crown Estate awarded the development rights for three offshore renewable energy sites in Northern Ireland's coastal waters. One of those development sites is for a 600 megawatt offshore wind farm located off the County Down coast. That represents a major milestone for Northern Ireland. Across the UK, the level of support for offshore wind is set at 2 ROCs for each megawatt hour in 2014-15, reducing to 1.9 ROCs in 2015-16 and 1.8 ROCs in 2016-17. That is consistent with consultation proposals and reflects the expectation that the costs of offshore wind will fall as mass deployment takes place and industry innovates. The new support levels will ensure that the UK as a whole retains its position as the world's leading location for offshore wind deployment.

Onshore wind is one of the most cost-effective forms of renewable electricity generation. In Northern Ireland, we benefit from some of the highest wind speeds in Europe. Therefore, onshore wind will continue to play a key role as part of a diverse energy mix. In line with the rest of the UK and supported by evidence of falling technology costs, I propose to reduce by 10% support for large-scale projects over 5 megawatts to 0.9 ROCs for each megawatt hour for new developments accrediting from 1 May 2013.

The evidence that has been gathered as part of the banding review has also shown that costs could be falling faster than expected. The Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) has undertaken a UK-wide call for evidence on potential falling costs. If the call for evidence confirms significant change in costs and I am satisfied that that reflects the Northern Ireland position, along with the other United Kingdom Administrations, my Department will review onshore wind support rates again. Any new arrangements arising from a potential review would not take effect before April 2014. Financially committed projects would be protected through grandfathering and grace periods.

I propose to continue to support our small-scale onshore wind generators by retaining the current level of 4 ROCs for stations generating up to 250 kilowatts and 2 ROCs for stations generating above 250 kilowatts up to 5 megawatts. However, in my Department's response to the most recent NIRO consultation, which was issued in January, I have given a commitment that we will review all small-scale banding levels in 2013-14 with the intention of introducing any changes in April 2015.

In line with the other two renewables obligations, we are establishing two separate bands for solar photovoltaic (PV) under the NIRO. New bands will be introduced from 1 May for building-mounted and ground-mounted solar PV stations. Both bands will apply to stations generating above 250 kilowatts. I want a solar industry in Northern Ireland that grows in a sustainable way and that does not result in the same issues of overcompensation that have occurred recently in Great Britain.

Evidence that has been gathered at a UK level has shown that there has been a significant reduction in solar PV costs over recent years. I have therefore set lower support

levels to reflect that fall. From 1 May, ground-mounted solar PV above 250 kilowatts will receive 1.6 ROCs for each megawatt hour, reducing to 1.4 ROCs in 2014-15, 1.3 ROCs in 2015-16 and 1.2 ROCs in 2016-17. From 1 May, building-mounted solar PV above 250 kilowatts will receive 1.7 ROCs for each megawatt hour, reducing to 1.6 ROCs in 2014-15, 1.4 ROCs in 2015-16 and 1.4 ROCs in 2016-17. ROC levels for building-mounted and ground-mounted solar PV generating stations up to 50 kilowatts will continue to receive 4 ROCs for each megawatt hour, and stations above 50 kilowatts up to 250 kilowatts will continue to receive 2 ROCs.

As I mentioned, I have given a commitment to review all small-scale banding levels over the next year. However, if evidence shows that the current support levels are not sustainable, I will instruct my officials to carry out an early review under a mechanism that is set out in article 31 of the Renewables Obligation Order (Northern Ireland) 2009.

The NIRO will continue to support innovative technologies that can play a long-term role in our energy future, including innovative processes for generating electricity from waste, such as anaerobic digestion (AD) and advanced conversion technologies (ACTs). AD above 5 MW and ACTs will continue to receive two ROCs in 2013-14 and 2014-15. Support will then reduce to 1.9 ROCs in 2015-16 and 1.8 ROCs in 2016-17, in line with our aim to reduce subsidies over time. ROC levels for AD up to 5 MW will be considered as part of a small-scale review, which I mentioned.

I previously referred to the three new offshore renewable energy sites in our coastal waters. Two of the sites are for tidal stream energy and are situated off Torr Head and Fair Head. Each will accommodate 100 MW. I am sure that Members will welcome the news that support for wave and tidal stream technologies will increase from two ROCs to five ROCs from 1 May this year. That level of support will be available for generating stations with an installed capacity of up to 30 MW, above which support reduces to two ROCs.

In conclusion, the amendments in the order are designed to ensure that we support renewable electricity generation at a level that continues to provide investor certainty — I hope that I have achieved that today through what I have stated — while maintaining value for money for the customer.

Mr McGlone (The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht an ráitis a thug sí dúinn ar maidin. I thank the Minister for her detailed account.

The current Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, as did the previous Committee, has closely followed the evolution of the Northern Ireland renewables obligation through the Renewables Obligation Order (Northern Ireland) 2009 and its amending orders in 2010 and 2011. The Committee recognises the importance of the NIRO and its impact on the development of both large- and small-scale renewable energy installations. I listened very carefully as the Minister outlined that. I also listened very carefully when she mentioned a review of the small-scale projects. The Committee looks forward to that review and to its detail and content on the provision of renewables and the incentives for the industry.

It is essential that the appropriate levels of support be offered in order to meet the targets that the Department set in the strategic energy framework. It is equally important that renewable generation not be over-incentivised, so that full value is achieved from the public purse.

The Committee considered the Renewables Obligation (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 at SL1 stage on 24 January and subsequently considered the draft statutory rule on 8 April. The Committee is content that the amendments proposed are appropriate and therefore agrees that the 2013 order be affirmed by the Assembly. Go raibh maith agat.

Mrs Foster: I thank the Chair and the Committee for their work on the order. It introduces further changes, some of which are Northern Ireland-specific. It shows that, when the House has an opportunity to look at specific measures for Northern Ireland, it does so and puts forward proposals based on evidence. That is what has been achieved by this piece of work. I hope that the measures proposed today will help ensure that we have more electricity generation from a wide range of renewable sources; that we increase our security of supply, which is another of our key objectives in the sustainable energy framework; and that we contribute to the United Kingdom's obligations in Europe.

It is a balancing act to incentivise those technologies but not overcompensate. That is why we need to keep this at the forefront of energy policy. I thank the House, and I thank the Chair of the Committee for his input.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the draft Renewables Obligation (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 be approved.

Private Members' Business

Teachers: Employment Law

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes to propose and 10 minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Kinahan: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes that the exception in fair employment law allowing discrimination on the grounds of religious belief when appointing teachers is now over 35 years old; further notes that the same exemption, uniquely written into European anti-discrimination employment law (directive 2000/78/EC), suggests that it is designed to further "the reconciliation of historical divisions"; the Equality Commission recommendation for its withdrawal in 2004 in respect of secondary school appointments and earlier in its entirety has not been put into effect, nor has any proposed monitoring been introduced; the Department of Education's equal opportunities policy for teachers (TNC 2009/2) now prohibits controlled schools from so discriminating; and calls on the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to repeal the exception to ensure equal opportunity and that school teaching staff reflect our religious and ethnic diversity.

I welcome the opportunity to speak today in what I hope will be a healthy debate that will send the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) a clear instruction to put right an inequality that should have been addressed years ago. I will start with an observation: it is totally reprehensible that there is no ministerial response to the debate, and I hope that the Speaker will follow what he has been asked to do by our Whip.

The motion should not conjure up fear or suspicion. It should be an issue that truly unites the House. How can any political party that claims to be committed to equality be content to oversee an over-discrimination in how our teachers are recruited? It cannot, because that would be rank hypocrisy.

Before I get into the detail behind the motion, I will quickly pay tribute to one of my party colleagues, Jeff Dudgeon. He is no stranger to championing equality in Northern Ireland and, once again, has played a pivotal role in supporting today's motion. He also happens to be a renowned bugbear to Departments, which, for whatever reason, believe that they can get away with withholding public information. I also thank Austen Morgan, a barrister at the London and Northern Ireland Bar, who has proved invaluable in casting his expert legal opinion on the matter. I am pleased to say that both men are in the Public Gallery for the debate, and I encourage any Member to approach them at the end and engage with them further on the topic.

I will provide a very quick background to the debate. To apply for teaching posts in Catholic maintained nursery and primary schools, applicants must possess a recognised religious education certificate. That certificate is supposed to ensure that teachers in Catholic maintained schools have an understanding of the Church, its teaching and way of life to enable them to contribute to

the maintenance of the ethos of the school and to assist parents in educating their children in the faith according to the principles of Catholic education.

That appears to be all very noble, but should every single primary school teacher in the maintained sector require it? The answer is clearly no. I will explain later what I propose as an alternative. For many people, the requirement for primary school teachers in our single biggest sector to hold a certificate that effectively eliminates up to half the potential workforce sounds grossly discriminatory, and that is because it is. It was discriminatory in the PSNI, and it is discriminatory in our education system.

In 1976, Parliament exempted employment as a teacher in a school from anti-discriminatory legislation. That is the so-called teachers' exemption. In 2000, when the European Union provided for general anti-discriminatory law, supposedly to improve labour flexibility in a single market, the UK secured a continuing Northern Ireland opt-out in the directive permitting religious discrimination — that is, it allowed religious discrimination. Rather than it being something that we can be proud of, the fact that teachers in Northern Ireland are the only occupational group in 27 member states to be legally unprotected should bring a huge degree of shame to our equality laws.

The teacher exception is now nearly 40 years old and was to be abolished a decade ago, in all secondary schools at least, in the long-forgotten single equality Bill. The two Equality Commission reports of 2000 and 2004, which were written because of the review obligation inserted into the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1976, were followed by the commission saying that reform was needed. Article 15 of Council directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000, establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation, says that the teachers' exemption should remain:

"In order to maintain a balance of opportunity in employment for teachers".

What a contradictory statement: trying to keep the discrimination law in order to balance opportunities for teachers, when half of them are excluded. I strongly believe that writing the exception into EU law in 2000 was an exercise in deception. It is long over time that it was reversed.

12.30 pm

At least when the education and library board circular TNC 2009/2 on equal opportunities for teachers in schools was issued four years ago, the exception ceased to apply for all controlled schools. The circular stated up front, in paragraph 2.1, that:

"The aim of this policy is to communicate the commitment of ... the Board ... to the promotion of equality of opportunity. It is the policy of the Board and the Board of Governors to provide employment equality to all irrespective of "

—inter alia —

"religious belief and political opinion."

Even if discrimination on grounds of religion in the appointment of teachers was still permissible, it had become a disciplinary matter for any appointment panel

so to do. That was a welcome move, but, again, it was not necessarily being followed.

Last December, the Minister stated that the education and library boards told his Department that they do not monitor the composition of teachers, applicants for employment or appointments in controlled schools on the basis of religious belief and political opinion as there is no statutory obligation to do so. However, he went on to say that the boards are aware of the requirement detailed in that circular. So we do not even know the extent of the current balance of opportunity, as the monitoring of teacher appointments promised in the same circular never actually happened.

It is clear that this whole area is in desperate need of reform. Whilst OFMDFM may cower away from its responsibilities, I believe that the task comes down to us, the Assembly, to change it. That is why I am pleased to say that, on top of the huge number of other areas in the Education Bill that need amending, I intend to table a raft of amendments to remove this exception. Again, I pay thanks to Austin for his invaluable support in that regard.

For anyone who believes that removing the exception is some sort of attack on the ethos of CCMS schools, they are wrong. I am well aware of the important role that the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) primary school teachers play in the preparation of young people for communion, for instance, and the excellent education throughout. Whilst I am going to make judgement on that in either way, I do propose that some protection remain in place for CCMS schools. In my amendments to the Education Bill, I will propose up to 20% of teaching jobs for the teaching of religion in various ways. That one-in-five rule would be similar to what is already the case in England through the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

In conclusion, I urge all of us in the Chamber today to really consider whether discrimination in the employment of our teachers is something to be proud of. The young people whom our education system is responsible for are becoming increasingly diverse, and yet we still have old, draconian laws in place. I was pleased to see recent moves by CCMS to open up its schools a little bit. However, if it does not go further than just a three-year stopgap, unfortunately those moves will be seen as little more than gestures.

While some parties may talk a good game on their vision for a single education system, the fact that neither the DUP leader nor any of the other three Executive Ministers in OFMDFM could be bothered even to respond to the debate shows how insincere they really are on the matter. I hope, though, that the Education Minister is listening to the debate, for whilst the responsibility to change it may lie with OFMDFM, he should realise that his silence on the issue is the equivalent of his complacency.

Mr Storey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Education): The motion refers to equality in employment and education. By way of informing the House and with your indulgence, Mr Speaker, I will take a few moments to advise of the Committee's recent deliberations on the matter.

The Committee has only recently received the Department of Education's report on the review of the employment opportunities for teaching staff, including

the assessment of the equality impact on the religious certificate requirement. Whether this House agrees or disagrees, as the report finds, some non-Catholics clearly view the requirement to possess the certificate for religious education as a bar to employment in the Catholic maintained primary school sector. The report suggests that there is no statistical evidence of an adverse impact on employment opportunities for newly qualified non-Catholic teachers. Nonetheless, the Department suggests that CCMS should consider the limiting of the requirement to designated posts only in the primary and nursery sector.

As Chair, I point out that some members of the Committee do not view the certificate as necessarily discriminatory. They accept the Department's findings that there is no evidence of material disadvantage. The majority of members of the Committee highlighted that they have considerable concerns about the continued insistence of CCMS that teachers in Catholic maintained primary schools be required to obtain the certificate of religious education. The majority of members feel that the present arrangements are unfair and represent a significant inequality. These members felt that the approach of CCMS is particularly unhelpful, given the need for flexibility on all sides in the face of primary school area planning. The majority of members believe that cross-sectoral amalgamations and enhanced sharing between schools can only be hampered by what some have described as this unfair employment practice. We have invited CCMS to the Committee to brief us on the current consultation.

I move from Chair of the Education Committee to make remarks as a Member of this House and the DUP's education spokesperson. If the Members who drafted the motion had used a bit of intelligence rather than trying simply to get something onto the Order Paper, they might have included not only OFMDFM but the Minister of Education. I see that the motion's proposer has disappeared from the Chamber. Clearly, no Minister was to come to the House because the Minister who is responsible for recruitment is the Minister of Education. We put in an amendment along those lines, and, unfortunately, that amendment was not accepted.

Let us get to the core of this issue. It is absolutely and totally unacceptable that any organisation is allowed to discriminate in the way in which this practice has been going on for the past 40 years. Let us not try to dress it up, and let us not try to hide it. At the core of this is one sector that wants to, by all means and all methods, ensure that it protects its own sector. I raised this issue repeatedly in this House. In fact, I raised it with the deputy First Minister back in 2009. The deputy First Minister used the phrase that this was:

"lawful discrimination on the grounds of religious belief".

Would that have been acceptable to nationalists and republicans in this House in relation to recruitment for the RUC and the PSNI? Nationalists insisted that there had to be 50:50 and that there had to be equality, but it is all right when you are protecting a sector and your own schools to ensure that you deliberately and lawfully discriminate.

I pay tribute to the non-Catholic teachers who are in the maintained sector, some of whom I know personally and some who are related to me. They do an exceptionally good job, but I know many others who are very unhappy

and very uneasy about the issue of the Catholic certificate. Even today, when we have the publication from a shared education working group, it is abundantly clear that old habits do not die easily. The sectors, particularly, in this case, the maintained sector, want to talk a good talk —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is almost gone.

Mr Storey: — and want to talk about equality and want everybody else to jump the hurdles, but they do not allow anybody else to play the game the same way as they do. We support the motion, albeit with reservations about its limitations.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I support the motion. I am delighted that the Ulster Unionist Party has finally seen fit to include terms such as "equality" and "equal opportunity" in its educational discourse.

The recent decision taken by CCMS to formally amend its current policy that all teachers seeking appointment to a Catholic maintained primary school must hold, by date of appointment, a certificate in teaching Catholic religious education is to be welcomed. The amendment enables all teachers, irrespective of their perceived religious background, to be considered for Catholic maintained schools, subject to a commitment to acquire the Catholic certificate within three years. Moreover, the move by CCMS to open talks with St Mary's University College and senior trustees of Catholic schools in order to review the range of courses and the creation of equitable pathways to acquiring any new certificate is proof that progress is indeed being made in relation to moving beyond the need for such an exception.

In recent weeks, the House has examined the future cohesion of our education system, and perhaps today's motion is a pertinent extension of that debate, given that many have viewed the fair employment exception as an inevitable consequence of an education system that permits and promotes separate denominational schools. It is salient, however, to stress that any proposed repeal of the exception will not be the silver bullet that some believe it may be in addressing the ongoing legacy of a sectoral education system or, indeed, any polarised teaching workforce. I was interested to read in the Equality Commission's recent report on the exception that connected research carried out by Seamus Dunn and Tony Gallagher outlined a wide variety of factors contributing to such a polarised teaching workforce. The reasons, of course, included the requirement to have a certificate in teaching religious education but also emphasised deep-seated societal divisions, perceptions of the influence of the various churches in some schools, lack of a desire among teachers to move outside the tradition in which they themselves were educated and the long-established practice of some schools of employing a majority from one community. We must recognise that, should the exception be totally removed, many of those factors will not change, nor will the additional fact that many of our schools are located in areas aligned to a particular political tradition.

I will make one final point, which I alluded to at the outset of my speech. I welcome the language from the opposite Benches in relation to the need to tackle such perceived inequalities in our system and to do more to provide equality of opportunity. We do not hear that enough from those sitting opposite. Where is that language when the House discusses academic selection, Irish-medium

education or, indeed, wider societal issues such as marriage equality or the rights of ex-prisoners to equal employment opportunity? Indeed, I look forward to the debate next week on marriage equality to see whether the Members on the Benches opposite will be so excited in their pursuit of fair treatment and equal opportunity.

Mr Storey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Hazzard: No, I just want to finish this off. No doubt, I would be wise not to hold my breath.

Mr Storey: Will you give way?

Mr Speaker: Order. The answer is quite obviously no. The Member should not persist. *[Interruption.]* Order. Allow the Member to finish.

Mr Hazzard: Sinn Féin does not support the continuation of the exception and calls on the Education Minister and OFMDFM to take forward proposals for the removal of the exception under article 71 of the Fair Employment and Treatment Order 1998, following the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority. That approach would not only provide a basis to open dialogue with key interest groups but would give both sides of the debate ample opportunity to put forward their views and concerns in a neutral environment.

Mr Rogers: Today's debate gives us the opportunity to discuss how we can strengthen our employment laws, particularly when it comes to the appointment of our teachers. Equal opportunities for people across society must be incorporated into revised legislation that takes into account European anti-discrimination employment laws. As a former principal, I have had first-hand experience of the contribution that our teachers make to a broad range of educational issues. Our teachers are real asset in a society that is increasingly diverse in religion and ethnicity.

The SDLP is a strong advocate of parental choice when it comes to the selection of a school, and it equally wants to see student teachers able to apply for jobs in the full range of educational sectors, whether it be Catholic, controlled, integrated, Irish-medium or whatever. I welcome the publication of the Department's review of the certificate in religious education, which is a mandatory requirement for those seeking employment in a permanent teaching post in a Catholic maintained nursery or primary school.

12.45 pm

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for giving way. Does the Member not find it strange that the review was announced in 2009 — we are now in 2013, four years on — and what we got back was hardly worth the paper it was written on? Given the seriousness of the issue, it lets you see that the Department and the Minister responsible are not taking the issue very seriously.

Mr Rogers: I thank the Member for his intervention.

Initial teacher education for the primary sector is provided by three institutions: St Mary's; the University of Ulster, where there is easy access to the certificate; and Stranmillis, where the certificate can be obtained through a distance learning course. The review points to potential barriers that Stranmillis students may face when it comes to the distance learning course, including lack of awareness; lack of information about the course; the need to pay fees up front; the additional time commitment; and

the lack of support and resources available. Few students studying at Stranmillis appear to choose to obtain the certificate, but there is absolutely no evidence to suggest that that has affected the employment opportunities of Stranmillis graduates.

I welcome the removal of barriers for any aspiring teacher, and the review sets out how that can be achieved. It includes improving awareness and understanding of certificate requirements; improved information on distance learning at Stranmillis; re-examining the provision of fees; and consideration of obtaining the certificate through a partnership arrangement between Stranmillis and St Mary's.

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

The certificate in religious education was never designed to be an exclusive ticket to employment or to exclude talented student teachers. The Catholic maintained sector uses the additional training to equip teachers working in nursery or primary schools with the ability to conduct religious education classes in a thorough manner against the background of a Christian ethos. In addition, at primary level, sacramental preparation is an important part of the religious education curriculum. The sacraments of reconciliation and Holy Communion take place in P3 or P4, and confirmation takes place in P7. In many schools, there are information sessions for parents so that they can deepen their own faith and help to accompany their children in preparation for the sacraments of encounter. They are not only school events but family and community events.

There is less need for the certificate in post-primary education, as not all teachers teach religion. However, I would still encourage our students to complete it as it gives them greater flexibility for employment and retaining employment in a contracting environment. During my time as a teacher and as a principal in the Catholic sector, I observed the tireless work done in Catholic schools during the worst years of the Troubles to shield children from sectarianism and bigotry. Religious education classes incorporate the study of world religions and help young people to understand difference. Visiting our other Christian churches takes place across the sectors. Throughout my career and in working closely with neighbouring controlled schools, I saw that teachers in those schools showed a similar dedication to the promotion of tolerance. It is wonderful to see children from different schools and backgrounds engaging and learning from one another. I never experienced the segregated ethos that some people talk about.

I believe that it is a positive step to encourage those students at Stranmillis to avail themselves of the certificate if it enhances their profile and broadens their choices when applying for work. For the Assembly, our goal must be to ensure that children across the North have access to a first-rate education system and that our teachers are equipped to deal with a diverse range of pupils and to promote the principles of tolerance and respect in whatever setting. Hence, the SDLP will not support the motion. It is not discriminatory to expect our teachers, who play a major role in faith formation, to have the right qualifications and skills.

Mr Lyttle: As a member of the Alliance Party, which is clear in its support for increased integration in our education system, I support the motion. I am acutely

aware of the ongoing debate on education in Northern Ireland, which I believe is not always helped by political parties engaging in the politics of misrepresentation, manipulation and retreating to narrow sectoral interests. Alliance Party support for integrated education has been misrepresented as being anti-parental choice and anti-faith or for forced integration and secularisation of education. That is plainly false. It is about helping to give the 80% of parents who would like to select integrated education for their children more than 6% of our schools from which to choose. Many integrated schools across Northern Ireland facilitate excellent religious education and instruction when appropriate, and, in that context, there should be no need for an explicit exemption in fair employment legislation.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Member for giving way. I appreciate the approach of the Member and his party to integrated education, so does he find it unacceptable that Phoenix Integrated Primary School recently advertised a teaching post for which one of the essential criteria was that the applicant possess a Catholic teaching certificate?

Mr Lyttle: Certainly. I think that everyone knows that we are not without troubles with the Catholic religious education certificate, and I may develop that as I go along.

My party believes that fair employment exemption is a much broader provision than required, and, as I have said, a connected issue is the requirement for a certificate of religious education. I appreciate that the rationale is that pastoral care, preparation for sacraments and ethos are believed to be an essential part of the educational experience, but the exemption allows schools to discriminate on the basis of religion when recruiting. So even if you support the requirement for a certificate in religious education — I think that there are problems with that — the fair employment exemption is excessive. There is also a genuine occupational requirement in existing equality law that allows organisations a basis for making a credible defence against alleged discrimination, and it is possible to refer to that provision.

Alliance will argue that any professionally trained teacher, irrespective of their background, should be capable of teaching in any school, even one with a specific religious ethos. Our aim should be to train teachers in a shared and integrated environment and prepare them as one to teach in a range of settings. All teachers should have a sufficient blend in their training to adapt and teach in all potential circumstances. That is not anti-choice or anti-faith.

Alliance recognises that there will continue to be a range of sectors in Northern Ireland for the foreseeable future. We must, however, promote greater integration in our education system. There are clear reasons and clear support for integrated education and collaboration between sectors in the delivery of education.

Mr Storey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lyttle: Yes, I will give way.

Mr Storey: The Member is saying that there needs to be greater integration, but does he not think that it would be better starting with the integrated movement, given that 45% of its schools have a majority of one community or the other? Maybe the integrated sector would be a good place to start.

Mr Lyttle: I disagree with the Member if he is trying to make an argument that the integrated sector is not integrated. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, order.

Mr Lyttle: The integrated manner of delivery in our integrated schools is absolutely first-class. In this context, all teachers should have a broad understanding, and Alliance believes that fair employment exemption is much broader than necessary and supports the call from the First Minister and deputy First Minister to take the action necessary to amend the legislation.

Mr Craig: It will come as no surprise to the House that I support the motion's call for the removal of the Catholic certificate. Indeed, it was I who raised the question with CCMS and the Catholic bishops when they appeared before the Committee. I thought that I was going to go down in history as the person who caused one bishop in particular to have a major heart attack and that I would go down famously in my community for having done so.

What I find alarming is that this reinforces discrimination, but it is not the first time that I have seen discrimination reinforced in legislation, going against the whole ethos of equality and all the rest of the things that others in the House are supposed to champion. We have seen it in the past. We saw it in 50:50 recruitment to the PSNI, and we see it continue with the Catholic certificate. Members can rant to their heart's content about the ease of access to training for the Catholic certificate.

I listened with interest to what a colleague said about teachers having to be part of the preparation for the sacraments. It will come as no surprise to anyone in the House that there are those of my faith and others who will find that such preparation goes against their moral background and will not be prepared to do it. So, it is a discriminatory issue for a teacher. I still have to ask myself this basic question: if you are a maths teacher, for instance, what relevance does the Catholic certificate have for you at all? What is the Catholic ethos behind maths? I think that that one would be lost on all of us. A maths teacher is a maths teacher is a maths teacher, no matter their religious background.

We must put all this into perspective. If I came to the House to propose a Protestant certificate for teachers in the controlled sector, I know what the response of 90% of the House would be. Why do we then have an exemption in the equality legislation not only in Northern Ireland but in Europe, that so-called bastion of equality for all? That goes to the heart of all this.

My former party leader would probably be proud of what I am saying, because he knows the truth about religious liberty. There are those who have double standards. This is one of the relics of the double standard that we have left on the equality of treatment for all who teach in schools. It is an issue for many teachers in the education sector. Many have approached me asking why it is allowed to continue and why it is reinforced not only here but in other jurisdictions, with them and their beliefs being discriminated against. It should stop. That is why I firmly support the motion. I have no issue with looking forward to the day and hour that this is changed. Let us see that equality of opportunity for all.

Statistics on the issue are hard to find, because others choose to bury them. However, recent statistics show that over 50% of employment opportunities in education in Northern Ireland this year lie in the maintained sector. For all those who, for their own personal reasons, cannot and will not sign up to the Catholic certificate, that means that they are discriminated against. It must stop, and the sooner it stops, the better.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Members on the opposite Benches for bringing the motion to the Floor. Having carefully read it and having listened to the proposer and, indeed, to others, I think that it is quite clear that this exemption to fair employment law has long outlived its sell-by date. OFMDFM tasked the Equality Commission with reviewing the issue in 2004, but, some years later, we are just getting round to the idea of debating it.

The Equality Commission's view would be that teachers should, in the foreseeable future, be included in religious discrimination legislation and that further restriction of the teachers' exemption to teachers in mainstream primary schools should be effected in the single equality legislation, with a particular view to extending the protection that exists on the grounds of religion to include all teachers from all sectors in any of its reviews of duties and monitoring. It cannot continue to exclude the entire teaching workforce from the fair employment legislative provisions that cover all occupations here.

Our society and education system are growing in culture, tradition and diversity. Our education system provides for children from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. The same opportunity should be given to those who want to teach in those schools, and it should be inclusive of all. The Equality Commission's investigation was a detailed piece of work that highlighted a range of opinions across the sectors on recruitment practices. My party welcomes the CCMS's decision to amend its policy so that teachers can, if it is their choice, teach in other sectors and be afforded the opportunity of time to do that.

The review carried out by Professor Tony Gallagher and Professor Seamus Dunn suggests that more work needs to be concluded to effect the change, mainly as a result of the complexity of the issue, that support for the change is often a minority opinion. I believe that the Equality Commission's recommendations for developing a new single equality Bill will go before OFMDFM, and that is where the change to legislation will be made. As the Chair of the Education Committee said, the CCMS will brief the Committee on the issue, and I look forward to that briefing. There should be equality of opportunity in the sector. I support the motion.

1.00 pm

Mr Eastwood: I am glad to have the opportunity to speak in the debate. I am probably not really known for my strict adherence to the Catholic Church, and I may not be as closely associated with the Church as some of my colleagues, but it strikes me that the issue is not about discrimination but about logic. If I wanted to become a football coach and coach kids on how to become better footballers, I would have to get a certificate. I would have to be qualified in that field. If we accept that parents have a choice of the education that they want their children to have, that faith-based education is part of our education

make-up and that parents should have the opportunity to send their children to a faith-based school, if they want to, the logic is that the teachers teaching in those schools, particularly those in primary schools, where they go through the sacraments, should have some form of qualification in that regard. That is the basis of our position.

Mr Storey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Eastwood: No, I will not. You had plenty of time, and I am sure that you will come in again before the end of the debate.

It is absolutely hilarious to hear the other side of the House talk about equality for all and use the types of phrases that we do not hear from those Benches. We do not hear it; we never hear it. This is the first time in a debate that I have been involved in that the DUP, in particular, has talked about equality, fair employment, equal opportunities and equal rights for everybody. It never happens, so I am suspicious that it seems to happen around the one thing that the Catholic Church or Catholic education is involved with. I never heard you talk about it through all the years of the old RUC or the old Stormont, when it routinely and en masse discriminated against Catholic people in Northern Ireland.

Mr Storey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Eastwood: No, I will not give way to the Chairman of the Committee.

It is important to note that the CCMS has begun an evolutionary process in which it is willing to make changes, but I do not think that that should be done arbitrarily by a Department. Mr Rogers made this important point: we need to ensure that people have the opportunity to avail themselves of the certificate. The recent study of the supposed inequality states that the qualitative evidence suggests that the majority of the particular cohort would not apply for posts in the Catholic maintained sector for other reasons. Maybe there are societal reasons why people are not interested in applying for certain positions. It is a bigger issue than merely the certificate.

Mr Kinahan said that he would be prepared to table amendments to the Education Bill. We will look at those amendments when we see them. The fact is that they are not covered in the motion, so we cannot act on them. However, I look forward to seeing those amendments. Our position is clear, and it is a position of logic: to be a teacher in a Catholic school and to provide a very important part of Catholic education, you would, I imagine, need to have some form of qualification in that regard.

Mrs Dobson: I, too, welcome the opportunity to speak on the matter. Like Danny, I thank Jeff Dudgeon and Austen Morgan, who join us in the Public Gallery for the debate, for all of their hard work.

The motion does not call for anything that people should get themselves alarmed about or something that is undeliverable. It simply puts right a long-standing wrong in the current system. Apart from trainee teachers and those who are currently applying for teaching posts, few others would actually notice. The Catholic certificate may have its purpose, but to require all applicants to all teaching positions in CCMS primary and nursery schools to hold it is, at best, discriminatory and, at worst, outright sectarian. The fact that the exception remains in European law

today, in 2013, should serve as a huge discredit to those who like to proclaim that the EU is there to protect human rights and stamp out discrimination. No other part of the continent of Europe has had need of such a draconian and total exception in any area of employment. Of 27 states, with all their varying pressures and challenging eccentricities, Northern Ireland remains the only one where discrimination in the employment of teachers does not even need to be veiled and is actively promoted.

For as long as the exception is in place, how can the House really expect shared education to break out into its next phase? We cannot look to the future with confidence while blatant discrimination remains enshrined in law. Sharing is about much more than facilities; it is also about teachers. How can we expect that to happen formally as long as the requirement for the certificate remains? Those are the considerations that may not have been considered a decade ago when the issue was last looked at.

What the Ulster Unionist Party calls for is not total removal of Catholic training for Catholic teachers but removal of the obligation to have it for 80% of teaching posts in maintained schools. Danny has already indicated our plans to amend the Education Bill to remove the exception. I believe that we have found a reasonable compromise for CCMS in the one-in-five rule. If that is still not enough to assure people, schools will have the additional protection of article 4 of the EU directive of 2000.

Mr Craig: Will the Member give way?

Mrs Dobson: Yes.

Mr Craig: Can the Member outline where exactly in the Bill it actually states anything about the Catholic certificate? I had to raise the issue with the bishops because my reading of the Bill was that it was not there and I was curious to see why it was not there to reverse it. Part of the problem is that I do not see anything in the Bill that actually reverses that discrimination.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mrs Dobson: I thank the Member for his intervention. That is why my party is tabling amendments.

The directive states:

"in the case of occupational activities within churches and other public or private organisations the ethos of which is based on religion or belief, a difference of treatment based on a person's religion or belief shall not constitute discrimination where, by reason of the nature of these activities or of the context in which they are carried out, a person's religion or belief constitute a genuine, legitimate and justified occupational requirement, having regard to the organisation's ethos."

As in the Republic of Ireland and, indeed, everywhere else in Europe, their interests will be protected further by the concluding provision of article 4, which states:

"Provided that its provisions are otherwise complied with, this Directive shall thus not prejudice the right of churches and other public or private organisations, the ethos of which is based on religion or belief, acting in conformity with national constitutions and laws, to require individuals working for them to act in good faith and with loyalty to the organisation's ethos."

Therefore, it is clear that the removal of the teachers' exception should pose no risk whatsoever to the ethos of any school here.

Our education system reflects the rich diversity of cultures in Northern Ireland. If you walk into any school, you will hear accents from all around the world. There is absolutely no reason why our teachers should not reflect that rich diversity.

Mr Allister: For decades, it was peddled around the world that Northern Ireland was a place of rampant discrimination — *[Interruption.]* — particularly against the Catholic community.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. If Members wish to have conversations, it is not meant to be in the Chamber.

Mr Allister: Thank you.

It was peddled around the world that Northern Ireland was this place of rampant discrimination, particularly against Catholics. Of course, we have had legislation on this very topic of discrimination since 1976. The supreme irony and the fact is that, since 1976, the only lawful discrimination that has been permitted in Northern Ireland has been against Protestants, first of all in respect of the 50:50 discriminatory rule in police recruitment and, for decades now, this overtly discriminatory requirement for a certificate of Catholic education if you want to teach in the maintained sector. So, the truth is often different from the fiction that is peddled, and the fiction that has been peddled around the world perishes on this rock, as it does on so many other rocks of truth. The reality is that the only discrimination lawfully permitted here has indeed been against Protestants. The question for all in the House is whether they have any appetite or willingness to address that. Do Members, particularly those who were the chief peddlers around the world of the notion of discrimination in Northern Ireland, have any intention of grasping the nettle? It seems that the party of John Hume, chief proponent of Northern Ireland as a place of discrimination, is not prepared to address the issue. Indeed, we heard Mr Eastwood make the ludicrous suggestion that retaining the certificate was all a matter of logic. Well, I am sorry. As Mr Craig asked in the debate, where is the Catholicism that must be protected in the teaching of mathematics, geography, English, IT and so on? I could go on. There is none. So, this shield that the certificate is supposed to be is a fiction, because it is not necessary to protect the ethos of Catholic schools. In the very select area of the teaching of religious education there may be a case for selection of teachers on a very particular basis but not on the generality that is being applied across the board. There can be no justification for clinging to the certificate.

This is a basic issue of equality. It is a matter of regret that the Department with responsibility for equality — OFMDFM — is absent from here today. Indeed, in response to a variety of questions on this very topic, some from me and some from others, the Department indicated that it had no inclination or intention to ever address this inequality.

I suppose it is not here because the likelihood is that it cannot agree about this, yet we had a contribution from Sinn Féin in this House today saying that it supports the motion. If it supports the motion, what are its Ministers in OFMDFM doing about it? If the DUP supports the motion, why can that collection of Ministers not do something about it? I think one has to test the delivery of that

Department on the affirmations that we have heard today. I suspect it would be found very far wanting.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Would the Member draw his remarks to a close, please?

Mr Allister: I support the motion. It is the right thing to do, and it should have been done years ago.

1.15 pm

Mr Agnew: I declare an interest as a director of the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education. I support the motion on behalf of the Green Party. For us, it is very much a question of equality in employment. Mr Allister made a point about discrimination against Protestants. For me, this is about discrimination against all non-Catholics. I would like to widen it out from a two-traditions debate. We are a diverse society and many people are excluded due to this exemption from fair employment laws.

Mr Eastwood made the point that this was not a question of equality or discrimination, but of logic. I can follow that line of argument, and I anticipated it being made, but the fact that this exemption is required suggests that it is about more than logic because any employer can discriminate on the grounds of suitability for the post. If this is simply about candidates being suitable to teach in a school that has a Catholic ethos, that can be part of the admissibility criteria within law. It is the willingness to discriminate outside the law and therefore seek an exemption from the law that is key to this for me. If it was simply about logic and suitability for a post, we would have no problem and there would be no need for any exemption. That is why I am absolutely certain that the exemption needs to be removed.

We have further human rights laws that allow freedom of religion, and there can be different ways that our courts look at the laws around these issues. We have seen these laws being challenged when it comes to discrimination against homosexuals. That is why I am surprised by the SDLP's position, because religion could not be used to discriminate in employment or the provision of goods and services when it came to another section of our society: gay people. Again, if this was a question of logic, we could justify it within our existing human rights frameworks and religious freedoms without having a specific exemption.

I question the role of religion in schools.

Lord Morrow: I thank the Member for giving way. I would like to hear his views on an experience that I had last week. A person wanted to apply for a teaching post in the integrated sector, but the advertisement clearly stipulated that they must have the Catholic certificate of education. Does the Member accept that that is a very raw discrimination and that that sort of practice should be stopped?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Agnew: In order to try to seek equality, there is a series of monitoring and, in some cases, proactive recruitment in the integrated sector. I do not defend everything in the integrated sector, but I support it as a whole because it has gone a huge way to educating our children together and to ensure that, while we acknowledge difference in our society, we recognise that that difference does not need to be a reason for division.

I come back to the point made by the Chair of the Committee, Mr Storey, about whether there is complete religious equality across every integrated school. Integration is about more than just having balance. A number of Catholic maintained schools in my constituency have a large Protestant intake, but they are not integrated in name or nature because, ultimately, they retain a religious ethos that is exclusionary. That is the difference; integrated education brings together children of different religions. It does not matter about the proportions; what matters is that we teach those children to respect difference, challenge sectarianism —

Mr Storey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Agnew: Yes.

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for commenting on the issue, but does he not accept that the integrated system is built on the basis of a legal requirement to have a percentage from the other community? I said to the Member from East Belfast, who dodged the issue, that it is a fact that 45% of schools in the integrated sector have a majority of either Catholics or Protestants.

Mr Agnew: The Member's colleague the Minister for Social Development has not challenged or changed the division and segregation in our housing system. Inevitably, integrated schools are in divided sections of our community, because that is how our housing is. Integrated schools are a solution to that problem, but we need a solution on housing. The housing Minister is failing to tackle that.

The role of religion in Northern Ireland is a very sensitive issue. However, as I said, while we need to teach respect for difference, we need to understand that difference does not have to be a cause for division. We, in the House and in the Executive, must challenge that division at every turn and do all that we can to make sure that we have a genuinely shared future in Northern Ireland.

Mr Nesbitt: I very much welcome the debate and congratulate my colleagues Jo-Anne Dobson and Danny Kinahan on bringing it to the House. I also thank all the Members who have contributed to the debate over the course of the past hour.

Of course, I had hoped to be following a ministerial response today. I echo the sentiments that were expressed by Danny Kinahan: it is a matter of deep regret that, despite the fact that OFMDFM has no fewer than four Ministers, all of whom the Business Committee was told would be available today, none has made it to the House. It is not just today. A fortnight ago, the SDLP brought forward a motion calling for the return of the Civic Forum. Again, OFMDFM was unable to supply even one of the four Ministers to make a response.

Sadly, it has to be recorded in Hansard that the apparent disrespect for the House extends to Committees. The Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister has had a run of four consecutive weeks when we have suffered late papers or the cancellation of briefings by officials. On 6 March and 13 March, papers arrived very late. Those were papers regarding the delivery by OFMDFM of its Programme for Government commitments, so it was core business, and yet some papers arrived just two hours before a Committee meeting. On 20 March, officials who had been due to brief the

Committee on the child poverty action annual report cancelled, and, on 10 April, officials again cancelled briefing the Committee on the older people's strategy.

We are debating equality in the context of education, hence the reference to OFMDFM. It might be useful to give some context to the motion. During the debate, mention was made of the single equality Bill. The options for that Bill were consulted on during direct rule. The Minister with responsibility for equality, John Spellar MP, issued a report as long ago as 2005, summarising the responses received. Those responses indicated a significant support for harmonising existing anti-discrimination legislation in Northern Ireland. In response to a question for written answer that was tabled by my colleague Robin Swann in September last year, the First Minister and deputy First Minister said that they had no plans to develop a single equality Bill here. The repeal of the certificate could easily be done as part of taking forward a single equality Bill.

With regard to a sexual orientation strategy, on 17 September 2012, junior Minister Bell gave the Assembly a:

"confirmation to have that draft ready and out for consultation by the end of 2012." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 77, p107, col 2].

Yet again, that strategy has not come forward from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

As we heard, you cannot acquire the certificate of religious education at Stranmillis directly. Students there have to take a distance learning course from Glasgow University that leads on to the certificate. A small number of students from Stranmillis do so, and this is funded by the Department for Employment and Learning. Therefore, we have a situation in which all the necessary teaching and support to gain employment in the maintained sector is offered by one of our university colleges, while students at the other college must undertake a distance learning course to get the same qualification.

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for giving way. Given that I assume that he is expressing a concern to protect teachers in the controlled sector, will he explain to the House why his party and his previous party leader, Lord Empey, aided, abetted and assisted the removal of the transferors from the board of governors of Stranmillis College? That has left that college with no representation from the Protestant Churches. Perhaps, in the interests of equality, he might revisit that issue.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Member for his intervention. There is much in the past that we could look to, Mr Storey. There is much that we could talk about in terms of policies reversed, Mr Storey. We learn in politics that never, never, never is not necessarily what it is said to be.

Students at Stranmillis are at a clear disadvantage. When it comes to finding a teaching position, graduates from St Mary's can take up a post in any primary school in Northern Ireland as they will have that certificate.

In a statement to the House on teacher training on 28 November 2011, the Minister for Employment and Learning, Stephen Farry, outlined:

"The situation could be addressed either through measures to remove the capacity for schools to require the certificate or through ensuring fairer and more ready access for students to the certificate across all

institutions.” — [Official Report, Bound Volume 69, p78, col 1].

That is another example of discrimination in the area of teachers gaining employment through a lack of equality of opportunity.

In opening the debate, Mr Kinahan thanked Jeff Dudgeon and Austen Morgan for their sterling work in highlighting this issue. I want to do the same. Mr Kinahan took us through the history of the issue and alerted us of his intention to table an amendment to the Education Bill to address the issue. He also said that, in that amendment, he will offer protection so that 20% of teaching jobs would require the teaching certificate: the so-called one-in-five rule that is consistent with the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 in England.

As Chair of the Education Committee, Mr Storey said that some Committee members reject the notion that the certificate is discriminatory but that the majority feel that it is unhelpful, especially with the move to more work in area planning. As the DUP education spokesman, he felt that the focus should be on the Minister of Education as much as on OFMDFM, even though the Member will be aware that equality falls within the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. He supported the motion, even though he was at pains to articulate that the DUP's amendment had been rejected.

For Sinn Féin, Mr Hazzard said that he welcomed the Ulster Unionist Party bringing equality into its thinking and language. I must get Mr Hazzard a copy of the Belfast Agreement, or perhaps direct him to the policies of Lord Londonderry, Northern Ireland's first Minister of Education in 1921. Mr Hazzard seemed more concerned with ex-prisoners and same-sex marriage, but in the end he said that he would support the motion.

For the SDLP, Sean Rogers said that he wished to praise our teachers as an asset in an increasingly multicultural society. He made the point that Stranmillis offers only distance learning for the course. He also stressed the importance of sacramental issues and preparations, which would be protected by the one-in-five rule that Mr Kinahan proposes. Despite that, he said that the SDLP will not support the motion.

Chris Lyttle said that the Alliance Party supports the motion. He began by defining his party's position. He then took an intervention from my colleague Tom Elliott, who had discovered an integrated primary school that had advertised a job for which the certificate was essential. Mr Lyttle conceded that there are issues with the certificate. He spoke in favour of greater integration and collaboration between sectors. Mr Storey intervened to point out that the make-up of the integrated sector was not that well balanced.

1.30 pm

Mr Craig highlighted moral issues surrounding sacramental teachings and questioned the relevance of the Catholic certificate to the teaching of mathematics. Our call for a single education system should not be perceived as a threat to the Catholic ethos. If there is something about that ethos in Catholic maintained schools that is good for their pupils, why should we not all want it for all our children?

Michaela Boyle said that the certificate had long outlived its sell-by date and gave a rare acknowledgment of the need for a single equality Bill. Mr Colum Eastwood said that the issue was not about discrimination but logic and made a comparison with a football coach, ignoring the one-in-five rule that we propose. He also seemed to find some hilarity in the debate that escaped other Members.

Jo-Anne Dobson highlighted the fact that teachers in Northern Ireland are the only occupational group in the 27 member states of the European Union to be legally unprotected. She also quoted from article 4 of the 2000 directive, which requires individuals who work for organisations to act in good faith and with loyalty to that organisation's ethos.

Mr Allister questioned whether the House had the appetite to address misrepresentation regarding alleged discrimination throughout the years. Mr Agnew highlighted the fact that there was a willingness to discriminate outside the law.

What we propose is not an attack on any sector or any group, nor is it the outright removal of the certificate. It is a move towards equality, with the protection of the one-in-five rule that Mr Kinahan outlined. It is a small step towards a single education system and a very important step towards full and proper equality. I support the motion.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes that the exception in fair employment law allowing discrimination on the grounds of religious belief when appointing teachers is now over 35 years old; further notes that the same exemption, uniquely written into European anti-discrimination employment law (directive 2000/78/EC), suggests that it is designed to further “the reconciliation of historical divisions”; the Equality Commission recommendation for its withdrawal in 2004 in respect of secondary school appointments and earlier in its entirety has not been put into effect, nor has any proposed monitoring been introduced; the Department of Education's equal opportunities policy for teachers (TNC 2009/2) now prohibits controlled schools from so discriminating; and calls on the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to repeal the exception to ensure equal opportunity and that school teaching staff reflect our religious and ethnic diversity.

Special Needs Provision: Further Education and Training

Mr Deputy 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.

Lord Morrow: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes with concern the lack of provision for individuals with severe learning difficulties leaving special needs education at 19 years of age; and calls on the Minister for Employment and Learning to expand the provision of support staff and develop the assistance needed to encourage the uptake of further education and training, thereby allowing more engagement with society.

I am pleased to propose the motion standing in my name and that of Mr Weir. I was going to welcome the Minister, but I see that he is not here. I do not know whether that is an indication that he is not coming. Maybe he is. I am not sure, but we will return to that subject in any event.

Mr Lyttle: He is.

Lord Morrow: I have been assured that he is coming. I welcome that and look forward to hearing what he has to say in response to this important matter. I also very much look forward to hearing what all MLAs who are listed to speak have to say on the issue.

The matter for debate touches all our lives in some way — some more directly than others. I trust that the motion will receive universal support and that the House will unite behind it to send a strong message that the Assembly, the Minister and the Executive are ready to tackle these important issues, close gaps and make provision where it is obvious that it is required. I have spoken to my Chief Whip, who indicated that he does not expect the House to divide on the motion. Since he seldom gets these things wrong, I am prepared to take his word for that. I look forward to a positive outcome. However, we will not count our chickens before they hatch; we will wait for the outcome.

At this juncture, let me pay tribute to all those who work in special needs. I believe that there is something that sets them apart as they devote their energies and determination to furthering inclusion and equality. The professional approach that they apply is to be admired, and it strikes me that it is a calling for the dedicated few. I simply say to them: well done. Those of us who are in the Assembly, or, indeed, in any other elected forum, have a duty to ensure that we are ready to respond and to take those issues forward on their behalf, as, indeed, we are attempting to do today.

Young adults with special needs had been forgotten to some degree, and, indeed, they were sometimes ignored. I trust that, as a result of today's debate, that will change. Regrettably, there has been a failure of duty of care. Failure to protect and adequately provide for the vulnerable is discrimination and a gross breach of equality. I challenge anyone who would seek to dress up the situation in fancy language to detract from or smooth over

the situation. If you examine it closely, you will see that it cannot be done.

The Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People recently released a report, which I will quote directly from:

"Transitions to adult services for young people with learning disabilities have long been identified as a particular issue and there is a clear history of attempts to address the associated difficulties ... Nonetheless, young people with learning disabilities continue to encounter significant difficulties on transition from school".

It also states:

"Young people with learning disabilities and their families do not always receive appropriate information about the options and support available to them on leaving school. Nor is there a statutory obligation on a public body to take young people's views into account in decision making processes."

I think that it is important that young people's views are taken into account.

The commissioner also states that there are concerns that are centred on the lack of support for the young person with special needs who is attending a further education course. There is also a lack of genuine options and subsequent opportunities for progression when the course comes to an end. There are no specific statutory obligations to support those young people on transition into further education and from that into employment. In the context of employment, there is variation across Northern Ireland in supported employment opportunities, the availability of suitable work experience placements and the impacts of part-time working on social security benefits.

I am sure that Members will agree with me that we have a serious problem that needs to be urgently addressed. It seems that the matter has ever been with us. It was neglected under direct rule, so we have a duty to ensure that it is remedied under our watch. Indeed, I hope that Northern Ireland will take a leadership role on that and become a model of excellence for the rest of the United Kingdom and other regions. Research shows that we are trailing drastically behind the rest of Europe.

If one looks at section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act, which many in the House put a lot of emphasis on from time to time, one sees that there are nine identified key groups of persons who could be at risk of discrimination. One of them is a person with a disability. I will quote NI Direct, which states:

"Government departments, agencies and councils take into account Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act, which lists nine key groups that must be given consideration before any decisions are made."

On equality, it states:

"equality of opportunity' which means that everyone in society should be able to compete on equal terms. All government departments, agencies and councils must also give the nine key groups 'due regard' when creating a policy."

I am of the opinion that, when applying that test to providing for the requirements of 19-year-olds who have special needs, failure is, unfortunately, the only conclusion that I can come to.

Turning to my constituency of Fermanagh and South Tyrone and to Dungannon in particular, we see that there is a need there. If we compare ourselves with our nearest neighbours, whether in Armagh, Cookstown or Omagh, which appear to be functioning much better, we are left wondering why Dungannon is, as it appears to be, the poor relation in all that.

Therefore, it would be fair to say that a young person with special needs who leaves education at 19 in Dungannon, for example, is, to put it moderately, disadvantaged. I know that many others are experiencing similar circumstances.

Children with special needs attend the same school from the age of three until they are around 19. To attend one facility for the best part of 16 years represents a significant section of life spent in one environment. Having reached that stage, many people are facing a stark future.

Most people who are in and around 18 or 19 years of age are moving into further education, training or employment, marking an important stage in growing up and moving on. However, for some people with special needs, in many circumstances there is virtually nothing for them. That flies in the face of many directives.

Equality is much talked about in the House, as I said earlier. There is seldom a debate, whatever the motion might be, in which the word equality is not used at some time. A young person with special needs has exactly the same rights to access further education, training and suitable employment as anyone else.

Lifelong learning is a vastly promoted initiative, but there is only limited scope for young people with special needs, even though there is a statutory duty to provide equal provision to young adults with special needs. It is time for the Minister to take the appropriate action. He and his party are adamant that equality is a cornerstone of their strategy, so here is a prime opportunity to demonstrate their commitment.

As I said, section 75 lists people with disabilities as one of the nine groups that are likely to face discrimination and therefore should be among our main priorities to address. Having discussed these matters at length with parents, carers, teachers, support workers and — most importantly — young adults with special needs, I am aware that they face a continuing struggle to be accepted by society as equals.

When efforts are made to progress matters, there follows a flurry of paperwork and interminable meetings and discussions to decide whether there is an issue. That is followed by work on who will take the issue forward, seek funding and prepare case studies. Suddenly, time has passed and little has been done as the years fly by.

Many areas, Dungannon included, simply do not have time for that. The situation has been permitted to develop into a serious problem that needs to be addressed urgently. I am not satisfied that the Department is doing enough to fulfil its remit on young people with special needs. With the correct steering, all the young people could be supported to find out what they want to, and can, do.

Businesses must be encouraged to offer placements and, where possible, employ young people with special needs. Some radical thinking is needed to offer incentives to businesses to engage more young people with special needs. Further education colleges must open their doors —

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

Lord Morrow: Further education colleges must open their doors and welcome young adults with special needs to the concept of lifelong learning, just as they do for everyone else.

I would like to have said much more, but as you have reminded me, Mr Deputy Speaker, my time is up.

Mr Swann (The Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning): I am pleased to speak in this debate as Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning on behalf of the Committee. I thank the Members who tabled this timely motion.

The Committee has been considering the issue of post-19 special educational needs (SEN) provision in recent months and has been active in corresponding with Committees and Departments.

At its meeting on 16 January 2013, the Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Education requesting information on the current policy and future plans for post-19 SEN provision from the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL). At its meeting on 20 February, the Committee for Employment and Learning considered its response to that request, and members raised their concerns about the matter.

The Committee agreed that it was an important issue that merited its full consideration. It has agreed to write to the post-19 SEN provision lobby group to engage with it on the issues and to write to the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development, the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety and Disability Action for information and assistance.

At its meeting on 20 February, the Committee for Employment and Learning noted correspondence from the Committee for Education seeking information from DEL on its input into the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP). The Committee forwarded that correspondence to the Department and has noted with interest that DEL representatives sit on the transition to adulthood of children and young people with disabilities subgroup — a group that accepts that the current co-ordination of support and services for children and young people with disabilities is lacking.

Given the Committee's concern about these matters, it has agreed to look more closely at the issues involved. To that end, it has scheduled a briefing from the post-19 SEN lobby on 15 May and from the Department on the post-19 SEN provision for 2013. I thank Members for bringing this matter to the Committee.

1.45 pm

I speak now in my personal capacity as a member of the Ulster Unionist Party and as the party's employment and learning spokesperson. In Northern Ireland, there is an urgent need for the provision of educational opportunities for young people with severe learning difficulties and, indeed, those with profound and multiple learning

difficulties on leaving school at 19. From talking regularly to the parents of autistic young people, I can only conclude that more provision needs to be put in place to cater for special needs teenagers once they reach the age of 19. In supporting the motion, I call on the Minister for Employment and Learning to provide the opportunities and support necessary to ensure that young people leaving special needs schools at the ages of 16 and over 19 can further their education and aspire to meaningful employment.

For an individual to be able to embrace the transition from school to a post-school environment, a firm foundation must be built. In that regard, I warmly praise the work of special schools across the Province. In my North Antrim constituency for example, we have the excellent Castle Tower School in Ballymena. The dedication and passion of staff in such schools must be acknowledged, as must the volunteers who Lord Morrow referred to. I visited that school on Friday after an invitation was extended by the chair of its board of governors, Rev Dr Coulter, an individual well known to the House. One of the issues that he raised was the transition problem. It is most welcome that DEL sits on the transition subgroup for young people, because that is the problem that teachers and parents in that area highlighted most.

It is interesting to note — and Lord Morrow raised the point — that the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Young People highlighted that there are persistent failures in the available transition services. These are people, such as those afflicted by autism, who remain in a special school until they are 19 years of age. When they reach 19, they are not able to move on to further education or employment and are left in their parents' care. Their only outlet is to go to a day-care centre, if that option is even available.

There is something that the House can do, and it was highlighted to me during a recent visit to Stranmillis University College. In England, recent Government proposals will extend education assessment and legal protection from birth until age 25. As part of the UK, we should follow that lead. In September 2012, draft legislation on the reform of provision for children and young people with special educational needs was presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Education. It is hoped that that will form part of the Children and Families Bill to be introduced in early 2013. It will include a single assessment process from birth to age 25 that is more streamlined; involves children, young people and families more effectively; is completed quickly; and replaces the current statement with an education health and care plan that aims to bring services together and focuses on improving outcomes. Legal protection offered through the education health and care plan will be extended to young people over 16 in further education. I encourage the Minister to follow that avenue.

As has been said on a number of occasions, this is not a matter for one Department. The problem is surely one that cuts across Departments and must be tackled together with a team effort.

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

Mr Swann: Together, we can enhance the lives of those young people in need of our help so that each child can achieve their full potential. I support the motion.

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. I support the motion and thank Lord Morrow for bringing it forward. I recently attended a meeting in Sperrinview Special School, Dungannon. I, with others, listened to parents talk about their journey. There was a lot of tears and emotion. I take this opportunity to thank those parents for the courage that they showed in sharing their stories. I commend the parents on their continuous efforts to fight for equality and equal opportunities for their young people.

I also attended an event with the Barnardo's young people's participation project Don't Box Me In. That highlighted the issues that young people with disabilities experience when they move from childhood to adulthood. Those young people delivered a truly profound message that it is when they step out of that labelled box that their abilities begin to be recognised fully. One in five people in the North has a disability. Working With Diversity NI states that the figures are increasing and estimates that, each week, two babies are born with some form of learning disability. The labour force survey in the North found that 53.9% of people with a disability are economically inactive.

The Bamford monitoring group, reporting for the Patient and Client Council, produced the 'My Day, My Way' research paper, which investigated the views and experiences of people with learning disabilities and their parents or carers.

The paper states that choices beyond transition for people with learning disabilities do not really exist. It is simply a matter of fitting in with the available provision. Education courses are limited, and some people have spent several years in college repeating the same courses.

The report goes on to state that there are few opportunities to secure paid employment and that those people who are availing themselves of day opportunities are afraid to question access to placements for fear of not receiving any. Some are even fearful that, if they give up one day in the day centre to explore alternative activities, it may not be replaced if the alternative activities do not work out.

Other issues arising from research papers for people with disabilities flag up a lack of real or meaningful engagement with employers. Those with learning disabilities who had employment were employed on a voluntary basis. There was also the issue of entitlement to benefits and paid employment, which needs to be further delved into. Going into part-time employment would have a significant impact on entitlement to benefits. As everyone knows, employment has to be reasonably paid.

In a research paper by Julie Jamieson, it has been flagged up that the biggest fear for parents and carers is who will look after the children when they are gone. One of the key messages from the Julie Jamieson report is that ongoing stimulating and meaningful educational input into the lives of young people with severe learning disabilities is essential to their personal development and progress towards independence.

Recommendations from the Equal Lives report, in 2005, and the Bamford report have been recognised by health trusts. Recommendations have indicated the need for a wider use of a range of community-based opportunities, options for those with learning disabilities and a reduced reliance on the traditional adult day centre.

In the Children's Commissioner's report, it was stated that further education (FE) college provision differs from campus to campus. The Equal Lives report expressed concerns at the lack of available options after school and the lack of progression from FE provision, students not being able to gain accredited awards from their study, the lack of links with job training and work experience, and students repeating the same course.

The Bamford report identified that young people with learning disabilities across the five colleges indicated that they would like more choice in college, including the ability to choose courses for themselves. The Children's Commissioner, in her research, found that parents and children identified the lack of choice in FE as a real issue.

The Children's Commissioner also expressed concern about the educational opportunities available to young people with severe and profound learning disabilities. Most of those young people attend day centres, and, while there are a number of activities, they do not have an educational focus. Research shows that, while many young people aspire to have a job, opportunities for achieving full-time work are limited. The Children's Commissioner's report also showed that people with learning disabilities have raised concerns that they are expected to work for nothing or for considerably less than others.

I welcome the Access to Success strategy to widen participation in higher education, introduced by the Employment and Learning Minister.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the Member draw her remarks to a close, please.

Ms McGahan: Although the Minister has outlined a range of programmes to address the employment opportunities for young people with disabilities, it is important that there is engagement with young people, especially in my constituency.

Finally, I suggest to the Minister that we need to do a closer inspection of FE colleges to ensure that resources are properly utilised and directed —

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

Ms McGahan: — to students with severe learning disabilities to ensure that they get suitable jobs when they leave college.

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

Mr P Ramsey: I commend the Members who have brought this hugely important subject to the Floor.

I am chair of the all-party group on learning disability. It is a hugely important matter for so many across the community. Maurice spoke at the beginning about radical thinking. It is necessary to have very creative thinking outside the box. I am a member of the Employment and Learning Committee, which, as the Chair outlined, has had a not in education, employment or training (NEETs) inquiry. That clearly outlined the difficulties experienced by young people in trying to secure employment. Unfortunately, the greater likelihood is that those with special needs, particularly learning difficulties, are four times less likely to secure employment than other young people who have some form of education. I am trying to remember where I got that figure.

I note that the Minister has announced a new strategy today: a guide for parents for future career plans. That, clearly, is most welcome, and one wonders where it has been until now. I attended an event in Stormont last week in the Long Gallery with Positive Futures, prior to which we listened to a number of parents talk about their greatest worries as they grow older. Bronwyn hit it on the head. They are saying publicly that they want their child to die before they do. Their point is that, if they have the opportunity for employment, it helps to deliver greater independence for them going forward and helps them immensely. Unfortunately, those in our community who have learning disabilities are more disadvantaged and face greater obstacles. Minister, I say that deliberately to you. I strongly welcome the paper that you brought today. I have only seen the headlines, but certainly —

Ms S Ramsey: Will the Member give way?

Mr P Ramsey: I certainly will.

Ms S Ramsey: Lord Morrow is right to bring the debate, and it is important that a number of Ministers take responsibility for the issue, when you are talking about that transition period, including the likes of the Department for Regional Development (DRD) for transport. The Health Committee recently put forward a recommendation for a Minister and Department for children and young people. Do you think that this is an opportune time, when parties are now negotiating the Departments and Ministries, to send a message from the House and call for a Department for children and young people?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr P Ramsey: The mover of the motion made some very sincere comments on radical thinking. Even though we have devolved government in Northern Ireland, we are bad at collaborative work. There is not that important cross-departmental approach that takes place in Scotland and Wales, and there are lessons to be learned. During the NEETs inquiry, we did some study visits to Wales and Scotland and clearly identified better approaches to economic development, to young people in training and to employment need.

In my constituency, I deal on a daily basis with parents, guardians or kinship carers who find themselves in the position of looking after somebody in their community. It is the most worrying and distressing time when that person becomes 19 years of age and, in their opinion, they are abandoned by the state. They feel terribly let down, and there is nothing for them. There is no directed approach, and, in many instances — I say this to the Minister as well — in my constituency, parents have had to take the lead and try to secure employment or training for those people. Parents have had to take a lead in trying to get their youngster — it is always their wean — some placement, because, at the back of every parent's mind, they want to do their best for their child. Unfortunately, we have let down so many generations of young people in the past, who have been abandoned by the state.

I strongly believe that this is one of the most important matters that we could ever discuss, but it is also one of the most important subject matters to deal with in the most proactive way. I take Sue Ramsey's point. Somebody in the Executive should have the mandate to more meaningfully give hope to those parents who spoke in the Long Gallery in Stormont last week. Their child is the best

in the world and they love their child, but many a parent said at the meeting last week that they would prefer their child to die first. They said that because, if the child does not die and the parents grow older, they do not have the same strength or energy to look after the child, and if they pass on, will that child go into an institution?

It is about early intervention. It is important, Minister, that you are listening very closely to the debate and can give some hope to the many hundreds, if not thousands, in Northern Ireland whose children, unfortunately, have severe learning disabilities. It is an important matter for this House —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the Member draw his remarks to a close, please.

Mr P Ramsey: — but it is also important that, as a result of the debate today, the Minister, separate to the announcement that he has made — I certainly welcome careers for young people — comes through with other proposals.

2.00 pm

Mr Lyttle: I thank those who tabled the motion for bringing this to the House today. I do not always agree with the motions that Lord Morrow's party brings before the House, but this is certainly one to unite the House and focus all our minds on the challenges that are ahead.

Like other Members, I begin by paying tribute to all the parents, and the action groups that exist in the community, who are lobbying and working tirelessly, day and night, to get proper provision for people with learning disabilities on the agenda. I am thinking, for example, of the Equal Lives Action Group. As a member of the all-party group on learning disability, I know of the fantastic organisations that are involved with that group.

My party absolutely recognises and values every member of our community. In our recent document, 'For Everyone', we set out our vision for a truly shared society, where nowhere is out of bounds to anyone because of their creed, colour, gender, sexual orientation or disability. That applies not just to geographical locations but to ensuring that access to services and rights are fully available to all, guaranteeing that everyone has the same opportunity to contribute and participate fully in our community and is treated fairly and with respect.

There is some excellent work and provision for individuals with severe learning difficulties exiting special needs education at the age of 19. However, it is clear that a huge amount of work is still to be done. Indeed, the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People has set out persistent failures in the transitioning of young people with a learning disability into adulthood.

In my role as a member of the Employment and Learning Committee and MLA for East Belfast, I have seen at first hand much of the good work that is carried out. I am thinking of the work at the Edgcumbe centre and the Orchardville Society, and projects by the Big Lottery. The Department for Employment and Learning does, I know, provide advice and guidance for those leaving special education at the age of 19 who want to access higher and further education and technical training or to move into full-time employment. I look forward to hearing more about the services that are available to our young people today.

Numerous partnerships with providers have been established by the Department for Employment and Learning working alongside community sector organisations. Whilst all that is indeed positive work, there is much more that can be done on a collaborative, cross-departmental basis, as other Members have mentioned today.

I think that we need to see Departments working together to ensure the full implementation of the Executive's disability strategy, which was launched in February of this year. Within that disability strategy, the Executive are committed to transforming the process of transition to adulthood for young people with disabilities, and I sincerely hope that they will not be found wanting in that regard. I am sure that the Employment and Learning Minister will undertake that his Department works tirelessly to ensure that it happens. Today's debate is an extremely useful way of ensuring that the Assembly is fully aware of the challenges that young people with learning disabilities face, to ensure that we advocate on their behalf and hold the Executive to account for that action.

In closing, I again pay tribute to the many people carrying out work related to this issue and those who avail themselves of the services that they provide in order to be vital members of our community. It is important that we continue to ensure that every member of our community has the adequate resources that they need to achieve their full potential.

Mr Storey: At the outset, I commend my colleague Lord Morrow for securing the debate on an issue that all Members have said is of grave importance. I commend the Chair of the all-party working group for the work that it has done in relation to the issue. If there is one clarion call that needs to go out from the House today, it is around the issue of collaboration and joined-up thinking, which is probably little in evidence sometimes when it comes to how many of these things are put into practice.

As part of its ongoing consideration of related matters, the Education Committee received a briefing on the review of special educational needs provision. And hold onto your seats for this: that was back in June 2012. Snails move quicker, I think, than the Department of Education sometimes does.

Subsequently, we learned that the Education Minister had produced a draft Executive paper that proposes the extension of young people's statements of special educational needs to include further and higher education up to the age of 24. I welcome the Minister and thank him for being part of today's debate. If he is in possession of that information, will he update us on where that paper is at?

Like many in the House, I would expect that the proposal that was mentioned is designed to smooth the path for young people with special educational needs during their transition from post-primary school, thereby encouraging the uptake of further education and training. The Committee for Education further learned in January this year that further and higher education colleges and universities believe that special educational needs statements are not an accurate reflection of students' educational support needs post 19. Colleges and universities contended that existing arrangements or assessment procedures in further and higher education establishments were more appropriate for students with

SEN and were more reflective of the provision and support available to those students.

The Committee pursued, with other Departments, the issue of transition — the Chair of the Committee for Employment and Learning referred to that — and second-level education. As the House will be aware, the Health and Social Care Board established the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership, which has brought together a number of sectors with a view to improving outcomes for young people in Northern Ireland. The Department of Education contributes to that development through the draft action plan, which is out for consultation. The draft plan for the subgroup on transition to adulthood of young people with disabilities recommends, among other things, a passport linked to an individual integrated plan for disabled young people, the tracking of SEN students at school and beyond and the development of a cross-departmental commissioning process to ensure that all students have equal access to transition services.

I note that the draft action plan from the subgroup recommends taking forward a model for full-service schools, which is to enhance co-operation across agencies and sectors for SEN pupils as they progress through their education. Given that the Minister is present, it is the right place to ask him whether he will give a commitment to draw down funding from the European social fund, for example, to establish programmes across Northern Ireland that can then be allocated to the relevant agencies for the delivery of services for the category of young person that we are discussing and debating today. As was rightly said, society is judged on how it treats and cares for the vulnerable. I fear that, as a society, we are poorly judged when it comes to offering adequate support and provision for adults and young people who have special needs. I trust, therefore, that the issues that are raised in the debate will not just form part of another Hansard record but will be translated into meaningful and purposeful outcomes that will be to the benefit of our young people. I support the motion.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the motion being debated in the House today, and I commend and thank its sponsors for tabling what is a timely motion on a crucial issue on which we all want improvement. Many Members highlighted the problem, and I do not intend to repeat that. I will spend a few minutes focusing on possible solutions, and, to do that, it will be beneficial to stop and take a look at the programmes that are on offer for the people who are referred to in the motion, for those who are not in education, employment or training and, in particular, for those with a disability. It will be useful for the Minister to take the opportunity when he responds to the debate to provide clarity for all of us on what provision is actually on offer for those with special needs.

The Minister well knows some of my concerns about the proposed Steps to Work scheme and my fear that it will not help to get people back to work. All it will do is hand lucrative incentives to private firms to help people to get jobs that exist already. Such a scheme will not create any new jobs. As part of the Minister's response to the debate, I would like to hear what consideration has been given to implementing a community employment-led scheme, which could have at its heart a major emphasis on getting jobs for people with special needs and getting people

who have a disability or a special need into meaningful employment instead of simply proceeding with the Steps to Work scheme based on the Work Programme in England. Copying what has been done in other areas has failed abysmally and simply got people menial jobs carrying out menial roles. There is no chance of career progression and little sense of accomplishment in such roles. Many are employed for only 16 hours per week and are completely underemployed. We should look at something a lot more sustainable. There should be a community employment-led scheme for people who have special needs. They would be doing something that makes them feel good about themselves and carrying out roles that are much needed in many communities to drive up community development. That would be much more sustainable and a far better approach than some of the alternatives currently on offer.

I take the opportunity to ask the Minister to provide clarity on what programmes are available. There is a wide range. As we have heard in previous debates, there is little understanding among members of the Committee for Employment and Learning of what exactly is on offer, so how someone looking for an opportunity is supposed to figure it out, I do not know. It is my view that the programmes are too complicated and there are far too many of them. It is far too hard for people to get on to the right programme, so I ask the Minister to provide clarity when responding to the debate.

Mr Douglas: I support the motion and pay tribute to my colleagues Lord Morrow and Peter Weir for bringing this important issue before the House.

Two weeks ago tomorrow, the Minister made a statement on economic inactivity, in which he said:

"there are many people with work-limiting conditions who, with the right support, may be able to participate. The results have suggested that interventions should focus on those individuals".

That day, the Minister was asked what he intended to do to change the current situation of young people with special needs leaving education at 19-plus and how he would ensure that they are valued, as indeed they are. He replied that such persons are "very much valued" and agreed:

"they have the potential to make a contribution to the world of work and that it is important that we provide them with support".

He said that his Department would have to pick up on that as part of this strategy and recognised it as an issue that must be addressed. I welcome that response and thank the Minister for it.

The figures on the employment and unemployment of these young people should alarm us. Unfortunately, as my colleague said, as a society, we have failed in our duty to provide enough employment for people with a disability. We have not done and are not doing enough to provide them with opportunities, training and employment. The current situation has further compounded these problems, and serious action must be taken. Think of the growing levels of unemployment among young people: how much more difficult is it for a young person with a special needs education to access a training opportunity or, more importantly, a job?

I acknowledge that the Minister and his Department have taken action to attempt to redress that unfair imbalance, but a major issue is how the schemes are promoted and advertised by the Department. That must be looked into, and I ask the Minister to do that. For example, many young people suffering from a disability need information on how they can access services and help from us in the Assembly. Unfortunately, my research shows that it is not always readily available. When young people with disabilities leave education, clear guidance and advice must be available to help them choose whether to continue with education or to move into employment. I ask the Minister to look at that issue and to change it.

2.15 pm

Like a number of my colleagues, I pay tribute to the excellent work of the community and voluntary sector, which provides excellent services, often on a shoestring budget. Helping Hands, the autism support group, brought hundreds of people to Stormont recently for a day out.

Members said that young people with learning disabilities have difficulty getting into training and employment. That is a big fear for those families, and I support any initiative that supports young people aged 19-plus.

Like my colleague Chris Lyttle, I will highlight the Orchardville Society in east Belfast. That organisation is a model of excellence. It highlights clear examples of best practice and sets a high benchmark that we should follow. It provides people with a disability with an excellent support network, employment opportunities and the ability to build on skills and to obtain qualifications. It also gives them a sense of independence, which is key.

I will also mention the NOW project, which had a cook-off in the Assembly in 2011. Young people with special educational needs got together and provided top-class food, and I think that some of us here would certainly agree with that. They did an excellent job. The support that they get from the Department and from the private sector is very encouraging, so that is another model that we should look at.

Mr Kinahan: I welcome the chance to speak on the topic, and I commend the Members who tabled the motion.

Although I am not a member of the Employment and Learning Committee, I have dealt with the issue frequently through the education portfolio and recognise some of the difficulties that parents and those with severe learning difficulties face. I have also raised the matter in the Education Committee on two occasions after especially good presentations from post-19 young people from Hill Croft School.

I have always believed that, regardless of their individual circumstances, every child should have an education that meets the full range of needs. That must be balanced with an appreciation that formal education, in the classic sense of a classroom and teacher, will eventually come to an end, as it does for everyone. For many, the end of school comes abruptly. In its review of transition, NICCY highlighted persistent failures and called for the need to improve transition planning urgently.

The current structures cannot be considered anywhere near sufficient or fair, despite much good work by various Departments. I understand that, for many young people

with a condition such as autism, routine is paramount. The current situation of being an integral part of the school community one day and suddenly finding that your formal education has finished the next is unacceptable. Making the transition from post-primary education is difficult enough for most young people, never mind those who have moderate or severe learning difficulties. It is absolutely essential that we have sufficient opportunities for further and higher education provision for people with severe learning difficulties. I support the motion's call for increased numbers of support staff to make that a reality.

It would be remiss of me not to mention, as others have, Parkanaur residential vocational training college. It runs courses in business administration, catering, upholstery and horticulture. DEL funds 10 places annually. Are 10 places enough? Although it is to be welcomed, perhaps the Minister can update the House on the possibility of extending the funding for this worthwhile project.

My party also supports the continued expansion post-19 of the key treatments of behavioural therapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy and sensory therapy. That proves the importance of the Department of Health in the debate. As we have heard from many, a cross-departmental approach is fundamental. The Department for Employment and Learning has an occupational psychology service, among other initiatives, and those should be built on and developed. To that end, I would like to hear what engagement there has been between the Health Minister and the Employment and Learning Minister, how it is taking place and what they are putting in place to provide best services for those with learning difficulties.

Also relevant to today's debate — something that I have had concerns about in the past — is the provision of suitable respite for 19-year-olds. It is deeply regrettable that, when young people with a life-limiting condition leave school, they can sometimes effectively become confined to the house. Unfortunately, the provision of day centres is disparate across Northern Ireland, so I urge the trusts to identify and address any specific areas lacking in provision. That needs to be done now. We should also look at analysing the pressures that that puts on families and what needs to be done to remove those pressures.

It is also worth remembering that a period of respite is beneficial to more than just the young person in receipt of it. Families and carers welcome the opportunity for a short break in which their attention can be given to other things, safe in the knowledge that their loved one is being well looked after. I know from talking to many parents of children with severe disabilities that they value the respite that a school day provides. When young people reach the age at which they are coming to the end of their education, that often entails significant changes at home.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the Member draw his remarks to a close, please?

Mr Kinahan: To echo Pat Ramsey's passionate speech, I say that there is a need to look after those children so that the parents know what will happen to them when they are long gone.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question Time commences at 2.30 pm, so there is insufficient time for the Minister to respond to the debate between now and then. The debate will resume after the ministerial statement on local government

reform. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.30 pm.

The debate stood suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 2.22 pm and resumed at 2.30 pm.

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

Oral Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Magdalene Laundries

1. **Ms McCorley** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what actions they are considering in regard to those who were in the Magdalene laundries. (AQO 3819/11-15)

Mr P Robinson (The First Minister): Mr Deputy Speaker, with your permission, I will ask junior Minister Jonathan Bell to answer the question.

Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): We are mindful of the pain suffered by many individuals who were resident in the Magdalene laundry-type institutions here. We sympathise greatly with the plight of all who have experienced abuse. Anyone with any information on any abuse of any kind should report it to the PSNI and to social services for investigation. Anyone who was resident here in the Magdalene laundries or similar institutions as a child between 1922 and 1995 can go forward to the inquiry into historical institutional abuse to relate their experiences. They will be able to talk in private about their experiences to two members of the inquiry's acknowledgement forum. Contact details for the inquiry are available on its website.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagra. I thank the Minister for his answer. As we all know, some abuse victims were moved between the Twenty-six Counties and the Six Counties. In light of that, has consideration been given to how we can assist the children from the Bethany homes who were separated from their families and moved to the Six Counties?

Mr Bell: In respect of what we are looking at within Northern Ireland, we are aware of and we are deeply upset by the great pain that was suffered by those who resided in Bethany House, the Westbank home and similar institutions in the Republic of Ireland. In the past, the movement of children between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland was neither regulated nor recorded. Consequently, identifying children from Northern Ireland who had any linkage to institutions that are located in the Republic of Ireland would be very difficult. As those institutions are not within the jurisdiction of the Northern Ireland Assembly, allegations against them cannot be investigated here. Any such investigation would be a matter for the Irish Government. Where there are allegations of abuse within our jurisdiction, as I said, we encourage their being brought at once to the attention of the Police Service of Northern Ireland. We will engage further with colleagues in the Republic of Ireland, as appropriate, on the issue of the institutions that are within their jurisdiction.

Ms Brown: I thank the junior Minister for his answers so far. Will the junior Minister outline how many people have come forward to the inquiry to date?

Mr Bell: The inquiry and investigation are independent of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. However, I know that the work has been continuing, and many people have already been to see the acknowledgement forum and have had the opportunity to tell their experiences. In addition, I understand that 240 people have come forward to the inquiry with complaints, and they are being addressed and looked at to identify locations and systematic or systemic similarities.

Mr McDevitt: I note and welcome the Minister's statement that young women under the age of 18 who were in Magdalene homes will fall under the terms of the inquiry that is under way. However, can the Minister give the House an assurance that the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister will take steps urgently to scope out the extent to which the needs of women over the age of 18 may need to be addressed because they spent time in Magdalene institutions in this jurisdiction? Will he remain open-minded about the potential need for a future inquiry into their circumstances?

Mr Bell: As I said, the First Minister and deputy First Minister have agreed to ask an official in the Department to look at the issue and to present them with options. I understand that, as you pointed out in your question, many of those who were in the institutions are going to be covered by the current inquiry as they were minors at that time. We are conscious that there is a group, as you mentioned, that may not or will not be covered. That is why we have asked the official to take an initial look into the issue and to bring forward advice and options. We will be open-minded until we receive that report.

Mr Kinahan: Can the Minister outline the support that has been given to the victims of abuse who fall outside the remit of the recently established historical abuse inquiry? What effort is being made to offer them an inquiry?

Mr Bell: First of all, we need to be clear that anyone who has suffered any form of abuse the nature of which is a criminal act is entitled to an investigation by the Police Service of Northern Ireland and social services. Not only is that the legal position; it is the position that we encourage everyone to adopt. For those who are not included in the current process, the first point of contact is normally through a general practitioner or social services. A range of counselling organisations across Northern Ireland provide services to people who have been the victim of sexual and other forms of abuse. I encourage anybody who has suffered abuse at any time in their life to report that abuse, not only for themselves but so that there is an investigation of the alleged perpetrator in order to ensure that there is no recidivism, particularly where there was abuse of children.

Community Relations

2. **Mr Sheehan** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline their Department's spend on community relations projects over the last five years. (AQO 3820/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: Over the past five years, OFMDFM has allocated over £44 million to fund community relations work. That represents an increase of over 20% since

2008-09 and a much more significant increase from pre-devolution provision. The funding is complementary to the significant funds also being supplied under Peace III and other funds, such as the International Fund for Ireland. Over the past two decades, nearly £3 billion has been spent on good relations work through government and international funds. That funding has supported thousands of projects and helps to fund hundreds of workers to engage in building better community relations and reconciliation in Northern Ireland. The significant level of funding reflects our continued commitment to work towards our vision of a shared and united community.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chéad-Aire as an fhreagra sin. I thank the First Minister for his answer. Can he outline any next steps in the development of a community relations strategy?

Mr P Robinson: A significant amount of work was done by the all-party group until, of course, some of its participants decided to leave. The remaining members completed a report that has been passed to us. It left three outstanding areas of activity that needed to be resolved. They involved flags, parades and the past. On the other issues, there was a high level of consensus among political parties. Sometimes, I get bemused when I listen to and read some of the reports on the cohesion, sharing and integration (CSI) strategy. You would think that we were operating without a strategy at present. Of course, we still operate under the shared future strategy. However, now that officials have seen the high level of agreed and united approach to a range of issues, our present funding and other efforts are based not only on the shared future strategy, which, in my view, needs to be replaced urgently, but on the more updated views of political parties in Northern Ireland. I hope that we will be able to reach agreement on those outstanding issues so that the report can be published. Indeed, I think that it is fairly well known that I would be happy to publish it in its present form. Clearly, it will be published when the outstanding issues have been agreed, to whatever level of agreement is possible.

Mr Lyttle: Is the First Minister willing to clarify what exactly is causing the delay in publishing the report, given his desire to see it published?

Mr P Robinson: Of course, the Member is one of those who went AWOL during the discussions. When the hard work was being done to reach consensus on these matters, the so-called consensus party took stage left. I personally want to see the report published, but other political parties take the view that we should await the resolution of outstanding issues. It is only the resolution of those three areas that requires to be completed before the report can be published.

Mr Hamilton: If the First Minister were to listen to some commentators and, indeed, some in the House, he might believe two things: first, that there is no work going on on good relations in Northern Ireland and, secondly, that, if we only had a new strategy, all of Northern Ireland's ills would somehow be solved overnight. Will the First Minister outline for the House what impact the absence of a new strategy is having on good relations in Northern Ireland?

Mr P Robinson: The Member is right. I think that too much importance is perhaps attached to the agreement of a strategy. We want to have that and will continue to work on

the existing strategy, but that has not stopped us spending £3 billion of public funds to assist the work of good relations in Northern Ireland, nor does it stop the hundreds of people up and down the country who work day and daily to improve community relations in Northern Ireland. It will also not stop the deputy First Minister and me leapfrogging the difficulties that we are having with the CSI strategy to come forward with continued action plans. That is really what is important, rather than the strategy: points for action that can be taken to improve good relations.

Economy: Corporation Tax and Financial Assistance

3. **Mr Easton** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on any discussions with the Prime Minister on corporation tax. (AQO 3821/11-15)

8. **Mr Nesbitt** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on discussions with the UK Government on an additional financial package to boost the economy. (AQO 3826/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I would like to take questions 3 and 8 together.

We met the Prime Minister, David Cameron, on 26 March to discuss the devolution of corporation tax powers to the Executive. The Prime Minister indicated that no decision would be made until autumn 2014. You will already be aware of our considerable disappointment that a decision on the devolution of the powers has now been deferred. We briefed the Executive on our discussions at their meeting on 28 March, and our disappointment was reiterated and shared by every member of the Executive. This was not unexpected, but it is regrettable and will delay our efforts to rebalance the local economy.

Our meeting with the Prime Minister was adjourned so that consideration could be given to an economic package for Northern Ireland. The aim of the package is to assist our economy by encouraging private sector growth. We are presently working with the United Kingdom Government on the details of that economic package, which will use the economic levers open to the Northern Ireland Executive and the UK Government respectively. We hope to be able to resume our meeting with the Prime Minister and agree a formal package in the coming weeks.

Mr Easton: I thank the First Minister for his answer. Will he explain why the meeting with the Prime Minister was adjourned in light of the fact that the Secretary of State put forward a set of recommendations and indicated that a decision on corporation tax was due by autumn 2014?

Mr P Robinson: The Secretary of State went on radio and announced a number of the issues that we were discussing in relation to the economic package. The deputy First Minister and I also have views on what should be in that economic package, so we want to have an ongoing discussion with them to try to improve the overall package. It comes very much by way of the kind of city deals that were completed between cities in GB and the United Kingdom Government. Clearly, if that were to occur in Northern Ireland, it would be on a much larger scale.

As for the announcement that they would take a decision by autumn 2014, we want to be absolutely clear that not only will that decision be taken but it will be capable of

being implemented and legislated for before the end of that parliamentary term. Further work was being done on that.

2.45 pm

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the First Minister for his answer. As he said, the Secretary of State has been heard on radio on several occasions talking about elements of the financial package, including enterprise zones. Does the First Minister have a view on whether a zonal or sectoral approach would be best suited to providing a plan B for rebalancing the economy?

Mr P Robinson: As far as plan B is concerned, we are operating on plan A. We are looking for plan A+ so that we can attach corporation tax-setting powers to it. When we talk about the lack of enterprise zones, I am never quite clear whether people believe that the whole of Northern Ireland should be an enterprise zone. I am up for that kind of proposition. I become concerned when people are looking for enterprise zones in Northern Ireland because, in my experience, they displace business from one area to another and often provide for unfair competition between businesses.

However, as an Executive, we are taking forward a number of proposals that were announced in our Programme for Government. At the same time, we have other proposals that can be taken forward only by Her Majesty's Government, and we will encourage them to take some of those on board. I hope that we will reach agreement with the Government on the overall package around the end of April or the beginning of May.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I agree that the message from the British Government is that the only way to get corporation tax powers is by going for independence, and that applies to Scotland as much as it does to here. Does the First Minister really believe that the British Government intend to transfer corporation tax after the Scottish referendum?

Mr P Robinson: I fear that if the Government are not prepared to give the levers of setting corporation tax to Northern Ireland when they have explicitly and publicly indicated that there is a special case, they give a message to the people of Scotland that the only way to have greater fiscal autonomy is by way of separation. As a unionist, I think that that is a wrong message for the Government to give.

As to the second part of the Member's question about whether I believe that they will do it, all I can say is that if they do what they said they would do during the election, they will do it. If they do what they have indicated they believe is right, they will do it. If they do what they tell us they would like to do, except for some difficulty within the coalition and with the Treasury, they will do it.

I believe that there is a justifiable, moral, economic and political case to be made for tax-setting powers to be devolved to Northern Ireland. I believe that we have a special case and that they should take that decision straight away; they do not need to concern themselves about the issues with Scotland. If, however, they are leaving it until autumn 2014, I want to be sure that, if a positive decision is taken, it is capable of being implemented during this parliamentary term. If not, I rather suspect that it will not be implemented at all.

Dr McDonnell: I thank the First Minister for his answers so far. There is huge disappointment over the intransigence on the devolution of corporation tax. The First Minister mentioned that there are some ideas on a package. Does that package amount to a plan B? Will he share some of the ideas that might provide a stimulus to our local economy?

Mr P Robinson: We do not know what the final economic package will look like. As I looked over some of the issues that were being proposed, I thought that some of them must have been put forward with a slightly tongue-in-cheek attitude. Some of the issues relating to Europe were matters that the deputy First Minister and I went to Europe to fight for. When we were there, our standing in Europe was probably slightly better than the Prime Minister's because of certain remarks he had made. Some of them were not new proposals; some were already being processed.

As far as a plan B is concerned, the Executive, perhaps more than any other part of the United Kingdom, have been capable of bringing forward proposals to stimulate our economy as far as it can be in our present circumstances. That is evidenced by the fact that we have been able to get more jobs into Northern Ireland than ever before and that we are doing better at that than anywhere else.

The key fault lines in the Northern Ireland economy are down to the size of the private sector vis-à-vis the public sector and our ability to achieve export-led growth. Those are the key factors. Having corporation tax-setting powers would be a step change. You can do whatever you like around the periphery, but it would be a very slow, long process because, traditionally, Northern Ireland has always been slower than any other part of the United Kingdom to come out of a recession or economic downturn of one form or another. It will be a very slow pace of improvement for Northern Ireland if we are to rely on whatever the Member describes as plan B. The only way for us to significantly change direction —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Minister's time is up.

Mr P Robinson: — is to have corporation tax-setting powers. We have seen evidence of how the Irish Republic is capable of turning round the downturn in its economy. It has been doing so by bringing in, because of the low level of corporation tax in the South, very significant jobs.

Economic Growth

4. **Miss M McIlveen** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what measures are being taken across the Executive to drive forward economic growth. (AQO 3822/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: The Executive have taken the important step of making the economy a top priority in their Programme for Government. We are committed to growing a sustainable economy and investing in the future. We want to achieve long-term economic growth by improving competitiveness and building a larger and more export-driven private sector. To do that, we must rebuild the labour market and rebalance the economy to improve the wealth and living standards of everyone.

Our Programme for Government sets out the main actions: we are committed to increasing the number of jobs; increasing the value of exports; supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs); increasing research

and development; providing rate relief; eliminating air passenger duty (APD) on direct long-haul flights; investing in social enterprise growth; supporting creative industries; regenerating former military sites; supporting business; improving skills; attracting tourism; increasing the uptake of science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) subjects; and implementing a strategy to address economic inactivity.

Miss M McIlveen: I thank the First Minister for his response. Further to that, will he outline the economic impact that the development at the Maze and Balmoral Park will have for Northern Ireland, particularly the location of that site and the potential for the construction industry?

Mr P Robinson: You press a button when you raise the issue of the Maze because I have heard such a lot of claptrap over the past week on the subject. I have heard people who recommended and approved the location of the Maze for a peace and conflict resolution centre saying that it is the wrong place to have it, yet the Ulster Unionist Party proposed it. I am sure, Mr Deputy Speaker, that you will not allow me to go down that road any further.

Suffice it to say that there is a series of elements to what will go on site at the Maze. There is the peace and conflict resolution centre, and I hope that its construction will start soon. Work is going forward with the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society, which has a fantastic and imaginative proposal for the future. There is a massive amount of work to be done in the economic development of the site. I think that the Maze board is looking to get a development partner for that.

At the end of all that, we will have probably one of the largest and most important construction sites in the whole of the British Isles. We hope to have not only construction jobs but about 5,000 people employed on that site. It is a massive regeneration opportunity. As one of those who have had the opportunity to speak to people who want to develop on that site, I can tell you that there is massive global interest in its potential. Its location is such that it is a prime and attractive site. I believe that it can provide jobs and economic growth for our region as a whole.

Mr Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the First Minister for his response, and I very much welcome his outlining the range of measures that the Executive have adopted across the board. Although the First Minister has referred to some of this previously, does he agree that, if we have the necessary tools, fiscal and otherwise, we could be so much more successful?

Mr P Robinson: I think that the one thing that Northern Ireland has consistently shown throughout the years is that there is a high level of ingenuity in the Province. That is why so many companies come here for research and development.

This is an attractive place to come to. We have a population that is much younger than you will find almost anywhere else in Europe. In cost terms, we are very competitive, but I would not use the word "cheap". We also have a first-class telecommunications link with the rest of the world, particularly to the United States and Europe, which makes us very popular as a base for IT companies. We have a high level of education, with a GCSE-level pass rate that is some 10% higher than elsewhere in the United Kingdom. We also have two very good universities, with

the Ulster University winning awards across the world, and Queen's University being a part of the Russell Group, which is the Ivy League of universities. So, we have all the ingredients that make this an attractive place to come to.

As I indicated in an answer to an earlier question, we have been successful in bringing more jobs here than at any time in our history, and, outside of London, we are the most popular area in the United Kingdom for each person in the population and for the size of location. That gives us a good start. If we add to that the potential to set our own level of corporation tax, I believe that we would be unbeatable.

Mr Byrne: I thank the First Minister for his answers so far and for his reference to the construction industry. Will he reaffirm the Executive's commitment to the A5 road project, given the importance that that project would have to north-west development and to the construction industry? Does the First Minister agree that the uncertainty is causing deep concern to many people who are involved, including those in the farming community and the construction industry and to others who are associated with the project?

Mr P Robinson: Mr Deputy Speaker, I can see that you are allowing the question to be stretched a little. In their entirety, the Executive were disappointed at the court's decision. I do not blame the courts, as they will act according to the law as it stands, but, as an aside, let me say that we need to look at ways of reducing the courts' interference in what are political decisions.

There is a commitment on the part of the Executive to the A5 project. However, it is very clear that no matter what route we might take — that is not intended to be a pun — it will take a year to 18 months before work can really start on that site. If that is the case, the funds that were allocated to the project for its existing time frame would have to be reallocated. However, there is a commitment on the part of the Executive to proceed with the A5 project as soon as those issues are cleared and out of the way.

Gordon Gallagher

5. **Mr Allister** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether their Department has given all possible help to the Gallagher family from Londonderry in their humanitarian quest to identify the murderer of their nine-year-old son, Gordon. (AQO 3823/11-15)

Mr Allister: I trust that the supplementary question has not been talked out.

Mr P Robinson: Mr Deputy Speaker, you and I have no control over how long people take to ask and answer questions; that depends on the complexity of the questions that are asked.

The Gallagher family has not sought help from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. However, I assure the Member that I am willing to provide the family with all available help and assistance. I sympathise fully with the Gallagher family and can only imagine the tremendous suffering and pain that they have endured. I call on anyone with any information regarding the murder of their son to come forward and give it to the PSNI.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. There is no time for a supplementary question. *[Interruption.]* Time is up, and we must move on.

3.00 pm

Environment

Councils: Capacity Building and Training

1. **Mr G Kelly** asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the plans to develop future capacity building and training for new councillors and council officers. (AQO 3834/11-15)

6. **Mr Craig** asked the Minister of the Environment what resources and training provision he is putting in place for the handover of planning powers to councils. (AQO 3839/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): I thank the Member for his question. It is particularly important because, although there have been many examples of councils merging in other jurisdictions, there are not so many examples where, at the time of merger, additional powers have been transferred.

The multiple challenges of the review of public administration (RPA) are quite evident, and we must build councillor and management capacity to deal with that level of change. That is why I am glad that, a couple of months ago, the Executive allocated £3 million of their £48 million RPA budget allocation to capacity-building and training. That is why the Department, working with Community Places and the chief executive of Ballymena Borough Council, is scoping out what needs to be done to develop councillor and management capacity and training in the run-up to RPA to ensure that, when it happens, it is done right and ratepayers are not disappointed.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Minister, I understood that you were to group questions 1 and 6 for answer. Is that your intention?

Mr Attwood: It is, yes. I am sorry.

Mr G Kelly: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chéad-Aire as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for his answer. He touched on some of the issues. Obviously, we are dealing in the most part with bigger councils and a bigger burden of work on councillors, especially, as he pointed out, with issues such as responsibility for planning being moved to councils. Will the local councils themselves be involved in the design of capacity-building?

Mr Attwood: Very much so. As I said in my initial answer, the chief executive of one of our councils is leading the group that is scoping out what level of councillor and management training will be required, bedding the project very much into the life of councils, and also into the life of communities. That is why my officials will be working with Community Places, the community-based planning organisation, to ensure that citizens, communities, councillors and management are fully aware of the scale of the new responsibilities, not least when it comes to planning decisions, community planning and development plans.

Mr Craig: I thank the Minister for the information that he has provided. Particularly as there will be newly elected members on the new councils, will part of the training cover clear responsibilities around planning issues? Until this point, councillors have really been lobbyists on planning issues. In future, Minister, you are making them decision-makers. There is a clear conflict of interest between the two responsibilities.

Mr Attwood: I may be making them decision-makers, but the entire Executive are making them take on that responsibility. However, the point is a good one. As I have said many times in the Chamber and elsewhere, if you speak to the Scottish planning Minister, John Swinney, he will tell you that, in Scotland, there are councils with planning functions that understand what it is to be a planning authority, and there are other councils that continue to play a lobbying role. That is an important role — I do not diminish it — but there is a material difference between being a lobbyist and a decision-maker.

When it comes to making decisions, let councils understand that, although we will give them power and build their capacity, they will have to conduct themselves entirely properly. That is why the draft local government reorganisation Bill, which is circulating among Executive colleagues, provides for a regime of ethical standards and appeals from citizens against what a council might do. That is to ensure, whether in planning or any other transferred function, councillors conduct themselves ethically and properly.

Ms Lo: The Environment Committee has recently been looking at the training budget for local councils. It appears that most of the money is for council staff, probably quite rightly and for valid reasons. Is a proportion of the £3 million that has been put aside for capacity-building earmarked for councillor training?

Mr Attwood: I await the advice of the group chaired by the chief executive of Ballymena. The members of that group are the people who are scoping out the issue; but you can rest assured that I anticipate that that budget will be allocated for dedicated councillor, dedicated management and dedicated joint councillor and management training. I think it will cover all bases. If it does not, then, on the far side of 2015, the quality and service of what councillors and managers deliver to local citizens will not be what they hope for.

Mrs D Kelly: Given the importance of audit in ensuring that there is fairness throughout all local government decision-making and the perception of fairness, will the Minister strengthen the powers of the local government auditor and ensure that the role and function of local councillors as scrutineers is strengthened in the capacity-building training?

Mr Attwood: I think there are many ways to skin that particular cat. That is why in the local government Bill there is going to be a number of checks, balances and requirements placed on councillors and councils in order to live up to best practice and proper standards, be it the ethical standards that fall to councillors, the requirements of proportionality when it comes to the appointment of people to various posts within and outside councils or when it comes to performance standards within the conduct of councils themselves. There will be multiple models, allied with the existing powers of the local

government auditor, so that, by law and practice, councils will be measured and judged, and will judge themselves, against the best standards.

Planning Policy Statement 21: Newbuilds

2. **Mr Clarke** asked the Minister of the Environment whether he has any plans to relax the requirement to group newbuilds within a cluster of existing farm buildings under PPS 21. (AQO 3835/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his question and record that he has raised this particular matter on a number of occasions. As the Member knows, an operational review has been ongoing in respect of PPS 21. That review was deliberately in real time and real life in order to ensure that PPS 21 was being rolled out properly. The consequence of that is that although public representatives will make many points to Ministers, the operation of PPS 21 over recent months has not been the subject of great correspondence. Given the training that was rolled out in respect of PPS 21 and the peer review that is ongoing in respect of hard cases, whereby senior management review decisions are taken by local planning authorities, and so on and so forth, I think that PPS 21 is in a better place this year compared to two years ago.

However, when I come to the Chamber before recess in respect of the operation of PPS 21, I will outline where proper interpretation and flexibility of PPS 21 will be applied in respect of new dwellings in existing clusters, replacement dwellings, conversion and reuse of existing buildings, ribbon development and the point touched on by the Member in his question.

Mr Clarke: I think I thank the Minister for his response. I am somewhat unsure about what he just said. I welcome his foresight in looking at the issue, but, although it has no direct response to the problems as such, most people working within the parameters of the policy see the problem as being in the clause itself, whereby people are being forced to cluster. It is for that reason that I am asking the Minister whether he has any intention of relaxing that to make it more appropriate for someone to build a house, and not necessarily forcing them beside existing buildings.

Mr Attwood: As I indicated, there has not been a litany of correspondence or representations from MLAs or other local representatives in recent times that the policy is doing violence to what people would like to see as the outcome of PPS 21 and CTY in particular. That is why, in my view, the Planning Service, when it comes to the application of CTY10, and, in particular, where there may be exceptional circumstances for alternative sites, has been demonstrating some level of greater flexibility.

If the Member or Members have further examples that indicate that that is not the case, I will look at them, as the Member knows I have done previously with cases that he has referred to me.

When I come back to the Chamber, as I indicated, I will comment on new dwellings, replacement dwellings, conversion and re-use of buildings, ribbon developments and the matter that was touched on by the Member, which will, I think, give some further reassurance if that is required.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle, agus gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a fhreagra. I thank the Minister for his answer.

I want to bring the Minister on to the issue of non-farm rural dwellers. I know that he said that he has not received correspondence, but we are putting it on the table now. I welcome the question being asked today, because we need to come back to it. I welcome the mention of ribbon developments. However, it is about time that we introduced —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the Member get to the question, please.

Mr Boylan: The question is coming, Mr Deputy Speaker. Will the Minister introduce criteria that will address the needs of non-farming rural dwellers who are not getting opportunities to make an application in the countryside? That is something that has not been brought forward in PPS 21.

Mr Attwood: At one level, I have to warn myself and caution the House. Members know the history of PPS 21; they know about the toing and froing around it and how it was eventually brought forward by the planning Minister but was subject to consideration by an Executive subcommittee.

I am expressing caution because if I moved beyond what is in PPS 21 — if anyone might suggest that — and its proper interpretation, given the controversial history of this particular planning policy statement, sooner or later, somewhere or other, I would be in court on the wrong side of a court judgement. So, let us have a little caution, given the history of all this.

When I come back to the House in respect of the operational review, and when we outline how the training was rolled out and how it was very rigorous in its interpretation of PPS 21, including for non-farm rural dwellers, whilst there will be hard cases and there will be times and places when you cannot tell people what they want to hear because it would be beyond the competence of the policy, I think that people will conclude that the policy, subject to those further flexibilities, will be fit for purpose.

Mr Gardiner: Has the Minister issued any guidance to planning officers on allowing flexibility on this issue of policy, and will any such guidance be shared with the House?

Mr Attwood: Yes, policy guidance has been issued. I will give the Member one example for the purposes of this Question Time. Guidance was issued in respect of what constitutes an active farm and on how to interpret clustering, especially in the context of health and safety issues. In that way, in my view, that is why we do not have a narrative of many people raising many cases about the interpretation of PPS 21 today, compared with previous days.

Councils: Senior Officers

3. **Ms Fearon** asked the Minister of the Environment to outline how senior officers will be appointed to the 11 new councils. (AQO 3836/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for her question. I am awaiting some legal advice on the matter that is touched on in the question. The reason is because it is my view that, in going forward, when it comes to the appointment of senior officers in the 11 new councils, there should, as fully as is possible, be open competition. That is the standard against which I think the reform programme should be judged.

That being my ambition, I hope that the legal advice will confirm that that is a legally proper and justified approach. In my view, it would be healthy that, as we go through this reform programme, given the number of councils that we are now going to have and the scale of the new responsibilities, there should be greater opportunity for senior posts to be appointed by way of open competition.

3.15 pm

Ms Fearon: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for his answer. By way of clarification, is there any timescale in mind? When does he envisage any of the appointments taking place?

Mr Attwood: When the voluntary transition committees become statutory — the regulations in that regard will be tabled in the Chamber shortly — one of their powers will be the power of appointment of senior officers. Once the voluntary becomes statutory, they will have the legal authority to proceed, if they are so minded — I will certainly encourage them so to do — to create certainty about the council leadership and the management side. Therefore, I would like appointments processes to be rolled out in this financial year. If I am right that the law allows open competition for those posts, I hope that open competition arises in the course of the next year.

Mr Spratt: I welcome the Minister's comments on this subject so far. Certain chief executives are already making threats that, if chief executives are not put into post in the 11 councils, they will take legal action. It seems to me that it should be open to competition. I think that the Minister has confirmed that that will be the case. Given that there will be some very good candidates who run major organisations outside local government, it should be open to those outside local government to apply for these major posts.

Mr Attwood: There will also be very good candidates in local councils who could run local government organisations. This is not an approach that aims to exclude people. It is an approach that aims to include all those in councils and others outside who may have the skills and ambition to lead the new councils at chief executive and senior officer level. There may be different views on the law on this. There may have been a view historically about what is or is not permitted. The policy position, which I trust will also be the legal position, is to have open competition as fully as possible.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle, agus gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a fhreagraí. Does the Minister agree that it is extremely important that we get the best possible candidates so that the new councils operate effectively and efficiently and that, by and large, open competition is the best way to achieve that?

Mr Attwood: I welcome the fact that all those who have contributed on this question seem to be on the same page; namely, that there should be open competition. I hope that that is heard far and wide.

Planning: Waste Disposal Plant, Mallusk

4. **Mr Nesbitt** asked the Minister of the Environment whether a planning application has been submitted for a waste disposal plant at Mallusk. (AQO 3837/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I can confirm that no planning application has been lodged with the planning department in respect of any waste disposal plant at Mallusk. I can also confirm that pre-application discussions on that matter are ongoing between the Department and the developer. Although it is outwith the pre-application discussion process that the Department is involved in, I understand that the applicant is conducting their own pre-application discussion with the local community.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Minister for clarifying that. Are there any other pre-application discussions going on for similar proposals? If so, when will we be made aware of those?

Mr Attwood: In respect of the waste procurement strategy, as Members know, the Southern Waste Management Partnership (SWaMP) proposal is no longer to be taken forward. As Members know, the north-west proposal is being taken forward with some financial cover from the Executive. Nearly all the member councils of the north-west proposal are in agreement with that proposal. There are no other pre-application discussions (PAD) ongoing in respect of a waste proposal. There is a planning application in the system that is separate from the waste procurement strategy. It has been advertised publicly. The application is on behalf of Bombardier in the harbour estate. It is, in terms of its commercial organisations and in a private way, making a proposal for energy from waste in respect of its requirements.

Mr Campbell: Has the Minister indicated to senior planning officials how comprehensive and detailed their discussions should be in pre-planning processes, particularly as regards in-depth discussions that need to take place?

Mr Attwood: I will give a very clear reassurance to the Member and the House. When I came into this job, I was anxious to ensure that, given our obligations under European directives and the desirability of moving towards an avoidance of landfill in respect of our waste, consistent with good practice and good law, the process around procurements was taken forward. Whether it was SWaMP, the North West Region Waste Management Group or Arc21, the standards were these: deliverability in respect of a site, which was touched upon by Mr Campbell; affordability in respect of the council's view; and legal and financial viability in terms of the backers of any scheme, given that there is a lot of money at stake.

In terms of deliverability, we will have been exhaustive in dealing with any possible planning application from Arc21, and we are being exhaustive with respect to the PAD. It is very important that, when it comes to road issues, the suitability of a site, the interests of the local community or any other valid planning considerations, this matter is got right. That has been made very clear to the promoters of the scheme.

Mr Byrne: Is the Department of the Environment strategy on waste management being updated in line with the requirements in the EU landfill directive?

Mr Attwood: I confirm that that is the case. We will shortly go out to consultation in respect of what I call a "recast plus" waste management strategy. Among other things, in terms of our environmental ambitions, we need to grapple with and grasp whether we should have a ban on domestic waste going to landfill. Should we have a requirement

on our local councils to provide suitable containers into which household food waste is deposited? Those are the sort of issues that we have to grapple with, including a forthcoming consultation, in the next number of days, on a statutory 60% recycling target in respect of domestic and municipal waste, which is beyond the 50% target that we are obliged, under European standards, to fulfil.

The introduction of the carrier bag levy last week demonstrated that there is an — excuse the word — appetite for citizens and communities to take forward opportunities to deal with waste on the one hand and tackle climate change in our own ways on the other. That is why a recast waste strategy with further examples of landfill diversion is the way we need to go.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr David McIlveen is not in his place to ask question 5. Question 6 was grouped with question 1.

Single-use Carrier Bag Levy

7. **Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister of the Environment how he plans to use the revenue generated from the recently introduced single-use plastic bag levy. (AQO 3840/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I touched on that in my last answer. As I indicated when the levy on single-use plastic bags was introduced, save the administrative costs, which will be in and around £600,000 a year, with those jobs being located up in the city of Derry, the rest of the moneys will go to environmental causes. What will those causes be? My ambition is to have a river restoration fund, a sustainability and innovation fund and more money allocated to the Northern Ireland Environment Link community challenge fund and Rethink Waste. So, 80% of the money that comes in will go out through interventions to support the economy, especially at a community level.

Mr G Robinson: Will the Minister give assurances that all revenue-generating transactions will be open and transparent?

Mr Attwood: Yes. As with any other income or expenditure by government, requirements are laid down by the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP), the Audit Office and departmental standards on disclosure and accountability. Those will be no less with the income generated by the carrier bag levy.

Mr Elliott: Are there any proposed savings from the original suggested administration costs for the single-use bag levy?

Mr Attwood: There was a suggestion in the Department initially that the management of the single-use carrier bag levy should be administered by a third-party private organisation. I opposed that proposal because the costs would have been significantly more. It proves the point that many services are better delivered by public organisations rather than by private organisations, and people should not idly embrace a private model when there is a better public model, as there is with the carrier bag levy. The cost is £600,000 a year on a rolling basis. Given the environmental benefits of the proposal and the small income streams that will go back to the environmental organisations that I outlined in my original answer, I do not think that that is a highly significant amount of money for bringing about a highly significant change in environmental practice.

Mrs McKevitt: It is perhaps too early to ask whether there has been positive or negative feedback. However, has the Minister had any feedback at all from shop owners?

Mr Attwood: Yes, I have had feedback, and the retail industry increasingly recognises that this was the right time for the measure. My strong sense is that citizens and consumers were well ahead of some of the politics and the law, and people had been conditioned by the plastic bag levy in the Republic of Ireland to begin to adjust their behaviour. Consumers in the North have welcomed and embraced the levy enthusiastically. The business side raised some questions, but we were innovative in how we rolled it out and communicated with people, and we had the support of good business leaders. The National Federation of Retail Newsagents Northern Ireland said that the levy would reduce costs to local newsagents without any disproportionate increase in management and bureaucracy. Those wise words are almost verbatim. The retail industry has widely and increasingly recognised that.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am happy to clarify that: the Chair has no role. I was simply pointing out to the Minister that a grouping had been arranged by him, not the Chair.

Mr McCartney: I am not referring to your reminding the Minister of a particular grouping; I am talking generally. There are times when, quite rightly, a Minister asks for questions to be grouped, but there are other occasions when very similar questions are not grouped. I just wonder who has a role to play in that.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am happy to clarify for the Member that it is entirely in the hands of the Minister.

Members will take their ease for a moment while we change the top Table.

Wind Farms: West Tyrone

8. **Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the scale and proliferation of wind farms in West Tyrone. (AQO 3841/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for the question, which touches on a point that is beginning to emerge more acutely in Derry and Tyrone in particular. To date, 48 planning applications have been submitted for wind farms in the Omagh and Strabane district council areas. That is 40% of all applications that have been submitted, of which 29 have been approved; 15 have been built; two are under construction; three are with the Planning Appeals Commission, and 14 are under consideration.

Issues are arising with potential new advice on noise and certainly on cumulative impact. I keep that under very close watch, given that more and more questions are being asked. That said, two conclusions also need to be borne in mind. First, as I keep saying, renewables are Ireland's biggest economic opportunity. We should be minded to embrace the opportunity for self-sufficiency in electricity.

Secondly, it seems to me that, more and more, community benefits need to be built in to the planning system to ensure that the benefits, whether from renewable applications or other significant applications, go to the community. So the DOE and Community Places are organising a community benefit summit for the first week in June to try to ensure that, while we deal with concerns about wind farms, more and more benefits go to local citizens and communities because of them.

3.30 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: Once again, we do not have time for a supplementary. That concludes Question Time.

Mr McCartney: On a point of order, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I am looking for clarity on the grouping of questions. The practice of grouping similar questions is a good one because it gives more people an opportunity. However, when a Minister asks the Chair to consider a grouping and other questions on the Order Paper could obviously be grouped, has the Chair any role in suggesting such a grouping?

*(Mr Principal Deputy Speaker
[Mr Mitchel McLaughlin] in the Chair)*

Ministerial Statement

Local Government Reform: Transfer of Functions to New Councils

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I congratulate you on taking up your new position in the Assembly.

On a more solemn note, I want to acknowledge that, unfortunately, the husband of Evelynne Robinson — she is one of the North's very best councillors and sits on Ballymoney Borough Council — who had been suffering ill health, died in the past number of days. Evelynne has been of enormous assistance to the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) and the Department in their work on local government reform, including the transfer of functions. I want to record the sympathy of the House for her and her family.

I turn now to the statement. The reform of local government is one of the fundamental building blocks of streamlining public administration, a process first started some years ago. It has already produced change in the administration of the health sector, and the education sector is also undergoing major change. I believe that Northern Ireland does reform well, even if too slowly and, in some places, with reluctance. Indeed, I believe that we need a new phase of deep reform to progress our politics and deepen our democracy. These initiatives, taken together, can benefit our society and citizens and are further steps towards a sustainable future. Bringing decision-making and responsibility for functions and related services closer to the communities and citizens affected by them is part of political independence and authority, and it is this that is central to the reform of local government.

The local government reform programme is, arguably, the most complex policy issue before the Assembly today. As I said at Question Time, although there have been many examples of the number of councils in a jurisdiction being reduced, it is not often the case that, at the same time as merging councils, you have the transfer of significant functions. Therefore, it is, in my view, very much the case that this is a complex policy issue, as I referred to.

The reform is huge in scale, has over 140 main work strands and involves multiple interfaces, partners and stakeholders. The multiplicity necessary to process this work through the voluntary transition committees, the statutory transition committees, when they come into place, the regional transition committees and the multiple mechanisms under all that is testament to the scale of what is being undertaken. As I said, it needs to be remembered that, although other jurisdictions have merged councils, it is rare that councils merge and receive enhanced powers at the same time.

As Minister, I have continued to push hard for progress across the board, even with some misgivings in one or two places. RPA is on track to meet the commitment in the 2011-15 Programme for Government to have the 11 new councils in place by April 2015. There are now just 700 days to grasp an opportunity for change that

last arose over 40 years ago. I urge all those who have influence to bear and all those involved to ensure that we maximise that opportunity. I have said before, in answer to a question from Mr Weir, that we have a once-in-a-political-lifetime opportunity to get this done, get it done right and get it done on time. After extended negotiation with ministerial colleagues, I can now report that, on 11 April, the Executive agreed a package of functions that will transfer new powers and responsibilities to the 11 new councils from 1 April 2015. That adds to the momentum that I have been steadily building and brings the further clarity needed to clear the way for the great deal of work still to be done. Greater clarity will also help to alleviate the anxiety among the many staff impacted by the changes and the uncertainty among elected members who face significant change.

The Executive decided what is to transfer on 1 April 2015. My Department will transfer local operational planning, which consists of local development plan functions and development control and enforcement. The Department for Regional Development (DRD) is transferring off-street parking, except park-and-ride. The Department for Social Development (DSD) is transferring the following areas of urban regeneration and community development: functions associated with physical development, such as environmental improvement schemes, and Members will note the statement that the Minister for Social Development issued today on Streets Ahead in Belfast; area-based regeneration, such as neighbourhood renewal; and some community development programmes for the voluntary and community sectors. DSD is also transferring the following housing functions: registration of houses in multiple occupation; and housing unfitness responsibilities, including repair and demolition notices.

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) is transferring a number of local economic development activities from Invest NI, namely the Start a Business programme and enterprise shows; youth entrepreneurship, such as the Prince's Trust and Shell LiveWIRE; social entrepreneurship; Investing for Women; and neighbourhood renewal funding relating to enterprise initiatives. The following local tourism initiatives are also moving to councils: small-scale tourism accommodation development; providing business support, including business start-up advice along with training and delivery of customer care schemes; and providing advice to developers on tourism policies and related issues.

A number of other functions and assets are moving from DARD and DCAL. Those are the delivery of the EU rural development programme; authority to spot list to enable councils to add a building to the statutory list on a temporary basis, subject to ratification by the DOE; authority to draw up local lists of buildings that are of architectural or historic interest; Armagh County Museum; local water recreational facilities; greater involvement of local government in local sports decisions; and Donaghadee harbour.

As Members will be fully aware, it is also intended to introduce a statute-based system of council-led community planning. Community planning is a process whereby councils, statutory bodies and the community and voluntary sectors work together to develop and implement a shared vision for promoting the well-being of their area

and to pave the way for the most efficient use of scarce resources.

Now that the package of functions is agreed, it is important that we move swiftly to confirm the number of staff transferring and the quantum of funding. In confirming these details, Ministers will have regard to the principle agreed by the previous Executive, which is not in dispute: functions that are to transfer from central to local government should be fit for purpose, sufficiently funded and cost-neutral to the ratepayer at the point of transfer. That point cannot be stressed enough. If, on the far side of the transfer of functions, they fail to live up to those requirements, to the disappointment of councillors, citizens and ratepayers, all this effort, which has taken a long time to evolve and mature, will create disappointment, if not worse, in our local council areas. All of that will require the transfer of resources from central to local government when the functions transfer. There will also be a requirement for Departments to commit adequate resources in preparation for the functions to transfer.

Ministerial colleagues have agreed to provide me with information on staff transferring and the quantum of funding by 31 May 2013. I anticipate that there will be some conversations with Ministers on the detail of that over the next four or five weeks. All of that will enable Departments to provide certainty to their staff and to draw up firm transfer plans to ensure that all functions are fit for purpose and properly financed. It will also enable councils to begin to plan new organisational structures and arrangements.

The previous Executive agreed a vision for local government in March 2008. That vision is one of a strong, dynamic local government creating communities that are vibrant, healthy, prosperous, safe and sustainable and have the needs of all people at their core. Central to the vision is the provision of high-quality, efficient services that respond to the needs of people and continuously improve over time.

There was a clear view that, to deliver that vision, the functions to be transferred should be cohesive and that a critical mass or family of functions was needed. The functions that we will transfer in 2015 form the bedrock on which to build such critical mass. It is not the end in itself, because there may be some opportunities beyond 2015 to build on that critical mass in order to have proper functions more embedded in our local democracy.

Transferring planning and regeneration powers will allow locally elected leaders to begin to shape the places in which they live. Too often, we concentrate on the technical when it comes to RPA — the funding or the character of the new local government — but people should also remember and begin to embrace more and more the opportunities that RPA will create for local councils in working with local communities to shape their local areas and bring about local benefit, including local jobs. The other transferring functions, coupled with new community planning powers, will allow local councils, as I indicated, to become effective local champions, responding to the aspirations and concerns of their communities and guiding, in partnership with others, the future development of their area.

It is important that we recognise that the transfer of functions from central to local government should be a process rather than an event. There are potentially other

functions that would be better delivered at a local level. Therefore, the Executive Committee have also agreed that in April 2016, one year after the initial transfer, the transfer package should be reviewed with a view to augmenting it.

As to the wider local government reform programme, among the other major achievements to date I number the recent announcement on the provision of a funding package; the ongoing consultation on councillor severance; the imminent appointment of a councillor remuneration panel; the draft local government Bill now in circulation among Ministers; and the forthcoming regulations on statutory transition committees. Each by itself is a substantial piece of work, and together they begin to put in place the architecture and mechanisms to underpin and deliver the ambitious challenge before us now and ahead.

In managing the reform programme, I have taken pains to involve elected representatives, both local and regional. The regional transition committee and the regional transition operational board, which I put in place to provide robust oversight, direction and vigour, have continued to meet regularly. The more recently established political reference group held its inaugural meeting in December and will meet again this week. I have also visited all 11 voluntary transition committees at their cluster locations to see, at first hand, how they are approaching the considerable work that they need to undertake and to listen to their issues and concerns. As I indicated previously, we are well past the point of no return.

I also acknowledge the contribution of staff, both centrally and locally. As I have tried to indicate in this statement and elsewhere, the scale of what has been undertaken and potential ambition of what we can achieve means that we need to work through all the issues, technical and political. Given the scale of all of that, the work done by many officers on many councils — not all to the same scale, I have to say — and by many in central government needs to be acknowledged. We would not be here today had it not been for their care and attention, diligence and leadership in taking all this forward.

Elements of the reform programme are not as I recommended, but with time now racing on we must ensure that the 11 councils in 2015 live up to the expectations, hopes and needs of citizens, communities and business. We must deliver for them, and that, ultimately, is the test. We are all public servants, and we must demonstrate, in getting this done and done right, that public servants are delivering on behalf of the local people we represent. The recent Executive funding decision means that councils, through low-interest loans, reserves and sharing and collaboration, can help to ensure that reform is fully funded without burden to the ratepayers. The transition committees — soon to be statutory — must ensure that their reform plan is comprehensive, deliverable, agreed and funded. The London Government must ensure that their work on boundaries is completed and legislated for this year. The DOE must build on its vast programme of work to date, keep its eye on the prize and keep driving reform forward.

3.45 pm

Ms Lo (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment): Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I

also offer my congratulations to you on taking up your new position.

I thank the Minister for his statement. I welcome the Executive's decision on the package of transferred functions. However, there is not really a lot of detail in this very important announcement. Will the Minister set out the next major steps, milestones and the timetable? Is he confident that the transfer of functions will be in place by April 2015?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for welcoming the statement. At the Executive meeting on 11 April that agreed these matters, I dealt directly with the issue of whether we would have merger and transfer at the same time, because there had been some chat that maybe they should be separated. I argued at the Executive that I believed that that was not the right thing to do. I believe that there are issues of political credibility if you go down that road, and I believe that there is sufficient time to get this done and done right. There are many examples of reform programmes in Northern Ireland, even recently, that demonstrate that, with dedication and application, you can get even more significant reform programmes than this over the line in even less time. I refer to the life of the first Policing Board — there are Members here who were on that board — which, in five years, saw the accomplishment, fully or substantially, of 85% of the 175 Patten recommendations. I am opposed to any suggestion of separating the timing of the transfer from the timing of the merger, and I believe that that is the way that we should go. There was no dispute, no difference and virtually no comment at the Executive meeting when I made the argument that that was the way we needed to go.

With regard to the next phase, I trust that, in the next three or four months, the Executive will agree the draft reorganisation Bill and it will come to the Chamber for First Reading and Second Reading in advance of the summer before going its own way back to you as Chair of the Environment Committee.

Secondly, the councillor severance arrangements will conclude. My ambition is that the councillor severance will go live in August, subject to agreement of the regulations. Similarly, regulations will be tabled shortly in the House in respect of making the voluntary committees statutory, so that they will be able to go statutory in June.

The members of the remuneration panel, which will take forward the independent review of what the pay and conditions for councillors should be post reform, have been identified. They will be formally appointed on 1 May, and they have been given six months to take forward that work. Those four examples — the Bill, the severance, the statutory transition committees and the appointment of the remuneration panel — demonstrate that, on the DOE side, the scale of work is accelerating. We need to see a parallel acceleration at local council level in the works that they are taking forward. DOE can try to get the multiple tasks over the line, but the clusters themselves have to get the multiple tasks over the line. I think that there has been a bit of a sea change in recent months in that regard, and I have seen fewer political issues and more operational issues coming into the conversation of the voluntary and regional transitional committees. However, they, like us, need to accelerate in order to ensure that Ms Lo's anxiety about getting this done and done right does not arise.

Mr Hamilton: I agree with the Minister's comments in his statement about the need for reform in Northern Ireland. He will know that it is my view that reform of local government presents a unique opportunity for people in local government to shape their areas in a way that those of us who used to be in local government could only dream of.

The Minister said that we had passed the point of no return. Hopefully, that means that some of the arguments about RPA are now dispensed with. Does he detect in his discussions with local government that there is now a willingness to embrace the fact that this is an opportunity to shape the future of the new council areas in the way that he outlines and that many of the rest of us hope will happen?

Mr Attwood: I do not want to suggest that there is unanimity across the 26 councils or the 600-plus councillors or that everybody is on the same page in embracing the reform programme. That is not going to be the case, and I have no doubt that arguments will endure. However, if there is certainty in the law around the reorganisation Bill and the regulations around severance and statutory transition committees; if there is certainty in respect of central government's welcome contribution to the family and funds that will be required for RPA; if there is certainty on the transfer of functions and, I trust, by the end of May, certainty on what that looks like in terms of money and staff to be transferred by the Departments that are transferring, then all that has to send out the message to all councils, clusters and councillors that there is certainty from where I, government and the Assembly are standing.

They have to demonstrate an equal level of certainty. I will touch on one example, which is the issue of how councils will contribute to the funding of RPA. I recently escalated my conversations with councils in that regard. How have I done that? I have written to all the councils asking them, on the far side of their audited accounts, to come back to DOE and to me by the end of May with what they believe is the true figure of useable reserves as part of the funding of RPA.

There are a lot of reserves in councils. Some are required for good business reasons or for financial commitments that have been entered into and so on and so forth. On the far side of that, however, there is a sum of money around the councils that, in my view, could be part of the contribution to the funding of RPA to ensure that there is no burden on ratepayers. There is dispute about that, and it is not easy, because, even within clusters, there are clearly different levels of reserves. One council in a cluster may think, "That is our money, not your money, and you are not getting it". We have to break through all that and say that, where there are useable reserves in a council cluster, those need to go into the pot of money to assist with the funding of RPA, because we cannot have a situation where there is a burden on ratepayers. The council clusters have until the end of May to have that information back to me. They have an obligation to make a contribution through that and through escalating the sharing and collaboration of services in a way that sees a reduction of costs at local council level.

I am not taking this approach for stand-and-deliver reasons. I have said that, when it comes to, for example, the sale of surplus assets, I do not have any ambition that local councils are going to find a pot of gold in the

run-up to RPA in terms of the sale of surplus assets. The market is not that interested in the sale of any asset, never mind the surplus assets of local councils. So, in my view, there are some areas in which councils will not be able to do very much, if anything at all, to contribute to funding RPA. However, there are other areas where, in my view, the ratepayer will expect the council to find money, for example from reserves, to help fund RPA, and they should, because that is not council money but ratepayer money. Ratepayers have a right to see that money spent to ensure that RPA is not a burden on the rates.

Mr Boylan: Comhghairdeas, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh ráiteas an Aire. I congratulate you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, and welcome the Minister's statement.

Minister, in your statement, you mentioned "fit for purpose" and "sufficiently funded". Will you outline clearly that you recognise that the powers to be transferred must be strong enough to give decision-makers proper powers to deliver for communities? I am talking about, in general, the Planning Bill. Also, given that the planning function is fee-dependent, is there a default position in the event that councils run into difficulties with those fees? The function is supposed to be viable, and there is obvious concern in local authorities that they may not be able to deliver on that.

Mr Attwood: Thank you for the question. The Executive have decided to set three standards, so, this is not my whim or that of any other Minister. The three standards to be met for transfer of functions are that they are fit for purpose, they are sufficiently funded and there is no cost to the ratepayer. Nobody has ever disputed that those are the three standards.

As I indicated, with all due respect to the school of permanent secretaries in this place, there will be permanent secretaries who will want to keep a little money for a rainy day. Therefore, Ministers will have to make sure that those standards — fit for purpose, sufficient funding and no cost to the ratepayer — are realised at the point of transfer in 2015. Otherwise, we are selling councils short. There will be some issues around all of that — you just raised the point, Mr Boylan, and Mr Elliott has also made the point — in how we ensure that, although the function has been transferred, there is not, on the far side of years 1, 2 or 3, some clawback from central government when it comes to the funding regime. It must be ensured that it is sufficiently and securely funded when transferred.

The variation in planning fees is the nature of the planning system. You will have periods when planning income surges and others, as we have seen over the past two or three years, when it declines year on year and month on month, which continues to be the case. That will have to be managed at local council level when the planning function is transferred. At the same time, we must ensure that, at the point of transfer, councils have certainty that there is nothing round some distant corner whereby there would be clawback to central government in a way that would prejudice the financial arrangements of a council. That will not be the case. Nonetheless, councils will, in the fullness of time, have to manage the new services and functions for which they will have responsibility, and they will have to make corporate and local plans on the basis of what is needed financially year on year and decade on decade to fulfil those functions. They do it in respect of all other local

functions, and they will be able to do it when it comes to the new functions.

Mrs D Kelly: Thank you, Principal Deputy Speaker, and I congratulate you on your elevation to such high office.

The Minister was at pains to point out in his statement that the transfer of functions was moving ahead at full steam. Nonetheless, does he share my concerns, given the high cost entailed in the reform of public administration overall, that a number of Departments are refusing to transfer any functions? Will the Minister outline which Departments those are?

Is it not the case that some Departments, including the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL), are rolling back on the transfer of functions that had been suggested in 2008-09? Has the Minister any concerns that, for their own party political purposes, some parties are trying to change the election date to prevent it from coinciding with the European election on 22 May of next year?

4.00 pm

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member. I do not think that I used the term "full steam ahead"; I said that there was a point of no return and that the Department of the Environment (DOE) and other Departments were showing good authority. It is not the case that it is full steam ahead, because, as I indicated, not all council clusters are as advanced as others might be. However, I can say that there is a lot more coal going into the engine, and that there is certainly a lot more steam and, hopefully, a lot more product as we speak.

It was my view that the transfer of functions needed certainty. In fact, I invoked the three-meeting rule at the Executive in order to bring that matter to a conclusion. Yes, it is the case that what is on the table today is a little less than what was on the table historically. That is the case. In order to create the certainty and to move down the road, however, my view was that the transfer of functions had to be defined. So, that matter was resolved.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure has undertaken a review of a number of functions within her Department, and, on the far side of that review, there might be some opportunity for functions to transfer, subject to the view of the Minister. That said, you could argue that DOE could have transferred more functions. However, my view was that the scale of what we were doing was already of sufficient size and that where we are is where we should be.

I see that there will be opportunities to do a bit more in DOE on the far side of 2016, especially when it comes to the heritage asset.

I spoke to the Secretary of State on Thursday a week ago, and I have spoken to the commissioner appointed to take forward the work on district electoral areas. I told them that nothing other than the fact that the European election date, which appears in the European calendar as 22 May next year, and the date of the shadow council elections have to be one and the same, was on my radar, had ever been part of my conversation or had been part of the narrative that I have been sharing. Even within the past very short space of time, I have made it very firmly clear to the commissioner, Mr Mackenzie, and to others that that has always been the premise on which we have been

proceeding. I trust that that will not be contradicted at a political level or at a procedural level.

Mr Elliott: I know that the Minister has gone some way to give us detail on how the financial aspect of the transfer of functions will work, but he indicated something about councils finding a way to make it work. Has the Department any plan in place to ensure that the ratepayer will not have an extra burden of finances added on to their rates bill every year for the transfer of functions?

Mr Attwood: If you look at the statement that I have just outlined, you will see that an Ulster Unionist Minister is transferring functions, a number of DUP Ministers are transferring functions, Sinn Féin Ministers are transferring functions, and I am transferring functions. If we do not ensure that our own Ministers live up to their Executive decision when it comes to the transfer and the funding of transfer, it shows a lack of authority in respect of the political parties. Obviously, the Alliance Party may have a different view on that because it is not proposing a transfer. However, the Minister of Justice, Mr Ford, is very much involved in issues around community planning, because, when it comes to community safety, community planning is going to be an opportunity that, heretofore, was not there.

There have been a lot of politics around RPA. It seems to me that the job of politicians and parties is to ensure that we now get that done, on time and right, in the terms that have been outlined. When it comes to the latter criteria, we need to ensure that Ministers do not let down ratepayers because that will be thrown back in our faces.

Mr Weir: I thank the Minister for his statement and for his kind comments about my colleague and friend Councillor Robinson.

I was slightly worried when the Minister referred to points of no return and going full steam ahead. It conjured up an image of the Titanic heading towards the iceberg. Hopefully, we can have a much more productive response than that.

The Minister clearly identified the funding arrangements for the transfer of functions from central to local government. He has rightly identified that that should be done on a cost-neutral basis. What work is ongoing to establish a formula for that money to transfer effectively from central to local government? It would be helpful if the Minister were to indicate publicly whether that formula will be by way of a shift in the burden between the regional rate and the local rate or some form of annual grant. Clarification on that would be welcomed by local government.

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his question. The DOE and the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) are taking forward a number of financial issues. Sometimes, DFP leads. Clearly, some financial issues will be taken forward by individual transferring Departments because they know their own details better than I do. How do we create certainty on all that? First, I hope that Ministers will comply with the Executive decision that, by May 2013, they will have confirmed details with me. I will then confirm those details with the Committee to give that more shape and substance. I say to Ms Lo that I will send the Committee many more details on all that. On the far side of 31 May, there will be more details on staffing and financial issues in respect of the transfer of functions.

Subject to that, I want there to be one approach across transferring Departments; I made that point at the Executive. I do not want more than one approach to the model of transfer. There have been indications that that might become an issue, and I do not want that. Although there must be one model of transfer that is consistent for staff, the trade union interest, legal obligations and so on, it must not be a one-size-fits-all approach. We are dealing with multiple councils and a lot of staff. Therefore, it has to be dealt with intimately and sensitively, but, nonetheless one model for the transfer.

Secondly, there is a big piece of ongoing work on how we will allocate the £30 million for rates convergence from the £48 million that the Executive have allocated to the RPA. It is likely that we will need a new law in the Assembly to ensure that that is modelled properly.

Thirdly, Mr Weir encouraged me to answer affirmatively about whether there will be an adjustment to the regional rate or annual negotiation on a grant for the transfer of functions. My firm view is that it will be the former. We need some adjustment in the regional rate to create certainty for local councils going forward, rather than the shadow of uncertainty that is created by annual negotiation of grants.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Guidhim rath agus bláth ar do chuid oibre mar Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I wish you well, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, in your work ahead.

Will the Minister detail what resources or capacity will be invested in the community and voluntary sector, perhaps from a departmental or wider Executive point of view, to allow the sector to play a full role in the community-planning process, which is well defined in his statement?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his question. If we think that we can create this new statutory responsibility for community planning and then abandon councils to it, we are wrong because we will not have transferred fit-for-purpose planning powers, and we will have let down the communities to which Mr McElduff referred. Having the power to make planning decisions, decide on local development and do community planning — those three legs — is an enormous opportunity to shape communities and council areas in a way that citizens, communities and businesses need and that creates growth on the far side of that. We must not delude ourselves: we have to do this right to maximise the opportunities on the far side of 2015.

That is why the work being taken forward in scoping out training for councillors and management is not stand-alone work by the DOE and local councils. Integrated into that will be the conversation with Community Places. Why? Community Places is, in my view, integral to scoping out training for councillors. We provide it with grant funding every year, and we have enhanced its grant funding in forthcoming years because we recognise that we should be seen to support community input into planning generally.

I know the nature of the staff and the character of Community Places as an organisation, so you can rest assured that it will bring Mr McElduff's concern into the room. Community Places will be very assertive in saying that this is not about how planning will be done in the future; it is about how you engage with the community and integrate local communities in community planning and

the wider planning function of local councils. Community Places will, if nothing else, keep us on our toes and, hopefully, ensure that Mr McElduff's concern does not materialise.

Mr Ross: I think it true to say that local communities can benefit from decisions being taken at as low a level as possible. The Minister, in his statement, mentioned that, in April 2016, there will be a review of the transfer of functions from central to local government. Will he indicate to the House whether he sees any further powers being devolved from central to local level after that date?

Mr Attwood: I do not want to second-guess any Minister on what may or may not transpire between here and there, except to say that, as I indicated, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure is undertaking a review of certain functions in her Department, and that might mature into the transfer of some function. From DOE's point of view, where I probably have a little bit more authority, what I can say is that we had a discussion about whether we would transfer some Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) assets to local councils and whether they should take over the management of, for example, country parks.

Given the time frames that we are working to and the scale of what we are already doing in DOE, with the transfer of planning functions having the single biggest impact, I decided that, although I would like to have that conversation, I did not think that this was the right time to create further work in the run down to 2015. The new chief executive of NIEA is taking forward some pilot innovation work, as he calls it, and part of that — this will be of interest to the Member for East Antrim — involves working with Carrickfergus Borough Council to see how, with the local council, we can better manage Carrickfergus Castle, which NIEA currently manages. I am not saying that the function of and responsibility for the castle will pass to the council on the far side of 2016, but let us see where that pilot innovation goes and whether it is a better model.

In my view, some local heritage assets are better managed locally than centrally. The council has a better local sense of the castle, how to market it and how to maximise opportunities around it. At the moment, 50,000 people a year go to the castle, which is a very low number given its quality. Last week, people from America went round various places here and were more impressed by Dunluce than the Causeway stones, but, more than anything else, they were impressed by the castle because there is nothing like it in many places. It was designed in a way that meant that there is no castle like it; you can actually have a touch-and-feel experience there. You can feel the body armour that people wore way back as opposed to its being behind some glass. So, there are marketing possibilities that I think that local councils might be better at doing. Carrickfergus Castle is one such example, which is why we are taking forward the pilot. Out of that pilot, we might create more opportunities with heritage assets for that council and others.

4.15 pm

Mr Milne: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Déanaim comhghairdeas leat as an phost nua. Will the d'Hondt system be used in the transfer of powers to the local authorities to allocate positions to the committees?

Mr Attwood: Under the clauses of the reorganisation Bill, which is currently in circulation, councils will be required to allocate positions in and outside councils on the basis of a proportional system. They will have the freedom to decide from a menu of proportional systems, but, in the absence of agreement on any other position, the default will be d'Hondt. Therefore, it will be embedded in law that all councils should comply with a proportionality principle. In the absence of agreement on which system should be used, d'Hondt will be the legal default.

I do not understand why there are still councils that do not subscribe to that principle voluntarily. The Executive have agreed the policy proposals on how positions will be distributed after 2015, and I trust that they will endorse the draft reorganisation Bill in the next number of weeks before it comes to the Chamber for First Reading and Second Reading, which will hopefully be before recess. How can politicians and parties endorse that approach at Executive level but not comply with it voluntarily in councils, which is the case at the moment? That is beyond me.

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for his statement. It certainly helps to see what is planned, although I notice that some Departments have clawed back functions from the initial plans. Will the Minister clarify exactly what is anticipated will happen to local enterprise agencies and to Invest Northern Ireland under the proposal?

Mr Attwood: As I indicated in my comments, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment agreed to transfer a number of local economic development activities. Those are: the starting a business programme and enterprise shows; youth entrepreneurship; social entrepreneurship; Investing for Women; and neighbourhood renewal funding that is related to enterprise initiatives. There is also a range of tourism issues. As I indicated to the Chair, I will provide the detail of those to the Member and the Committee.

Mr Spratt (The Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development): I thank the Minister for his statement. Will he throw some light on the benefits and efficiencies that may be created by the transfer of off-street parking? Will the property that is involved transfer to the local councils?

Mr Attwood: That is a very good question to which I do not have a very good answer at this stage. So, I will come back to the Member.

Mr Beggs: I congratulate you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, on your appointment. The Minister indicated that there is potential in the future for better working between his Department and local councils. He mentioned Carrickfergus Castle. Does he accept that, even at the moment, there is no reason why his Department could not look after the fabric of the building while local government looks after its day-to-day management? The local tourist infrastructure could then better respond to the needs of the market and attract more tourism.

Mr Attwood: I support the sentiment of the question. There will be opportunities post-review 2016 to escalate the functions that might be transferred to local councils. I regret a little that what was on the table historically is no longer on the table, although there are still very substantial functions to be transferred. I go back to the point that I made earlier: the model of merger and transfer of functions has not been deployed in many jurisdictions.

It is particularly challenging here, given that we are doing both on the same day and at the same moment. I believe that there will be opportunities. However, given our scale, historical certainty, the delays in the Executive with respect to the money before we got to this situation and that the transfer of functions paper has taken a little bit of time to mature and come to the Floor for consideration, I do not believe, from a DOE point of view, that more than what we are doing is appropriate at this stage. As an amber light for what might happen in future, we will roll out, for example, the pilot that I mentioned for Carrickfergus Castle. There will be multiple other opportunities.

There has been some resistance in councils and some delay around clusters taking this work forward and getting it up to speed. Given all that and while there may have been some enhancements, I think that the transfer of functions that are on the table is broadly right at this time.

Mr Allister: Over the years that we have discussed RPA, various figures for the savings have been bandied about — £400 million was a common headline. Where does that stand? Where do other propositions, such as a single waste authority, stand? What is the cost to date of RPA and what will be the cost?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his question. I touched on the issue of waste procurement during Question Time earlier. I have told the waste management board that, in my view, there should be a single waste authority. Given that we will have 11 councils and that we have a population of 1.9 million, a single waste authority is appropriate for the North. Indeed, given the waste needs of the island, the opportunity to manage our waste on the island and exploit opportunities, including business opportunities for recyclates, we need to consider how we might do more of that on the island. Minister Hogan in the South and I recently appointed David Surplus, a known commercial expert in renewables, as chair of the North/South Market Development Steering Group. When I met him 10 days ago, he indicated that he thought there was a lot of “low-hanging fruit” — to use his words — in waste opportunities.

However, I have also told the waste management board that, although that is my view of where we should go, in the first instance we have to exhaust the ongoing procurement exercises in respect of which SWaMP has collapsed, the North West Region Waste Management Group is getting close to final bidder status and Arc21 is having a pre-application discussion with the community and the Planning Service about any future planning application that it may choose to make. For legal and procurement reasons we have to exhaust that exercise. If, on the far side of that, we end up with one — or perhaps two — waste procurement body, so be it. My view is that a single waste authority would be appropriate.

There will be savings. However, even if we did no reorganisation, multiple savings are available. In August 2011, local councils produced a proposal, whereby, over a 25-year period — I stand to be corrected on this — savings of £265 million could be made through the sharing and collaboration of services. I could give you multiple examples, whether with electricity tenders, insurance or stationery contracts, of councils clustering together — not all councils, but sometimes up to 22 councils — to bring about more efficiencies and savings.

There was the example of the e-auction for a stationery contract in Belfast that, in the course of a couple of hours, saw costs de-escalate and the contract eventually being awarded to a local business. There are savings to be made, irrespective of the RPA merger around ICE. I have asked the senior people involved in the ICE strategy to see me so that I may, to borrow a phrase that I often use, interrogate them further about where they are going with ICE. I think that there is a lot more to be done — a bit like David Surplus said about renewables. There is low-hanging fruit when it comes to sharing of and collaboration in council services that could see cost reductions and benefits to the ratepayer.

The Member mentioned the cost to date of the council reform programme. I am going back into the recesses of my mind, but I think that the figure is something around £14 million. I am not seeing any nods of agreement to your right, Mr Deputy Speaker, so I will have to confirm that in writing. However, there have been significant costs to date. I will speak to officials and let the Member know immediately thereafter.

Private Members' Business

Special Needs Provision: Further Education and Training

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly notes with concern the lack of provision for individuals with severe learning difficulties leaving special needs education at 19 years of age; and calls on the Minister for Employment and Learning to expand the provision of support staff and develop the assistance needed to encourage the uptake of further education and training, thereby allowing more engagement with society. — [Lord Morrow.]

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning):

First, I thank the Members who tabled the motion. I apologise for missing the start of Lord Morrow's speech. I was undertaking other ministerial duties upstairs, and time moved on quicker than I expected. I also thank all Members who contributed to the debate.

I join others in recognising the immensely difficult daily circumstances that people with learning disabilities, and, indeed, their families, face. My vision, which I know that many share, is for a cohesive, shared and integrated society in which people are safe and prosperous, have ample opportunities, and are treated fairly and with respect and equality.

I acknowledge the considerable concern about the transition that occurs at age 19 for a lot of young people with special needs. Although my Department and others have a range of policies and programmes in place, I acknowledge that there may well be gaps in provision and that there are things that we can consider doing differently and, indeed, better. I am happy to follow up on concerns that were raised during the debate and in a meeting with a number of parents that Lord Morrow organised for this afternoon.

The Executive's new disability strategy was launched in February, and it adopts the social model of disability. It reflects the principles and obligations in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It outlines the Executive's strategic priorities and, in particular, identifies a strategic theme on the transition from childhood to adulthood. The Executive have committed themselves to transforming the process of transition to adulthood for young people with disabilities.

My Department is working to support the strategy and to make a real difference to educational and employment opportunities for people with learning difficulties. On top of the economic benefits associated with greater social inclusion, there is a moral imperative. Every young person, regardless of individual circumstances, should have the opportunity to engage in learning and development that will help them to participate, achieve and progress in life.

I reassure Members that social inclusion is reinforced in all my Department's main strategies. In working towards a more inclusive society, my Department complies fully with all statutory equality and disability requirements. We ensure that all policies are assessed for significant impact on equality of opportunity. The Department's services ensure that the needs of all people with special needs or disabilities are identified and addressed in an appropriate

manner. Care is taken to ensure that our services and facilities are open to people with disabilities and can be accessed by them. We are open to constructive engagement and feedback on how those services can be improved. As such, I welcome today's debate.

The Department plays a critical role in supporting young people with severe learning disabilities through advice and guidance. It has developed and implemented a social inclusion policy to address the needs of young people who face or are vulnerable to social exclusion. It has established working relationships with the relevant statutory, voluntary and community sector bodies with a shared interest in supporting clients who are vulnerable to social exclusion.

Partnership agreements are in place with post-primary schools, including special schools, to support their careers education programmes. Those agreements allow the schools the opportunity to select from a suite of services that are appropriate to the pupils' needs. Careers advisers attend transition-planning meetings for year 10 pupils and subsequent annual reviews. That allows young people and their parents or guardians to make informed decisions about the options available to them on leaving school.

Careers advisers work with multidisciplinary teams, including teachers and educational psychologists, to develop transitional plans. Those are developed by the implementation of the joint Department of Education (DE) and Department for Learning and Employment (DEL) careers strategy. The strategy recognises that people who are vulnerable to social exclusion have high priority career guidance needs, and that specialist skills are required for that area of work. In turn, the strategy is due for review in 2014, and we will be happy to take up any additional points that we need to as part of that review.

4.30 pm

Turning to employment support, the Department manages and delivers a range of pan-disability employment services and programmes aimed at helping people to progress towards, move into, and sustain meaningful paid work. Young adults leaving special schools should find those services beneficial. A team of occupational psychologists assist employment advisers and carry out employment assessments for individual clients.

There are a number of employment support programmes to assist individuals and employers. Access to Work helps towards travel costs, residential training, support workers, specialist equipment and adaptations to premises. The Workable programme aims to help people with a disability who have a substantial employment barrier to find or retain work. It provides assistance such as a job coach, financial help for employers, extra training and disability awareness training. Of the 418 employees availing of support, 232 have a learning difficulty or learning disability.

Work Connect is a new specialist employment programme that aims to help people to overcome their health-related and/or disability-related barriers to work and to support them to make the transition from welfare into employment. It is delivered by a consortium of seven local disability organisations, some of which specialise in support for people with a learning disability. The Department has developed strong and positive working relationships with the local disability sector and values the contribution that

all of those organisations make in helping to support some of our most vulnerable young people. One example is the Department's ongoing sponsorship of Ulster Supported Employment Ltd, in its capacity as the largest employer of people with a disability in Northern Ireland, and which also happens to be a key provider of disability employment services.

The European social fund programme assists unemployed and economically inactive people towards sustained employment. It helps groups experiencing difficulty in obtaining employment or maintaining sustained employment, including people with disabilities. Currently there are 20 projects that target participants with disabilities or health conditions, including a large number of people with learning disabilities who are receiving support from organisations that specialise in their disability. Mervyn Storey raised an issue about whether the European social fund is being deployed for that purpose, and, indeed, it is.

A good example of the work being done is a project being taken forward by NOW in Belfast and Stepping Stones in Lisburn. Their project aims to provide employment support and training places to people with learning disabilities. I regularly meet people who have benefited from the work of these organisations, and the positive difference that they make to people's lives is very clear.

With respect to further education, colleges are responsible for determining their own provision and compliance with their statutory obligation to have regard to the requirements of persons of compulsory school-leaving age who have learning difficulties. Colleges are also required to make reasonable adjustments to allow students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities access both to their premises and the mainstream curriculum.

All further education students enrolling with a learning difficulty and/or disability at a college undergo an educational needs assessment, which determines the level of additional support required to meet the particular needs of their disability and course of study. Colleges review agreed additional support twice-yearly to ensure that it remains appropriate and to allow the students to be involved in their own assistance and progression.

However, mainstream further education courses are not always suitable for everyone — for example, those people with complex health and social care needs. It is for that reason that colleges collaborate with special schools and adult day centres to provide customised training and development opportunities on discrete, vocational and life skills courses for young people with moderate or severe learning difficulties. These courses may be offered in the college, at a day centre or in other suitable premises. I am happy to do an audit of our further education provision across not just the colleges but all the campuses to ensure that we have uniformity in terms of the standards that are provided in the sector.

The Department also provides colleges with £1.5 million per annum through the additional support fund to help them meet the cost of providing additional technical and/or personal support that is required for students. A further £2 million a year is made available to help meet the cost of providing reduced classroom sizes, additional lecturer contact time, classroom assistants or any other services that are involved in the delivery of tailored, discrete

courses for those students for whom mainstream courses are not always appropriate.

The degree of support that is available in further education for students with disabilities is intended to be reasonable and can involve a judgement of what is proportionate and affordable. For students with severe disabilities, the educational element can be overshadowed by medical and personal assistance considerations. In those circumstances, while the colleges might have a contributory role, primary care responsibility must remain with the health and social care authorities.

I will turn now to higher education. The Department's Access to Success strategy for widening participation aims to expand the outreach activities of higher education institutions in order to promote higher education to young people with learning disabilities, and their parents and advocates, through a programme of informative presentations and workshops led by disabled students and graduates.

To assist persons with a learning difficulty to access higher education, funding is available through the disabled students allowance to help pay the extra costs that may be incurred because of a specific learning difficulty. This covers issues such as the cost of a non-medical support provider, major items of specialist equipment and travel. The Department also pays a widening access premium to universities and university colleges for students with learning difficulties. The purpose of the premium is to cover the cost of specialist equipment and/or specific support for these students.

I will turn now to professional and technical training. The Training for Success programme provides a guaranteed training place for all unemployed young people in the 16-17 age bracket, and up to age 22 for those with special educational needs. The programme provides a pre-entry training support referral for school leavers with a learning disability. Clients are referred to contracted specialist support providers who specialise in disability and learning support. All programme participants receive a non-means-tested educational maintenance allowance of £40 a week and assistance towards the costs of travel. Specialist support funding of up to £1,000 a year can also be accessed.

My Department also leads on the new Pathways to Success strategy for young people who are not in employment, education or training. A range of new initiatives has been developed, including the new education maintenance allowance, the collaboration and innovation fund and the community family support programme.

Addressing disability needs, however, is a responsibility for the whole Executive. To take this forward, the Executive will look to the disability strategy and the delivering social change programme to begin early intervention in those areas that will require cross-departmental action. There is also much work being undertaken by different Departments at both strategic and operational level. I will briefly outline some of that.

The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety works closely with my Department and the Department of Education on transitions, day care provision, supported employment and day opportunities for people with learning disabilities. The children and young

people's strategic partnership is a regional cross-sector strategic partnership, consisting of the leadership of key agencies who have responsibility for improving outcomes for all children and young people. Its purpose is to lead integrated planning and the commissioning of services aimed at improving outcomes for children and young people regionally.

A number of regional subgroups have been established to address the needs of specific groups of children and young people. One of those subgroups, of which my Department is an active member, is the transitions subgroup. The implementation of this group's action plan will bring a more consistent and strategic approach to the way we plan, design and deliver our services.

To assist young people with learning disabilities during transition from childhood to adult services, the health and social care trusts have appointed transitions co-ordinators, who provide transition plans for people who are making the move from children's services into adult services.

In the education sector, the education and library boards have in place education transition co-ordinators to ensure a person-centred approach and strengthen the transition planning process. The boards are required to produce a transition plan at the first, and subsequent, annual review of the statement of special educational needs following the young person's fourteenth birthday. It aims to plan coherently for the change when a young person moves from school to adult life. Parents are routinely invited to transition planning meetings to discuss key issues relating to the young person's special educational needs. The Department of Education and the boards work closely with the Health Department and my Department on transition planning.

Like Lord Morrow, I fear that I am running out of time. There is much more that could be said. It is important that we have had this debate. I want to assure Members and parents that this is not the end of the process. This is not a debate that will stay on the shelf but will serve to spark renewed activity by not just my Department but, hopefully, other Departments and the entire Executive to ensure that we address this issue, which is so important for so many people across Northern Ireland.

Mr Weir: At the start of the debate, Lord Morrow quoted my indication to him that I felt that this is a subject on which there should not be any division. I am glad that the House has responded in a manner that proves that, at least on this issue, neither Lord Morrow nor myself is a liar. The support from around the Chamber is welcome. We have had a very constructive, sober and focused debate on an important topic. While I have no problem with debates that stir up high levels of passion and division, which we often have in the Chamber, the fact that this debate has not been a ding-dong between either side is significant. While it is important that there is vigorous debate, I hope that the media and the public will give proper attention to a debate such as this.

This is a matter of key concern. I was struck by one of the themes that emerged in the contributions of a number of Members. Ms McGahan, for instance, made reference to fear; for example, the fear of carers and the fear of people with special needs about dealing with employment situations. If there is one thing that we need to do and one

message that we need to send out, it is to take action that removes that fear.

One of the most telling comments that shows the significance of the issue was made by Pat Ramsey. He gave the very clear example of some parents going very much against the norm by saying, "I hope that my child dies before me, because I fear so much what will happen to them after I am gone." We should take away that message and keep it in our mind constantly to ensure, as the Minister put it, that this is not something that simply stays on the shelf. It is something that we need to embrace.

One of the other key themes that emerged from the debate is that, while it has obviously focused on the Minister for Employment and Learning, this is something in which collaboration is key to finding a lot of the solutions. It is very telling that we had contributions not only from the Minister for Employment and Learning but three Committee Chairs: the Chair of the Employment and Learning Committee, Mr Swann; the Chair of the Education Committee, Mr Storey; and, in an intervention, the Chair of the Health Committee, Ms Ramsey. It is important to highlight, as the Chair of the Committee for Employment and Learning and the Chair of the Education Committee did, the positive work being done not just in the Chamber and the Department but at Committee level to ensure that there is a focus on this issue.

One of the key issues that came up is transition. Whereas there is a very clear and strong provision to try to ensure that there is protection up to the age of 19, the issue is how people move from that position into adult life. There has been mention of proposals in other parts of the United Kingdom to move towards a more integrated plan and to take the age up to either 24 or 25, depending on the situation. That would be a very welcome development here, although I will add three riders. First, with no disrespect to the current Government across the water, where provision is made elsewhere and then integrated, there is always the suspicion that it will become simply an excuse to cut services. We have to ensure that there is a proper level of provision.

4.45 pm

Secondly, in providing those plans, we have to accept that people with severe learning difficulties cannot be catered for with a one-size-fits-all approach: there has to be flexibility in any approach that is taken. A plan that moves into the mid-20s is something to be valued and welcomed, but it is important that there are proper exit strategies when it comes to funding and support — that it is not simply a question of providing some degree of additional support for another few years for the problem to be pushed down the pipe and the person to fall off the edge at the end of that period.

Mention was also made by Lord Morrow and others that, whereas there is a considerable amount of help out there, in many ways there is a patchy quality to provision across Northern Ireland. There can be regional variations, including from one council area to another. We have to ensure that, in adopting a strategy and implementing it, we do not have a postcode lottery and that the level of provision and support does not vary from area to area. We need to ensure that whatever strategies we put forward are time-bound and implementable.

Mr McMullan: I thank the Member for giving way. I agree that the House is united on this subject.

The Minister said, when talking about the transition to education, that families and others who wish to avail themselves of provision should have education available to them. The words should be "will have" not "should have". Does the Member agree that that is part of the problem? Does he agree that, in a lot of cases, it is nearly like a postcode lottery and that there is a difference in the provision in rural and urban areas? The provision in rural areas needs to be looked at that bit more because of, for example, transport and availability of education campuses in those areas.

Mr Weir: I agree in the broad sense. We have to make sure that there is no particular division, whether it is between urban and rural provision or between provision in one town in one part of Northern Ireland and that in another town in another part of Northern Ireland. There should be proper provision made for everyone.

Mention has been made of education and employment, which is vital as we move forward. Mention was made by Mr Ramsey of the difficulties in securing employment. Unfortunately, one of the by-products of recent years, when globally we have moved into recession, has been that the opportunity for employers to provide the necessary level of support has sometimes been lacking. That is where the state needs to step in and make sure that the support is there.

Mr P Ramsey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Weir: I will, briefly.

Mr P Ramsey: I will be brief. Does the Member agree that, because of the diversity and complexity of some people with learning disabilities, there is a need for an individually tailored programme of training?

Mr Weir: That is where there needs to be commitment and flexibility, because the solution cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach.

Mention was made by a number of Members, including Mr Storey and Mr Flanagan, of the need to have meaningful and purposeful outcomes and to focus on solutions. A range of solutions have been offered today. Obviously, a sustainable approach is needed. Practical suggestions were made, such as when Mr Storey talked about ensuring that there is tracking and monitoring of students with special educational needs to make sure that there are proper outcomes.

A number of Members, including Mr Douglas and Mr Lyttle, made specific reference to the work at a community level and voluntary level. There is good work ongoing, and there is good work being done by the Department. In tabling the motion, we are not being so churlish as to not admit that there have been considerable improvements down the years. Fortunately, we have moved on from the situation many years ago where those with learning needs were quite often shut away, treated in an institution and often treated by society as a form of embarrassment. We have moved a long way from that, but it is important that, having made that transition, we take the next step-change and ensure that those with special educational needs are given the proper degree of support.

It is also the case, and a number of Members raised this, that we need to ensure that information on the services available is properly communicated. In many cases, there are a range of provisions that, at times, people are not fully aware of. So, there is a job of work to be done on communication.

Mr Storey said that the mark of a civilised society is how it looks after its most vulnerable. This is a key test for us. I welcome the Minister's remarks that this is not the end of the debate but merely, effectively, a staging post towards better implementation and that it will not simply be a debate whereby the Hansard report sits on a shelf gathering dust. It is a key challenge for the Assembly to provide the support that is needed to those with severe learning needs and their families, and I welcome what I believe will be the unanimous support of the Assembly for the motion. However, we need to ensure that it moves beyond a motion and into real action on the ground that delivers for those people in our society. Therefore, I urge the House to support the motion.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes with concern the lack of provision for individuals with severe learning difficulties leaving special needs education at 19 years of age; and calls on the Minister for Employment and Learning to expand the provision of support staff and develop the assistance needed to encourage the uptake of further education and training, thereby allowing more engagement with society.

Adjourned at 4.51 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 23 April 2013

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Executive Committee Business

Tobacco Retailers Bill: Second Stage

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

That the Second Stage of the Tobacco Retailers Bill [NIA 19/11-15] be agreed.

In Northern Ireland today, more than 350,000 adults are smokers, and, according to recent survey information, 83% of these smokers took up the habit while still in their teens. Although tobacco is a legal product, it is unique in that it eventually kills one half of its users. Smoking affects almost every organ in the body and is the direct cause of a number of illnesses, including coronary heart disease, strokes and numerous forms of cancer.

Every year, around 2,300 people in Northern Ireland die from smoking-related illnesses. Many more lives are ruined as a result of illness, disability or bereavement caused by cigarettes. As well as the considerable human and emotional cost that we associate with tobacco use, there is also an economic cost. The estimated hospital costs of treating tobacco-related diseases are in the region of £119 million each year. I am sure that Members will agree that that is not an insignificant sum.

Although we have made substantial progress since the 1960s, when over half the population smoked, our smoking rates still remain too high, particularly when we compare them with those in other developed countries such as Australia and Canada. Rates are particularly high in areas of social and economic deprivation, where around one in three people smoke, compared with the average of one in four for the general population. Smoking continues to be one of the main contributors to health inequalities here, a situation that must be remedied.

Last year, I launched a new tobacco control strategy for Northern Ireland, the long-term aim of which is the creation of a tobacco-free society.

Supporting current smokers to quit is an essential element of this strategy. However, only by creating an environment in which future generations choose not to smoke will we see our vision of a smoke-free Northern Ireland become a reality.

I already referred to the fact that the majority of smokers take up smoking before they reach adulthood. Indeed, most smokers will have tried their first cigarette, and many will have become addicted, before they are of a legal age to purchase tobacco products. The reasons why

young people take up smoking, despite the overwhelming evidence of the harm that it causes, are complex and varied. We know that children are influenced by the smoking behaviour of people around them: their parents, siblings and peers. External influences, such as the media and tobacco promotion, also play a role.

In Northern Ireland, the latest results from the young persons behaviour and attitudes survey revealed that 8% of 11- to 16-year-olds are current smokers and that one in five children in that age group have smoked tobacco at least once in their short lives. Some 2,000 children here become new regular smokers every year — new recruits to replace the 2,300 people who die each year from smoking. We have to break that grisly cycle, and the survey indicates one means of doing that. It reveals that, of the 8% of children who smoke regularly, over half frequently purchase tobacco products from a newsagent, tobacconist or sweet shop. That is in spite of the legislation that makes it illegal for a retailer to sell tobacco to a person under the age of 18.

My main objective, therefore, in introducing the Tobacco Retailers Bill, is to ensure that the minimum-age-of-sale policy is more rigorously applied by retailers as the proposed legislation will introduce tougher measures for non-compliance. Many Members will recall agreeing, in 2008, to an increase in the minimum age of sale for tobacco products from 16 to 18. That change in the legislation brought us into line with the rest of the UK and Ireland and also made it easier for retailers to refuse to sell to under-18s as the majority of adults carry some acceptable form of ID.

At present, a retailer who sells tobacco products to a person under 18 years of age is guilty of an offence and liable to a fine not exceeding £2,500. That legislation is enforced by district councils, the majority of which arrange annual test purchasing exercises to ensure compliance. Between 2008 and 2011, almost 1,400 retailers were visited as part of test purchasing exercises. In approximately one in five of those visits, tobacco was sold to an underage child. That is an intolerably high proportion. Although I accept that the majority of retailers in Northern Ireland are responsible citizens and apply a “no ID, no sale” policy, the evidence is that a significant number will continue to sell tobacco products to those under the legal age unless we apply stricter sanctions.

The Tobacco Retailers Bill aims to achieve that by introducing the following provisions. It makes it compulsory for all tobacco retailers in Northern Ireland to register with their local district council, which will assist councils in their enforcement of tobacco control legislation. It grants courts

the power to ban the sale of tobacco on a named premises or by a named person for up to 12 months following an application by a district council. An application can be made only if three tobacco offences have been committed within three years. The Bill creates new offences relating to the register, including failure to register and failure to notify of changes. It creates an offence of breaching a banning order and allows for fixed penalty notices to apply in a number of offences, including that of selling tobacco to under-18s.

As is the case with existing tobacco control legislation, these provisions will be enforced by district councils through their environmental health officers. My Department currently provides funding through the Public Health Agency for the enforcement of tobacco control legislation. This funding was initially secured to ensure compliance with smoke-free legislation. We are now at a stage at which smoke-free legislation is firmly embedded. Therefore, resources can safely be redirected towards the enforcement of new tobacco control measures, including strengthened retailer sanctions, without incurring additional costs.

I am also concerned that the burdens on retailers be kept to a minimum. Therefore, there will be no charge for registering, and registrations will be kept on a local council basis. Retailers throughout the rest of the UK are already subject to similar provisions to those proposed in the Tobacco Retailers Bill. In England and Wales, a negative licensing system, which allows magistrates to ban retailers from selling tobacco, has been in operation since 2009. The Scottish system, introduced from April 2011, closely resembles my Department's proposals, in that it includes a registration scheme and allows for fixed penalty notices to be issued for a number of tobacco offences. The Tobacco Retailers Bill includes components of both pieces of legislation and will bring Northern Ireland closer into line with those jurisdictions, resulting in a more consistent approach across the UK.

It is my belief that the Bill will have the combined effect of providing a strong deterrent to retailers from selling tobacco to under-18s and an effective enforcement tool for local councils. Most importantly, the Bill will help to reduce the number of young people taking up smoking and will thus save lives.

Ms S Ramsey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. On behalf of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, I welcome the Bill. The Committee is very aware that smoking is the main cause of preventable illnesses and death — the Minister highlighted that in his opening remarks — killing around 2,300 of our people every year.

As the Minister said, the majority of people who take up smoking do so while they are still in their teens; in other words, before they have reached an age at which they fully understand the consequences of smoking and its addictive nature. Therefore, preventing children and teenagers from accessing tobacco is critical and crucial if we want to reduce the number of people in our society who smoke. Sadly, that stands at 24% of the population.

The latest research shows that 8% of 11- to 16-year-olds are current smokers and that half those children who smoke regularly purchase tobacco from newsagents,

tobacconists or sweet shops, in spite of legislation that makes it illegal to sell tobacco to anyone under the age of 18. We also know from the results of the councils' test purchasing exercises that the sale of tobacco to under-18s is occurring. Recent figures show that, in one in five of those exercises, tobacco was sold to an underage person. Therefore, the evidence clearly shows that a significant number of retailers continue to sell tobacco to children. The Bill's aim is to introduce stricter sanctions against those retailers, thereby ensuring that the minimum-age-of-sale policy is more rigorously applied. In turn, that will make it more difficult for children and young people to take up smoking.

The Bill will introduce a registration scheme combined with a negative licensing scheme. It will also bring in fixed penalty notices for retailers caught selling tobacco to under-18s. Similar schemes operate, as the Minister said, in the rest of Ireland, and in England, Scotland, and Wales. The Committee welcomes the fact that the legislation will bring us more closely into line with how those jurisdictions are tackling the problem of underage smoking.

The Committee is in complete agreement with the underlining aim of the Bill, which is to reduce the number of children taking up smoking. However — there is always a “however” or a “but”, but I think that we can get over this — during our pre-legislative scrutiny, one issue arose that was of concern to the Committee. The Bill will introduce a “three strikes in three years and you're out” rule. That means that if a retailer commits three offences of the sort specified in the legislation within a three-year period, that retailer can be banned from selling tobacco. The Committee welcomes that sanction. However, we are concerned that the offences that will lead to a banning order are too narrow.

10.45 am

Currently, the Bill states that the types of offences that can be counted towards a banning order are as follows: not registering a premises to sell tobacco; failing to notify changes to the register; and selling to underage persons. The Committee suggested that the Bill should contain a provision to allow the courts to include a conviction for selling illicit tobacco as one of the three strikes that would lead to a banning order. When the Committee made that suggestion to the Department, the Department advised initially that illicit tobacco sales were dealt with by HMRC under the Tobacco Products Duty Act 1979, and that under that Act, someone could be banned from selling tobacco if convicted.

However, when the Committee enquired further into the matter and contacted the Department of Justice, we learned that the Tobacco Products Duty Act 1979 had never been applied here and that, therefore, no convictions have been brought under that legislation. Rather, HMRC has indicated that typical tobacco offences are pursued under duty evasion legislation using the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979. In 2012, six people were prosecuted under that legislation here, resulting in five convictions. However, it is not clear whether the conviction also imposes a sanction on that person from selling tobacco products for a set period of time. We have followed that up and have written to the Department of Justice seeking clarification on the matter.

The Department's view on whether a conviction for selling illicit tobacco could count towards the "three strikes and you are out" rule to be introduced in the Bill was that sanctions against retailers for selling illicit tobacco is a matter for HMRC to deal with through its existing legislation. For the Department of Health, the focus of the Bill is the prevention of sales of tobacco products to underage people.

The Committee's view is that the Bill should try to capture all types of tobacco sale, including illicit tobacco. We think that an opportunity is being missed here, and we would like the Department to consider whether there is a way of amending the Bill in order to allow a more integrated approach with HMRC.

In conclusion, the Committee is delighted to see the Bill. We are delighted to see that the focus is on stopping children taking up smoking, and we are extremely concerned at the percentage who are doing so. The protection of children is everyone's business, and we congratulate the Minister on getting the Bill into the legislative programme and into the Assembly. The Committee looks forward to getting further into the detail of the Bill at Committee Stage. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Wells: I rise as a very enthusiastic supporter of the Bill, and I congratulate the Minister for introducing not only this legislation, but the raft of legislation that he has been responsible for, some of which has already been passed and is in the system, and which will further restrict the availability of tobacco products to young people.

We have already seen the introduction of a ban on advertising many years ago. We have seen the ban in pubs and restaurants, which has been welcomed by almost everyone. We have seen the ban on vending machines, which is a very recent development. It was introduced quickly and effectively, and there has been very little public comment about it. We have also seen the ban on point-of-display advertising. At the moment, that is being enacted in large supermarkets, but it will shortly become compulsory in small shops as well.

There were those who predicted that the world would fall in and that there would be Armageddon because we introduced controls over cigarette products, but that has not happened. The public adapted to those new measures very quickly and with very little reaction. I not only welcome what the Minister is doing, I also welcome what he proposes to do.

This legislation is to prevent young people having ready access to cigarettes. We have plugged the loophole of vending machines, where many young people were going into hotels and other establishments and buying cigarettes for themselves and their friends from unsupervised vending machines. We have stopped that, and that is good news. That will mean that it will be much more difficult for young people to go into small shops and try to purchase cigarettes.

As the Chairman pointed out, the results indicate a worrying situation at the moment, as tests show that there is a 20% failure rate when people who are clearly underage go into shops and are able to buy cigarettes. The vast majority of those who consume tobacco products start when they are young. I have only ever consumed two cigarettes in my life, and that was 40 years ago.

I have to say that I found it an absolutely disgusting experience. I threw them in the bin and have never touched them since. Unfortunately, that does not happen for many tens of thousands of young people in Northern Ireland. They get hooked on a habit that not only costs them a fortune over their lifetime but can lead to their death. The figures indicate that we lose 2,300 people a year in Northern Ireland as a result of tobacco usage — 2,000 utterly needless deaths.

As I said in a previous debate, three friends and colleagues of mine — all ladies, as it turned out — have recently died from lung cancer. I can think of nothing as horrible, painful and horrendous for the sufferer and their family as to watch someone die an agonising death from lung cancer. The three ladies started smoking as teenagers and had ready access to a supply of tobacco. They bitterly regretted throughout their lives that they ever took up the habit and spent most of their lives trying desperately to give it up. They were sitting in hospitals or hospices knowing that they were the architects of their own painful death.

We must make it as difficult as possible for young people in Northern Ireland to go down that road. Very few people in Northern Ireland are voluntary smokers. There are very few people who enjoy it and want to continue it. The vast majority are desperately trying to give up the habit and cannot do so because it is so addictive. They regret the day that they walked into the newsagent's or the corner store and were able to acquire cigarettes as teenagers. They regret it bitterly. We have to put up barriers to make it as difficult as possible for young people to get the habit. Therefore, what the Minister is proposing is absolutely right. It is balanced in that there is no charge for registration. I believe that it will not be a burden on the struggling retail sector. I accept that small shops throughout the country are experiencing real problems. Therefore, rather than adding a burden to their shoulders, registration is free. It must be made absolutely clear to the irresponsible shop owners and retailers in Northern Ireland that, if they deliberately sell tobacco products to underage children, the consequences are quite serious.

I am very enthusiastic. I hope that this is the first of a raft of measures to control smoking. We have to try to get this terrible rate in Northern Ireland down, with 29% of manual workers and 31% of blue-collar workers still smoking. There is also the worrying increase in the number of female smokers — girls taking up the habit. Although we have been able to reduce significantly the number of male smokers, in the female sector, unfortunately, the trend is in the wrong direction. Therefore, we need to take this seriously and ensure that people do not endure the horrible experiences that three of my friends have.

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Wells: Certainly.

Mr Allister: I empathise entirely with what the Member says. Is he entirely satisfied that the manner in which the Bill is worded will have the reach that he desires? In the language in clause 1 about "carrying on a tobacco business", is there any loophole for someone to argue that in fact their business is a different sort of business and selling tobacco is such an incidental part that it does not rank being called a tobacco business? Might there be a case for wording the clause in such a way as to ensure that

it covers anyone, without dispute, who retails tobacco in any circumstances?

Mr Wells: In all the material that we saw in relation to the Bill, the term “business” encapsulated anyone who sells tobacco products. The number of specialist tobacco retailers in Northern Ireland is less than double figures. There are very few tobacconists, as such, left in the Province. Therefore, tobacco is normally sold as part of a wider retail operation, be it in a corner shop, a newsagent or even a supermarket. So, it has always been assumed that that phrase encapsulates anyone who sells tobacco, not as a primary source of income but as ancillary to a much wider range of products. I know that some hotels, for instance, sell cigarettes. Could they argue that, because their primary purpose is as a hotel, they are not tobacco salespeople as such? That needs to be explored, because I think the intent of the Bill is that anywhere where you can purchase tobacco products will be covered.

We do not want to make it difficult for shops, corner stores and tobacconists to sell tobacco products to young people and have a loophole so that you can nip down to a local social club, pub or hotel and purchase them there. It has to be uniform. It must be difficult, no matter where you purchase tobacco products, to obtain them if you are clearly underage and cannot show identification. It is a useful point, and it is something that we need to look at, but the overall aim must be comprehensive: if you sell tobacco products and you sell them to young people, you are in big trouble. I am sure the Minister will look at that as the Bill progresses.

Mr McDevitt: I, too, welcome the introduction of this legislation. As colleagues have said, the policy objective is, basically, to make it more difficult for people under the age of 18 to be sold tobacco and to improve the regulatory framework and its enforcement on the sale of tobacco, with a view particularly to addressing some of the issues around availability of tobacco to young people. That is fantastic; it is really good. However, one thing that has emerged clearly from the policy briefs that we have been receiving at Committee level in the run-in to the introduction of the legislation is that, although there is no doubt in my mind that the Health Department, the Minister and his officials are very exercised about addressing any weaknesses that there may be on the statute book regarding the regulation of the sale of tobacco, there are other aspects of the statute book that have been in place for a very long time, and you would wonder how seriously they are taken by those who are responsible for them.

The Chair of the Committee referred to the Tobacco Products Duty Act 1979. It is pretty serious legislation; it is criminal justice legislation. You would think that, over the past 30 years, we would have seen prosecutions in this jurisdiction under that legislation. You would think that people would have been hauled before the courts for illegally selling tobacco or, to be blunt about it, selling illegal tobacco. Yet, there has not been a single prosecution under that legislation. That is why this Bill will deal with only a portion of the problem.

The other significant portion of the problem is, of course, contraband and illegal tobacco. It seems to me that there is an acceptance in our society that a bit of tobacco smuggling is just ordinary, decent smuggling. It is not. In my opinion, a bit of tobacco smuggling is a bit of active participation in the early deaths of people. It is a bit of

drug pushing. It is a bit of playing with the lives of a future generation and seeking to exploit, for personal gain, the addictive habits within us all as human beings. It is not OK; it never will be OK. There is little point in us bringing in lots of statutes in health if we do not take that equally seriously.

We have one hell of a tobacco smuggling culture in this society; we have a very, very big one. In fact, we seized a ton of the stuff at Belfast port in 2009. Last year, £7.6 million worth of tobacco was seized in a single operation. Last week, a defence was presented in court by a lorry driver from Maghera when he was up for smuggling cannabis. Do you know what his defence was? He said, “Sure, I thought it was tobacco”. He said that as if tobacco would be OK and cannabis, being a class B drug, would not. You can read it. It is all on the public record. The guy is caught because he has gloves on and he is transferring boxes, somewhere in the continent, from one lorry to his lorry, and he says to the judge, “I thought it was tobacco. Sure, what’s wrong with that?” — a bit of smuggling, a bit of ordinary, decent smuggling. We really need to come to terms with that.

11.00 am

This legislation will help to address the issue that exists in some communities where certain retailers do not seem to think that it is their duty to always ask for identification or to make sure that kids do not buy tobacco. That is brilliant. However, it is only a portion of the problem. When we debate the principles of legislation like this, it is important that we think about the problem in its totality. Perhaps, in his response to the debate, the Minister might take the opportunity to talk a little about the need for other Departments and the Executive as a whole to seize the issue.

I lost both parents to tobacco. I make no apology for having very little tolerance of it. When it comes to tobacco and the regulation of cigarettes and tobacco generally, I am happy to describe myself as a bit of a fascist. That is the sort of stage that we need to get to in this society. I hope that this legislation is followed by legislation on packaging. We need to take every step and use every means possible to ensure that we do not rob so many people unnecessarily of their opportunities in life just because of what is perceived to be either a socially acceptable habit or a socially acceptable form of procuring something that will, ultimately, kill you. Therefore, I am happy to support, on behalf of the SDLP, this stage of the Bill. I wish it all the best as it goes through its further stages.

Mr Beggs: Before introducing new legislation, it is important to identify whether there is a specific reason why it should be introduced and whether it will not just add more bureaucracy in the system. The fact that there are 2,300 tobacco-related premature deaths each year among those who smoke that addictive substance is a strong reason why we need to take more action. On top of that, thousands, if not tens of thousands, of our citizens suffer ill health, such as coronary heart disease, strokes and other diseases, particularly of the circulatory system, as a result of smoking. As the Minister and others have said, smoking is a major cause of health inequality. Of particular concern is the number of mothers who smoke and bring their children up in that environment. It can contribute to asthma, low birth weight and a range of other ailments that affect the young in particular.

Smoking is a very addictive habit. It is difficult to kick once someone is hooked. I agree that preventative work, as outlined by the legislation, needs to be prioritised in order to try to stop our young people commencing smoking. Others have referred to research that shows that 82% of people who smoke start when they are a teenager, with 8% of 11- to 16-year-olds smoking regularly. That indicates clearly that there is a problem among young people, who should not be smoking at all according to the law. Certainly, no sales should be made to those young people. There is a clear need to take action in that area and to plug the gap where addiction commences. Resulting health difficulties commence then and materialise in later life.

What is also of particular concern in the research is that 20% of test purchases failed the test: the sellers did not confirm that the person was over 18 years of age. Many young people purchase cigarettes from local retailers. Perhaps, good money is made from that and retailers can take the occasional fine. That is why it is important to increase penalties and start to make it really serious. I recognise that, if some retailers, particularly the smaller ones, were to lose the ability to sell tobacco, ultimately, it could affect the viability of many smaller shops. So, this could be a powerful tool for bringing about appropriate enforcement and stopping sales to the younger generation. In my opinion, the evidence clearly shows that there is a problem and a need for the legislation, particularly to protect our young people from accessing tobacco. I, therefore, very much welcome the proposal to legislate to regulate the area further.

Three underage sales in a three-year period allows some tolerance, but, if I were a retailer, I would not want to risk my business's viability. Shop owners should be able to protect themselves with relatively little training of their staff. As with alcohol, it is a simple matter of asking the person to produce their ID to ensure that they are over 18. All staff should be able to conform to that, and it should not be unduly expensive for a retailer to provide that training.

I welcome the proposal that it should be relatively simple for existing retailers to obtain a licence by registering with their local council. That would not be over-bureaucratic and would be very reasonable. At the same time, more significant powers would enable better enforcement of the legislation in that area.

I think that the proposal for a fixed penalty system is also to be welcomed. It would be an efficient mechanism that would send a clear message through an initial fine and a first step to potentially losing your licence. It would be very efficient, because retailers and, potentially, councils would avoid court time and expensive costs. So, that proposal has to be welcomed.

Like other Members, I expressed concern in Committee that tobacco offences have been very narrowly defined in this legislation. Other offences involving the sale of illegal tobacco have not been included for consideration. That is particularly important, because, in many communities, tobacco sales are driven not by legal retailers but by access to the £2 packet of 20. Those cigarettes can easily be sold at a profit through normal retail systems or through mobile shops, which appears to be a route that is used in many communities. It is important that everyone recognises that that is a problem and moves forward by taking action against it.

The evidence from the Northern Ireland Audit Office shows that someone who commits one type of fraud is frequently willing to commit another. If you are a criminal, does it matter how you break the law? I would argue that, if someone is prepared to break the law by selling illegal tobacco, they are equally likely to sell tobacco to someone who is under 18. It would, therefore, be appropriate to take this into consideration when determining whether someone is suitable to retain the ability to retail tobacco. Other tobacco offences should be considered in the round in determining whether someone can retain a licence.

I agree with others that HMRC needs to take a much more proactive approach to try to drive out illegal sales. Illegal sales frequently make their way to the young, endangering their health and long-term prospects. That subculture has to be driven out. Much more work needs to be done to educate communities about this. This is not about big government for the sake of big government; it is about improving the lives of some of the most disadvantaged members of our community. It is important that there is increased health education in conjunction with the legislation, particularly in disadvantaged communities, to bring illegal tobacco sales to an end. HMRC needs to use the existing legislation.

If, as I said, local retailers are caught with illegal cigarettes on their premises, why should that not be taken into consideration when determining whether they should be allowed to continue to sell cigarettes? That is important, particularly with mobile shops, because it is difficult to enforce legislation and prevent people selling illegal tobacco. However, if people are caught selling to under-18s or selling illegal tobacco, you can remove their licence and prevent them from selling tobacco at all. It would then be much easier for HMRC to monitor a premises, mobile shop or stall because any tobacco sold would be illegal, which would help to stop the practice. I realise that there will be moving goalposts and that other things may arise, but, as a society, we must do what we can to drive this out and to educate those who misuse tobacco, endangering young people in particular and creating difficulties for our next generation.

Future health costs are also important. Increasingly, as a community, we need to look at preventative work. We need to work out how we can educate people, make everyone adopt better practices and minimise the risk of future health difficulties and expenses to the health system. It is becoming increasingly difficult to meet the needs of the community. Let us bring about sensible legislation and prevent some of the illnesses that we are bringing on ourselves.

I am pleased that the legislation is progressing. I hope that the Committee will be able to look at it carefully and will be able to refine it and, hopefully, improve it to bring even better legislation to Northern Ireland.

Mr McCarthy: On behalf of the Alliance Party, I support the Bill.

The priority for us all is to reduce the number of people getting cancer in the first place. We all know that smoking causes one in four avoidable deaths in Northern Ireland. I pay tribute to all the organisations in Northern Ireland, from the Public Health Agency down to our local GPs and pharmacies, that work strenuously to get people out of the smoking habit and, in particular, to prevent our children

and young people starting to smoke in the first place. I congratulate the officials from the South Eastern Trust — my trust — who just this morning announced a campaign to encourage young expectant mothers to give up the smoking habit and consider the life of their unborn child. Perhaps if those young mothers had not started to smoke in the first place, they would not have to consider their situation in adulthood and motherhood. I congratulate the trust on its efforts.

It is important that appropriate controls are in place for the sale of tobacco, which, as we all know, is a dangerous and addictive product, particularly for our young people. The proposed registration system would allow greater enforcement of the laws on underage sales through fixed penalty notices. We must ensure that sufficient resources and training are available to our environmental health officers and others involved in the implementation. Prohibition orders could also prove to be not only a useful deterrent for retailers but an effective method of preventing those committing offences from continuing to sell tobacco.

Most retailers are responsible and keep within the law. It is regrettable that some are in breach. Indeed, the Minister advised that one in five is in breach. It is because of these failings that the law should be tightened. I think that we would all agree that effective sanctions against rogue retailers and anyone who sells tobacco products to our young people must be introduced.

11.15 am

I fully support the Health Minister's statement this morning. The facts and figures given by the Minister and Sue Ramsey, the Chair of the Health Committee, speak for themselves. As Members, we would be failing in our duty if we did not act to prevent our young people getting hooked for life on tobacco. I fully support the Bill, and I look forward to its further consideration in due course.

Ms P Bradley: As a member of the Health Committee and vice-chair of the all-party group on heart disease and stroke, I support the Bill. We have long known that ill-health outcomes are a direct consequence of using tobacco. We know its impact on families, societies and our health system. We know that the cost is felt not just in monetary terms and in Departmental budgets but by families impacted by the consequences of tobacco use. Therefore, it is incumbent on us, as legislators, to ensure that we do everything in our power to prevent people becoming addicted to this vile drug.

I can call tobacco a vile drug, and smoking a filthy and disgusting habit, because I am one of the 24% of adults in Northern Ireland who are addicted. I started smoking almost 30 years ago as a teenager. I remember that, within a very short time, I had become addicted to the properties of the drug. From an early age, my life has been ruled by cigarettes. I plan my day around cigarettes. I plan what time I get up in the morning around cigarettes. I plan meetings around cigarettes. I even plan the time that I spend in the Chamber around cigarettes. What Mr Wells stated earlier is correct: smoking is one of the biggest regrets of my life.

I also find it very worrying that recent figures show that, every year, as many as 5,000 young people in Northern Ireland take their first cigarette before the age of 18, and some are as young as nine or 10 years old. Therefore,

I cannot stress nearly enough that it is imperative that we do whatever is within our power to make the drug as unattractive and difficult as possible to purchase. Retailers who continue to flout our tobacco laws should be dealt with in an appropriate manner, which will be facilitated through the proposed register of tobacco sellers. The majority of retailers in Northern Ireland are responsible and try to keep within the laws on the sale of tobacco. However, for those who decide that the law does not apply to them, especially those who do so regularly, the Bill will ensure that the sanctions are appropriate and can be applied.

Tobacco is as addictive as heroin. Coming off it is difficult, as any smoker will testify. It is important that our young people are not placed at additional risk by unscrupulous people who supply them with the drug. Communities would not tolerate it if we turned a blind eye to heroin dealers working openly in their areas. We must ensure that those in a position to sell tobacco know that we will not tolerate them working outside the law either. I support the general principles of the Bill.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I, too, welcome the Bill and thank the Minister for introducing the legislation.

Paula adequately demonstrated the problems that smokers have, and I can only sympathise. I smoked quite a lot as a student — you are talking about 60 to 80 cigarettes a day — for a relatively short time. I was lucky enough to be able to give up because I was very involved in sports. I realised that, if I continued smoking, I would simply have to give up sports. I was able to carry on playing sport until a relatively short time ago, so that proves that there is a correlation between smoking and fitness, or lack of fitness in that case. Smoking is accepted as being a habit that is difficult to give up. It is an addiction, and, as I said, I can only sympathise.

Some briefing notes on the Bill were given to Committee members by Cancer Research UK. Those state:

"A registration scheme (working alongside a negative licensing scheme) would strengthen current controls on underage sales, as immediate action could be taken against those selling tobacco to under-18s. It would also help ensure compliance with measures regarding tobacco displays, and would ensure that a comprehensive record of all tobacco retailers was kept, which would make monitoring and enforcement easier for Environmental Health and Trading Standards Officers."

"Policies aiming to restrict youth access to tobacco products can only be effective if they are rigorously enforced. The proposed registration system would allow greater enforcement of underage sales through fixed penalty notices, without recourse to the court system."

The notes go on to state:

"We believe that a comprehensive educational campaign will be required to advise retailers of their new responsibilities and highlight the benefits to them of the new scheme."

"We would agree with the statement in the Regulatory Impact Assessment that 'a licensing system itself is not sufficient to ensure compliance therefore a

comprehensive monitoring system would also have to be established’.”

I also agree with the Chair of the Committee that the Bill should try to capture all tobacco sales, particularly illicit sales. I am also a member of the all-party group on heart disease and stroke, which received a very informative presentation on tobacco packaging from a Professor Bauld a couple of months ago. We talked about Australia, where plain tobacco packaging has been introduced and the impact that that has had. However, the most startling pieces of information to come out of that presentation were that, as packaging has changed, those who manufacture illicit cigarettes have been able to copy it very quickly and that it costs between 10p and 15p to produce 20 cigarettes in a packet that is exactly the same as the legal packaging. You can imagine the profit margin on that. Illicit tobacco sales can only increase. As far as I am aware, a packet of cigarettes now costs around £7, although Paula is indicating that it is more than that. It is quite an expensive habit, and you can understand why people will want to purchase illegal tobacco. The profit margins are huge.

I very much welcome the Bill. I congratulate the Minister on bringing it forward.

Ms Brown: As a member of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, I support the Bill's Second Reading.

I am happy to support the Bill, as I believe that it brings positive benefits for society at large to regulate further the sale of tobacco and reduce the number of smokers in Northern Ireland. Although the use of tobacco is in decline generally, smoking among young people, particularly teenagers, continues at a rate that gives us cause for concern, with approximately 8% of 11- to 15-year-olds taking up the habit.

The Bill is a timely and welcome further measure in the Department's strategy for reducing the use of tobacco among young people. That is when most smokers start. In some cases, they are beginning a life sentence. The Bill's aim is to apply tighter controls on those who sell tobacco products and to ensure, as much as one can, the good health of those under the legal age of 18. The Bill seeks to create a register of those places of business that sell tobacco. At present, there is no centrally held register of tobacco retailers, which makes it difficult to ensure the enforcement of existing laws; namely, fixed penalty notices to retailers who are found guilty of selling tobacco to those who are under the legal age for purchase.

Creating, maintaining and enforcing the register is to be carried out by the relevant local council. The costs for that will not be passed on to the retailer. In my view, that is a good thing, as many small retailers are under enough financial pressure these days. The creation of a register is a good thing and another step in the right direction in aiming to reduce the sale of tobacco to those under the legal age. It also acts as a helpful resource for those agencies that will be charged with upholding the law in respect of irresponsible retailers who continue to sell tobacco to young people.

At present, local councils perform the function of checking whether retailers are guilty of selling tobacco to underage smokers by carrying out mystery-shopper checks, which is proving a deterrent in some cases. I am aware of

attitudes increasingly changing as more retailers ask for identification, not just for tobacco sales but for alcohol as well.

We must continue to see further steps taken in reducing the harmful effects of tobacco smoking, never mind the financial impact that smoking has on a health service that is already under severe strain and pressure. As has been stated, reducing the rate of smoking among teenagers is key to ensuring a healthier society. We must also see that those who continue to smoke are discouraged from doing so, and I encourage the Minister to do what he can to see smoking rates continue to decline.

I support the Bill but call for more action against those who sell tobacco on the black market. The Bill will regulate legitimate and responsible retailers, but ignores the black market tobacco trade. Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs is responsible for dealing with cases of black market tobacco traders — thus it is a reserved matter — we must ensure that a clampdown on legitimate tobacco retailers does not have the effect of pushing children in the direction of counterfeit goods. That trade not only helps to fund and promote the growth of criminality, its effects on the health of individuals are too horrendous to contemplate. I therefore encourage the Minister to raise the issue of the black market tobacco trade at the Executive and with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, particularly given that we are the only part of the United Kingdom to share an unguarded and unchecked land border. I support the Bill.

Mr Gardiner: I am thankful for the opportunity to speak to the Bill and congratulate the Minister for bringing it to the House.

It has been shown that 82% of adult smokers in Northern Ireland started smoking in their teens and that around 8% of 11- to 16-year-olds currently smoke. Although the latter figure has reduced consistently, from over 14% in 2000, it has also been shown that, despite current legislation, a significant percentage of under-18s are able to purchase tobacco from shops. As the law stands, a retailer in Northern Ireland who sells tobacco products to a person under 18 is liable to a fine not exceeding £2,500. The legislation is enforced by environmental health officers in district councils, the majority of which use test purchasing exercises to ensure that tobacco retailers comply with the law.

It is true that most operators operate within the law and apply the “no ID, no sale” policy, but evidence also shows that a significant number of retailers continue to sell tobacco to those underage. That is why strict sanctions must be introduced. Between 2008 and 2011, a total of 1,393 tobacco retailers were visited as part of a test purchasing exercise. In approximately 20% of those visits, tobacco was sold to an underage child. That information was supplied to the Health Committee by the departmental officials.

Let us look at those 1,393 visits that took place over 156 weeks between 2008 and 2011, which represents an average of fewer than nine visits a week over 26 councils. That equates to 0.34 visits per week for each council area or, put another way, one visit every three weeks for each council area, which does not look to me much like a rigorous enforcement regime.

I have no argument with the proposed tariffs of punishment under the new legislation — doubling the maximum fine to £5,000 and creating a £20,000 fine for breaking a ban is the right way to go. My concerns rest with the rigorosity of enforcement. Throughout the Bill's preparation in Committee, I have consistently asked questions about enforcement.

11.30 am

It is also the case that we are lagging behind in this. Legislation on retail tobacco sales has already been introduced, in England and Wales in 2009, in Scotland in 2011 and in the Irish Republic in 2009. Of course we can pass laws, but if we do not create a clear enforcement pathway, the whole impact of legislation will be lost. It would be enlightening for us to discuss exactly how effective enforcement officers have been in their duties to date and whether there is any variation in performances between council areas. If the councils regard this as a cost exercise, which apparently they do, does that imply that they do not intend to do a great deal about enforcing the Bill when it becomes law in November?

I support the Bill, but I hope that my concerns over effective enforcement are taken on board.

Mr McNarry: First of all, I admit to an interest, but in this case, not a conflict of interest. I am not here for an argument as a smoker. Minister Poots is one of only a few well balanced Ministers in this House able and comfortable with his brief, as he has shown us this morning.

[Interruption.] Maybe some people would like to step out and have a comfort break at this moment, Mr Speaker, instead of getting too excited.

I welcome the Minister's presentation of his Bill. As I say, I do so as a smoker who enjoys what is commonly called an addiction. However, I do not recommend smoking to anyone. I am quite proud, I suppose, as a father, to have two daughters who do not smoke. I trust that they will bring up their children, my grandchildren, in the same way. Both my daughters consider me to be a great failure for smoking. I was not an underage smoker, or even a teenage smoker. In fact, I got hooked on it as something to do when I stopped playing football and sport. So, I came to it rather late in life compared to what we are taking about in the Bill.

I have to say that my welcome and support for the Bill is that I hope that it may well assist — I trust that it will assist — in preventative measures, particularly for young people prone to underage usage. That is extremely important.

It is fair to say that the Minister's party colleague the Member of Parliament for North Antrim may well have a commercial view, at times overruling a health view. Employment is important in that constituency. If such a factory were in my constituency, it would be important to me also.

Cigarettes are big business. I just came through duty-free at the weekend. I do not smoke the most expensive cigarettes, but the price of cigarettes is horrendous to me. The brand that I smoke is £6.40 for a packet of 20. I bought them for £3.80 in duty-free. That is the type of price I would have paid on the Continent for them, where I saw a culture that was free with smoking; over a glass of wine, over a cup of coffee, over a meal — before or after, as well. I think that the things we are saying here mean that

perhaps we may be able to give some sort of lead. In this case, we are following others, but we may also be able to give some sort of lead to other countries.

As I said, cigarettes are big business throughout the world, but here we must also not forget that they are a serious source of financial booty to the Chancellor. We have to take that on board, with the health aspect of it set against that. I would love to be in a conversation with the Chancellor and the Health Minister at Westminster. I would love to hear what their balance of priorities is. I sense that the Finance Minister would be saying, "We need the dough; we need the money".

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr McNarry: I will surely.

Mr Beggs: Does the Member not recognise that the cost to our National Health Service of treating those who are suffering as a result of their smoking is more than the revenue that is raised from the smoking, and, therefore, if we wish to look at our long-term provision of health, even in this area, it is essential that we reduce the number of those who smoke in order to reduce health costs?

Mr McNarry: The Member represents a good argument, but I would like to hear the evidence that supports that. I have tried to calculate how much it would cost me to go privately into a hospital to get treatment, as he says I need, put against how much I would have paid if I had been a smoker since the age of 10 or 12 and had been paying the taxes, particularly the taxes that I am paying today on a pack of cigarettes, how many packets of cigarettes I would use in a week and what my contribution is from that, on top of the other taxes that I pay, because I am not a freewheeler. I happen to think that I should pay as I go. I thank the Member for his intervention, but I do not want to be distracted, because I am not here to argue for that. I am only making the points about the amount of bounty or booty that the Chancellor derives from cigarette smokers, and, indeed, the benefits that we in Northern Ireland get from that.

That said, in welcoming the Bill, I would like to say something to the Minister. He is fair, straight and consistent on it, which I respect, but I say to him now, although I do not normally speak on such issues: just ease back on the voluntary smoker. I heard the Health Minister designate, Jim Wells. Heaven help us if he actually is the Health Minister. God help the smoker, after what he related in the five minutes when he stood up there. I am saying: ease off the voluntary smoker, and, for goodness' sake, let us have none of that nonsense that I was picking up yesterday about banning a person from smoking in their own car. I just find that intolerable. I also find, with my natural affinity with people having rights, that that type of Big Brother or nanny state enforcement is not acceptable to me. Judging by the people, smokers and non-smokers alike, who telephoned 'Talkback' — unfortunately I did not hear the Minister afterwards — it would be hard to find any great number of them who were supportive of banning a person from smoking in their own car. I know that I am deviating from the Bill, but I suppose it is part of it.

I believe that the purpose of the Bill was encapsulated in the Minister's early words, when he said that his aim is to achieve a smoke-free Northern Ireland. Yes, but not, Minister, if it removes the right to smoke. I do not think that that would be your purpose.

However, I agree with the aim of a smoke-free Northern Ireland.

We then delve into rights — rights that are recognised by the fact that, when we are talking about the monetary side, cigarettes are legally sold across the counter. As one Member said, the Bill intends to deal with the counterfeit aspect of this business and selling to underage people. So long as cigarettes are legally sold, it is incumbent on the House to acknowledge the right of anyone to enjoy a smoke. That is the main part of my contribution in two parts.

On many issues and from all sides of the House, we have stood up here and pontificated about rights. However, tied to the question of rights — I think that this is the crucial and essential part of what the Minister has outlined this morning — is the fact that this House also has to act responsibly to our young people by explaining fully to them and to their parents why the Bill is necessary.

I trust that that will be what is conveyed from today's debate by the Minister. It is not just about his reasons, which are valid, for the Bill, but about explaining to parents and young people why the Bill is necessary and why it is felt that the House does not want young people getting hooked on cigarettes. If that is the message that the Minister can deliver, the objective is worthwhile.

Mr G Robinson: I fully support the Health Minister's Bill, and I congratulate him for it.

Thankfully, I am not a smoker, but I watched both my parents die at an early age from the effects of nicotine. Given the effects that nicotine has, particularly on our young people, we as legislators have to do our best, by whatever means, to discourage the sale of cigarettes to young and underage people in order to protect them from, in some cases, an early death because of lung disease and other associated illnesses. We must also take into account the cost to our hard-pressed health service of smoke-related illnesses.

My contribution is a short one, but I want to discourage the sale of cigarettes to young people as much as possible, and I want to discourage them from buying and smoking cigarettes, because it can do nothing but damage to their health. That is the message from someone whose parents died from lung disease. I would encourage young people to steer clear of cigarettes.

Mr Poots: I thank all the Members who contributed to the debate. We have had a useful, wide-ranging and varied discussion in which a number of points have been made. I want to clarify matters again, because a number of Members have raised a variety of issues.

The Bill is targeted at tobacco retailers who are breaking the law by selling cigarettes to underage people. We recognise that the greatest problem that we have in reducing smoking is that it is such an addictive drug that, if people get hooked on it in the first instance, it is very difficult to get them off cigarettes. Many people get hooked on cigarettes when they are very young. They make choices that are not good life choices, but which are, very often, brought on them by peer pressure and everything else. This is targeted at reducing the number of young people who smoke by reducing the availability of cigarettes to them. However, I will deal with the other issues in any event.

11.45 am

The Chair of the Committee, Sue Ramsey, raised the issues of the offences being too narrow and illicit tobacco. Our legal advice is that evasion is an excepted matter. As I said, the aim of the Bill is to reduce the opportunity for underage smoking. A number of Members raised the issue of illicit tobacco. My view is that illicit tobacco is probably the greater problem we have in terms of smoking. It is available at around £2 for each packet, and up to one third of people avail themselves of that illicit tobacco, so what we are talking about today refers to around two thirds of tobacco sales and around half the young people who buy that tobacco buy it from these kinds of retailers. So, there is another subject on illicit tobacco that we need to challenge.

As, I think, Pam Brown suggested, I will be in contact with the Northern Ireland Office and, indeed, the Department of Justice on this issue. A number of Members asked why there have been no prosecutions under the 1979 Act. That is a very good question that all of us need to know the answer to. Why is HMRC not doing more to go after the people who engage in the illicit tobacco trade? Very often, those people are criminals, and very often, the money that they receive is put into acts of terrorism. So, there are a number of advantages to going after the people who sell illicit tobacco. It is a trade that brings pain and misery to the individuals who they sell the product to. However, very often the assets that they gain from that trade are used to cause more pain and misery for other people. So, I am quite happy to take up the issue with the Northern Ireland Office, HMRC and our own Department of Justice.

Mr Wells, who is no longer with us in the Chamber, confessed to smoking two cigarettes. I have to say that I gave up after my first smoke. I do not know why he had a second go at it, but one did me. He identified a worrying trend, particularly among the female population. I think that we have to be cleverer about how we seek to discourage and dissuade people from smoking. A lot of young women take up smoking because they believe that it will help them to control their weight. There is an element of truth to that, but the downsides are so much more significant. The impact on their health and appearance is very considerable. We need to do more to educate our younger women in particular and to discourage them from taking up smoking.

Paula Bradley made a very, very effective intervention. She spoke from the heart about how she, as a young person, became addicted to cigarettes. She does not really want to smoke and would love to give it up, but the addiction is so strong. We want to avoid young people who are like Paula starting smoking, regretting it in later years but being unable to give it up. I do not condemn smokers; I empathise with them. All of us have our little habits. I love sweet food. As Health Minister, I should not, but I love it. So, people have their different habits and things that they like. Some people have got into the habit of smoking. The nicotine is hugely addictive, and those people cannot get off it. Let us not go around condemning smokers. Let us help smokers to come off smoking, and let us work with young people to ensure that they do not take up the habit in the first place.

Mr Allister intervened during Mr Wells's contribution to raise an issue about the wording of the Bill. The wording is dealt with in clause 22, which defines a tobacconist, general retailer, supermarket, market stall or mobile shop.

All that should be covered in clause 22, which states that premises includes:

“any place and any vehicle, vessel, stall or moveable structure”.

It also states:

“‘tobacco business’ means a business involving the sale of tobacco or cigarette papers by retail.”

Those words should cover all those issues. However, we are happy to discuss that with our legal advisers to ensure that there are no loopholes because we certainly do not want to leave any. I welcome the fact that the matter was raised.

Mr McDevitt also referred to the Tobacco Products Duty Act 1979 and asked why no prosecutions have arisen from it. That is an entirely reasonable question, which, as I said, I will pursue.

Mr Beggs said that 20% of test purchases fail, which is significant. If it were identified that 20% of people driving on a road into our city were exceeding the speed limit dramatically, the police would be there very quickly because it would be a great source of revenue, and lots of people would get penalty points as a consequence. A large number of retailers — not the majority by any means, but a significant minority — are engaging in illegal sales and taking a chance. Hopefully, legislation that can affect their businesses will lead them to the realisation that it is wrong to sell cigarettes to young people, that they should make every effort to ensure that that does not happen in their businesses and that they should clamp down on that activity.

Mr McCarthy spoke about training for environmental health officers. The Department will work with district councils to produce comprehensive guidance for our environmental health officers to ensure effective enforcement of the legislation. There will be regular meetings between officials from my Department and representatives of the tobacco task group, which is made up of environmental health staff. That will ensure that any additional training requirements over and beyond the guidance are identified.

Sam Gardiner referred to enforcement being effective. I agree that there is no point in our sitting here making arguments, creating legislation and putting the powers in place for them not to be enforced. I admit that there are differences between our councils on levels of enforcement and the effectiveness of the councils. When we pass tobacco control legislation, it goes out to our local authorities. New service level agreements between the Public Health Agency (PHA) and district councils seek to address those issues and align funding with the level of council enforcement. I encourage those who are still double-jobbing, which is not a crime, although the Environment Minister is going to ban it — you can carry out any job apart from that of an MLA and be a councillor — to encourage their councils to ensure that there is effective enforcement and consistency. I also urge other MLAs to encourage their council colleagues in the same vein.

Mickey Brady referred to a comprehensive education campaign on legislative compliance to support retailers. The Department intends to commence an awareness-raising campaign some months in advance of the legislation being introduced so that it does not come as a shock to anybody. That will be led by the PHA and assisted by environmental health staff on the district councils. The

aim of any campaign will be to make sure that retailers are aware of the new requirements to register and of the increased sanction for repeated sales of tobacco to those who are underage.

Pam Brown spoke about the black market, and I believe that there is scope for closer working between my Department and the Department of Justice and its agencies. In England, there have been protocols between HMRC and local authorities, and I want something similar to be introduced here. I will make it absolutely clear: I think that HMRC has shown far too lenient an attitude to a range of issues, such as tobacco and oil, and it is time that the people who commit these crimes were brought before the courts, prosecuted and imprisoned for their activities. It is not conducive to good governance if people can go about breaking the law with impunity, and it is time that HMRC wakened up to that fact. It is not a matter for the House, but it is still a matter of public concern and, therefore, a matter that Members should not ignore.

I thank Mr McNarry for his very kind initial remarks, and I know that that view has widespread support in the House. *[Interruption.]* It is worth a try. In any event, Mr McNarry raised the issue of people's right to smoke. They do have a right to smoke. People have the right to make good and bad choices in life. If you are not harming others, smoking is a choice that you are entirely free to make.

There can be some debate about harm to others, and we had a debate on people smoking in restaurants and in public places. After that debate, a decision was arrived at, and an overwhelming majority of people would now say that it was the right decision. I was on holiday a couple of years ago in a restaurant when I smelt smoke rising. I was almost ready to tell the person to stub it out because they were breaking the law when I realised that I was not in my country and that it would be inappropriate. However, it brought back to me what it used to be like, when people regularly sat in restaurants and cafes next to other people's children and blew their unwanted smoke all over the place. That was doing harm to others. I do not intend to infringe anybody's right to carry out a legal activity — smoking is a legal activity — but I want to help and encourage people and dissuade them from taking up smoking in the first place, and I want to give every assistance to those who smoke and want to give up. That is reasonable because it is to the benefit of the public.

Mr McNarry is probably right that smoking is a bit of a cash cow for the Treasury. It probably brings in more money from smoking than it expends. Nonetheless, objectively, we want a smoke-free Northern Ireland. It will not happen in my lifetime; nor will it happen because we do one single thing. However, incrementally, we can take steps that encourage the proper observation of the law, which is what this legislation is about, to move forward.

Valid concerns have been raised and can be dealt with at Committee Stage, and I am happy to look at how we can amend the legislation to improve it, if that can be done. My officials will work very closely with the Committee on that. I commend the legislation to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Second Stage of the Tobacco Retailers Bill [NIA 19/11-15] be agreed.

Private Members' Business

Economic Initiatives and Sustainable Employment

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 to propose and 10 minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Boylan: I beg to move

That this Assembly calls on the Executive to target resources towards economic initiatives and sustainable employment to ensure a reduction in the numbers of young people, apprentices, graduates and skilled workers who are emigrating to seek employment opportunities elsewhere.

Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom labhairt i bhfabhar an rúin seo. This is a debating chamber, and part of the reason that I tabled the motion is for debate and to bring forward new ideas. I want to start by going back to 1973. I was lucky to be reared with five brothers and four sisters. Between 1973 and 1993, my mother watched as all 10 of us left the country for work. It was only when I saw a recent BBC programme — UTV also aired a report — that it brought it all back to me about how heartbreaking it must have been. There is one thing that my mother did not do: stand in our way. She wanted us all to do better.

12.00 noon

I will wind the clock forward 20 years to 2013. As public representatives, we attend many events. I happened to be at a funeral one day. I have to give this gentleman some praise, because, when someone comes up to me and calls me “Young Boylan”, I take it as a compliment. He said, “Young Boylan, I was on Skype, talking to my son in Australia.” This age of new technology is great. He said that his son was with his partner at a function in Melbourne. He walked into an entertainment facility, and, within half an hour, he had talked to 40 young people from his area. He knew at least 40 people from that area who now reside in Melbourne, Australia. That is part of the reason why I wanted the debate. In the past 40 years, we have experienced all of that. It is a sad fact that, at the minute, it is forced emigration.

The debate is not about criticism of anyone; it is not about criticising Departments, Committees or the contributions of any Members. There was a list of questions, and I thank the Research and Information Service team for its paper. We have to get away from expressions such as “operating in silos”. We all know that each Department has roles and responsibilities that it must adhere to, but each Department must also look at economic promotion.

The Programme for Government refers to creating:

“more jobs; more people in work; a better educated and more highly skilled workforce”.

That is a theme of the Programme for Government. I have so many papers for the debate. The First Minister answered questions on this in the Chamber yesterday.

I want to get to the nub of all this. It is a sad reflection on us that we do not have a single data source for all this. There are different references, and the research paper states that there is not a single data source. To me, that means that we are content to let our young people go away across the world and do whatever, and, as long as they are out of our hair, we have no responsibility.

I want to quote some figures. The unemployment rate is 8.5%. In reality, it would be different if we looked at the number of employable people who have gone away. In some parts of the document, people say that we are OK because in Europe it is more than 10%. That should not be the benchmark for us. I want to put that on record, but I have read various press statements about that.

I will talk about a couple of negative points and then move on to some positive things that the Assembly and the Executive are doing. There are still some concerns about apprenticeships. We see young people who cannot get taken on. Employers are not taking them on, first, for insurance reasons and, secondly, because of having to give them employee status. We need to start looking at that. There is so much information about people not being fit for work. I genuinely thought when I started to research this that, up to 16 years of age, people had a certain level of education, then another up to 18 and then further education. In some of the documents, I see that people are not ready for work, and that is something that we need to look at.

The figures for outmigration, as it is now termed, in 2010-11 refer to 13,824 people. In the South, 200 people were leaving each day. I mention the South because I represent a rural constituency on the partition line, and I know a lot of people. It impacts on communities down there as well, so it is not exclusive to here. I want to get the idea and send a message from the Chamber that there should not be forced migration.

I have outlined some of the negative things, and I will now mention some positive ideas. Corporation tax continues to raise its head. The Executive will keep pushing for that, and it will be a key element to growth. We will support the Executive in that. The Executive had a few other good ideas for short-term gains. One of those is the social investment fund (SIF). There have been a few complaints about how it has been rolled out, but I genuinely think that there will be some short-term gains from its revenue projects and capital projects. I want us to look at us trying to bring forward other capital projects. There needs to be capital investment. Other Members are on Committees such as the Committee for Finance and Personnel and have more knowledge about economics than I have through some of the Committees that I sit on, but we need to look at that. If we cannot balance our books, protect our revenues and use them properly in these economically challenging times, we will never be able to do it. We need to look at that. The announcement about the Long Kesh site is something that we can look at it. It will create a lot of jobs, and it is a capital project that will bring benefit.

I mentioned apprentices not being able to get employment and get experience through employment. I see that the Minister for Employment and Learning has initiated a review group to look at that, and that is certainly welcome.

Having listened to debates in the Chamber, the main issue for me is that there are a plethora of people who have been

educated at third level in normal subjects such as English, maths and geography. We educate these people for nearly 20 years, and the jobs are not there and were never there in the first place. We need to start looking at research and development, different technologies and different ideas. We need to work with the universities on that.

In recent weeks in the media, there have been complaints about the First Minister and deputy First Minister being overseas. That is natural and is part of what the Executive and the Assembly should be doing. We have to encourage firms to come here and to invest and not just to provide short-term or low-paid jobs. Some of the figures show that, in the North, we are some of the lowest-paid people, and that is something we need to look at.

Ideas such as investment in social housing and each Department doing its own bit should —

Mrs D Kelly: Will the Member give way?

Mr Boylan: Certainly, yes.

Mrs D Kelly: On the point about social housing, will the Member agree that it is a puzzle and an absolute disgrace that the Social Development Minister returned £15 million in the past number of monitoring rounds and failed to build the social housing that people needed and that would, quite clearly, have created much-needed jobs in the construction industry?

Mr Boylan: I thank the Member for her intervention. Each Department has a responsibility. I mentioned social housing, because that is something that the Executive can do. We can bring forward public sector support, retention, investment and all of that.

I will finish with this: we can never get at the private sector or the banking. I know that there are businesses in my constituency which have business and are starting businesses, and they are not getting the support or investment that they need.

Thank you very much. I have run out of time.

Mr Newton: I certainly welcome this type of debate on the basis of the value that our young people are to us and to our economy.

I take a slightly different tack to that of the proposer of the motion. I do not believe that we can come at this from a very narrow base. That having been said, the solutions are not necessarily within the gift of the of Enterprise, Trade and Investment Minister. There is a solution or solutions that exist within the gift of the Employment and Learning Minister and the Education Minister.

The one thing I want to say is this: we need to put a value on and appreciate our young people and the resource that they are to the economy. Many are talented, many are well educated, and many could well make a contribution to employers. Often, the employment situation produces circumstances that do not allow them to make that contribution. We have to find a way out of that situation.

We need to find the opportunities that exist, exploit them and present them to our young people so that they gain the skills and personal development that is needed for them to grow into people of much more responsibility. We need to find opportunities for them to take the skills and the education base that they have and commercialise their

skills and education, so that they are of much greater value to employers.

There are opportunities that can be exploited. From my previous experience — I am tempted to say, “When I worked for a living, before I went into politics”, but I will not — when I was doing some work with DEL, I realised that commercialising the skills of graduates is one of the keys to their future. It is a key and an aspect that employers demand. More and more, employers demand that young people should hit the deck running. We need to look at how we can exploit those opportunities for our young people. The proposer of the motion may be looking at this with some degree of parochialism or a narrow attitude. I say that —

Mr Boylan: Will the Member give way?

Mr Newton: I am happy to give way.

Mr Boylan: Obviously, I tried to portray it differently. I said that there was a role for each Department. I know that you have spoken about DETI, but I referred to all the Departments. I want to clarify that.

Mr Newton: I have used the word “parochial”. I pay tribute to the Minister and the work that she has done. If I get the chance, I will come back to the work that Stephen Farry is doing.

In terms of the parochial attitude, our young people should be valued as people who can operate not only in a Northern Ireland context but in a global one. The skills that they have, the skills that they bring to it and the skills they will eventually bring to it as they develop will be appreciated globally, not just in a narrow focus. If Northern Ireland is to develop its export base, it has to have people in business who can think globally and act locally. That is where I am coming from. As to presenting an opportunity —

Mr Speaker: The Member has a minute added onto his time because he took an intervention.

Mr Newton: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Allowing our young people to grow does not mean that we should confine them to east Belfast, Tyrone or wherever it might be. It also allows them to think about opportunities abroad. If we plan opportunities abroad, present training for them to take such opportunities and opportunities for them to commercialise their skills abroad, many of them will come back. Others may not come back, because the career that they find for themselves in Australia or wherever may be more attractive than coming back. That is our loss. It is a loss to the Northern Ireland economy, but we should not restrict our young people in that way. With regard to planning for our young people abroad, Martin McGuinness launched a book on helping, as he described it, Irish people — I hope that he means all of us here — moving to Western Australia. That is to be welcomed as a step, but it also recognises the fact that our young people will seek opportunities abroad.

12.15 pm

The apprenticeship training scheme was mentioned, and it has two aspects: the employer-led apprenticeship, which has an 82% success rate of young people moving from apprenticeship into employment and the programme-led apprenticeship, where we are failing —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is almost gone.

Mr Newton: — our young people. It has only a 22% chance of apprentices achieving an NVQ level 2, and it is not valued by employers. We need to address that sort of thing.

Mr P Ramsey: I support the motion. It is an important motion that calls on the Executive to take a more direct line. Any comments that I make will be as a member of the Employment and Learning Committee.

Between 2000 and 2010, an estimated 97,000 people emigrated from Northern Ireland. The societal and economic impact of such a loss over a decade is serious, but the increased number of young people leaving the shores of Ireland since 2008 is absolutely staggering and most worrying. I represent a border constituency, and it is all too clear that young people from Derry and Donegal are leaving in high numbers to go to Australia, New Zealand and Canada simply because they see no future here in Northern Ireland.

I have been a member of the Employment and Learning Committee for some time. It has had a fairly substantive NEETs inquiry, which examined models of best practice to try to stimulate and encourage young people into other areas. Unfortunately, increasing numbers of young people in Northern Ireland — almost 44,000 — find themselves in the NEET bracket. We have to do things better.

I spoke in the debate yesterday on learning difficulties for those in the post-19 lobby. It was a fairly good debate as regards ensuring that those who are most vulnerable and most marginalised have an opportunity to secure employment. I said yesterday, and I say it again today: we are not doing it right. I take Cathal and Robin's point, and this is not a criticism of anyone, but, because we are in a coalition Government, Departments are not prepared to co-operate and collaborate in a much more fundamental way, as happens in the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly. I can say that because the Committee went there and saw models of good practice and case studies where the evidence was clear that, from an educational, training and an economic development perspective, there is joined-up thinking. That, clearly, is not happening here. We have a NEETs inquiry, and we have been told that every effort is being made to ensure that there is leadership on that, but too many young people are failing.

Dolores talked to me earlier about young people, and there have been debates in the Chamber on suicide. Young people feel failed by the system. When they feel failed, they see no future and no opportunities. A lot of young people have, unfortunately, taken their own life because they do not have something. I always say that work is occupational therapy; it keeps the mind going but, more importantly, it keeps the mind of a young person going, a young person who could easily —

Mr Boylan: I thank the Member for giving way. The Member who spoke previously talked about the parochial aspect and about people who go across the world to gain experience and come back. In normal circumstances, people would go away anyway to get experience. We are now in an enforced situation where people leave because they have no choice in the matter. There is a big difference between that and people wanting to learn and bring something of value back. That is the problem. Do you agree with that?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an added minute.

Mr P Ramsey: I do, but, too often, we prioritise political battles in the House rather than prioritising the economic development that is necessary to give a good future. We need to have a much clearer, more focused and more comprehensive approach to maintaining the educational standards that we have. We have good educational standards, but too many fall through the system. The evidence is there, even in the Protestant community. They are not achieving the educational excellence that is required for them to move forward. As I said, we need to do more to ensure opportunities for work — they are few and far between — but, unless they have the education, they will not go anywhere. It is their passport to a career.

I have only a few minutes left. OFMDFM is the lead sponsoring body for the Ilex project in the city of Derry. One of the key elements of that project is the expansion of Magee university, and — I say it again in the House — it will be the most important economic regeneration project ever to take place in the city. It will provide a future for many of our young people who are moving across the water for education, and it will stimulate industry in the private sector. We have been failed on the student numbers that were promised by successive Governments, which were in the One Plan and which OFMDFM agreed to, on the principal point of an immediate 1,000 students and going up to 10,000 full-time students for Derry.

I want to finish on this point. The A5 project in the north-west would have stimulated incredible growth in the construction industry. It would have created immense employment opportunities for the same young people who were failed by the system, and it would have created greater apprenticeships, which Robin referred to, whether in young people's apprenticeships or adult apprenticeship programmes.

I thank the Members for tabling the motion. The SDLP fully supports it, but we need more joined-up thinking from the Executive.

Mr Copeland: In rising, I will state that I have never lived any further than eight miles from the place where I was born, so the position that I adopt in this debate should not come as any surprise. The Ulster Unionist Party has no issues with supporting the motion.

The concern that our young people — apprentices, graduates and skilled workers — are emigrating to other countries to find jobs is a serious one for the Assembly and for everyone connected with it. The problem is not new. Reg Empey commissioned research when he was Minister for Employment and Learning a number of years ago, but it remains something that we have yet to get to grips with. Perhaps this debate will lead to greater understanding of the reasons why people leave these shores and focus their future in other places.

To put it in context, first, I want to deal with the reasons why people decide that, having grown up in Northern Ireland and benefited from what is here, for some reason, their future lies elsewhere. From the current labour market statistics, it can be seen that unemployment recently reached 8.5%, which is the highest rate since 1998. The unemployment rate for young people aged between 18 and 24 was 23.8%, which is the highest since records began in 1995. The claimant count, which is people claiming unemployment-related benefits, is increasing monthly and

currently stands at 64,900. That is 64,900 people who have no realistic prospect of securing gainful employment or the self-respect or economic independence that flows from that.

The productivity gap between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK continues to widen. Indeed, an economic outlook from PricewaterhouseCoopers in March showed that we are continually slipping behind the rest of the UK in just about every measure of employment, growth and productivity. So, the numbers of young people moving from Northern Ireland must be considered in the harsh context of those economic realities.

As regards the numbers involved, there are sources that can give an indication of the scale of the problem. The NISRA Registrar General's annual report published in November 2012 sets it out that there is no comprehensive system to measure those moving into and out of the United Kingdom, so a series of indicators are used. That shows that, during the Troubles in the 1970s and 1980s, nearly 10,000 more people a year left Northern Ireland than came into it. That was clearly due in no small part to the effects of the Troubles. From the early 1990s until 2004, population movement was balanced, with similar numbers of people leaving and arriving. Yet, from 2004 until mid-2008, immigration to Northern Ireland rose sharply, but it now appears that the position has returned to one of modest net outmigration.

To give some clarity to the debate, we should look at the latest specific figures covering 2010 to 2011. During that period, almost 25,000 people left Northern Ireland to seek a future elsewhere. As you might expect, 45% went to Great Britain, and the remainder went to countries outside the United Kingdom. It is also apparent that the Belfast City Council area was most affected by a net outflow of young people between the ages of 20 and 29. So, although it is true that net emigration is less than in previous decades, it remains a matter of great concern.

The question remains of how we deal with the problem. The answer, with which all in the House will no doubt agree, is to rebalance the economy and create jobs, with a focus on tackling youth unemployment. Unemployment festers in and has implications in youth that it does not to the same degree elsewhere. If we can learn anything from migration levels in Northern Ireland over the past 40 years, it is that, when times are bad, people will leave and that, conversely, they will stay when times are good and opportunities are present. The failure thus far to secure a decision one way or the other in the devolution of corporation tax is an obvious blow and perhaps removes an essential tool from the equipment with which our Executive can confront these issues.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is almost gone.

Mr Copeland: Almost gone. Sorry, I have very little left to say.

Although I believe that it is right to continue to press the case for control of that economic lever, we must consider all other possibilities. Our youth —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is gone.

Mr Copeland: Our youth, our investment in the past and our return in the future will be denied us if we are not —

Mr Speaker: I call Chris Lyttle.

Mr Copeland: I apologise.

Mr Lyttle: I think that the entire Assembly will support the motion and agree that building a Northern Ireland with the opportunities and quality of life necessary to retain talent and compete internationally is one of its key aims.

We have heard concerning statistics. Migration has increased significantly. Jobseeker claimant numbers and unemployment among young people are of serious concern to every Member. The number of young people who are leaving Northern Ireland — apprentices, graduates and skilled workers in particular — is of serious concern. That has wide-ranging consequences for not only our economy but our community and, indeed, our aim of building a more knowledge-based economy.

I welcome measures that the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Minister for Employment and Learning have taken on the issue, in particular the £9 million investment in a collaboration and innovation fund to assist our young people into education, training and job opportunities. I also welcome a £40 million investment in the youth employment scheme to upskill our young people and provide opportunities for meaningful work experience. I welcome the extra university places and the increased number of PhD places that have been created. Those are essential in commercialising our unique selling point: the knowledge and skills of our people. Companies are seeking to attract and retain highly qualified talent, and it is vital that we are able to provide such qualified people.

12.30 pm

Corporation tax-setting powers are a concern. In the absence of such powers, we have to look to build on our existing economic strategy. We have to innovate more, export more and employ more.

I move now to the long-term measures that we should take. As a member of the Employment and Learning Committee, I understand the importance of ensuring that career guidance for our young people is as robust and accurate as possible. The labour market is shifting towards technology, the sciences and ICT. We need the resources to ensure that our young people, from the earliest age, make the right decisions regarding their career. We also need to ensure that those young people have the skills needed to compete in the international labour market.

Some of our graduates who have worked hard and, indeed, invested in their future face difficult employment circumstances that can affect their health and can lead to mental health issues. The young people who are detached from our labour market have been involved in difficult circumstances, and we have to react to those. We need to ensure that we create a competitive and sustainable job market that has opportunities for everyone.

In order to recruit and train the talent, we need to be able to offer a labour market with a good quality of life, where division and segregation are part of the past. We need political parties to work together to build the framework and the shared society in which we can create those opportunities.

I look forward to hearing the Minister's comments on the potential developments of the economic strategy with regard to enterprise zoning, building on existing knowledge transfer partnerships, looking at enhanced research

and development tax credits to improve and develop our intellectual property and accessing financing and banking for our businesses.

It is essential that we rebalance our economy and create jobs for our young people. My party fully supports the motion.

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately after the lunchtime suspension. I therefore propose, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm. The first item of business when the House returns will be Question Time.

The debate stood suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 12.32 pm.

On resuming (Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Mitchell McLaughlin] in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order. A large number of questions have been withdrawn. Questions 2, 4, 5, 9 and 13 have been withdrawn and require written answers.

Economy: Corporation Tax

1. **Mr Eastwood** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what implications does the recent announcement about delaying the decision to devolve corporation tax have for the economic strategy. (AQO 3849/11-15)

7. **Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the impact on investment and employment following HM Government's decision to delay any consideration of the devolution of corporation tax. (AQO 3855/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): With your permission, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I will answer questions 1 and 7 together.

I am disappointed that the Prime Minister has delayed his decision on devolving corporation tax powers until autumn 2014. The Executive remain committed to securing that important additional policy lever. Irrespective of the delay, we will continue to work together to deliver the actions contained in the economic strategy and the more recent economy and jobs initiative. However, it must be recognised that the economic strategy's key objective of rebalancing the local economy would be delivered more quickly if we had the power to vary the rate of corporation tax.

Mr Eastwood: I thank the Minister for her answer. Given what seems to be an indefinite delay in the devolution of corporation tax, would the Minister consider introducing proposals for a Calman-style commission to examine what further powers could be devolved to this place to give us more tools to address the economic difficulties here?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. First, of course, that sort of decision would not be for me; it would be for the Executive as a whole. Secondly, the delay is not indefinite. We have been told that, once the Scottish referendum is out of the way, a decision will be taken. I want to say that I think it a fundamental mistake by the Prime Minister not to have made the decision now. Frankly, if I were Alex Salmond, I would use that as a way to argue for independence. I would say that, although the Northern Ireland Executive have put forward a very compelling case in respect of corporation tax, the Westminster Government have decided not to devolve it. If I were Alex Salmond, I would say, "What you need is independence". In fact, I think that it goes contrary —

Mr McDevitt: You should make the argument for independence.

Mrs Foster: I absolutely, most certainly am not arguing for independence — *[Interruption.]* I can join the dots, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, unlike some across the way *[Laughter.]* I am saying that I think that the Prime Minister has made the wrong decision. However, he has just delayed it. We are looking forward to engaging with him on that and on what I have described as “corporation tax plus” — all of the other issues on which we must move forward. I have often said that the economic strategy is a living document that we go back to time and time again through the Executive subcommittee. Our last meeting was on 19 March, and we will get together again in the near future. It is about keeping at the economic strategy and looking at ways in which we can be innovative and, indeed, at the proposals on the economic pact, which have been mentioned. We are certainly coming together on those issues, and the First Minister and deputy First Minister will speak to the Prime Minister again.

Mr Weir: I thank the Minister for her responses so far. What is her assessment of the impact of the delayed decision on inward investment and unemployment?

Mrs Foster: It will have an impact. We had been planning for this. The Minister for Employment and Learning had put forward a very good paper on the skills that would be needed if we had the power to lower corporation tax. Of course, we had done some work on the number of jobs that would be created if we had a lower rate, and the figures are there for all to see. It would be difficult to achieve those figures without the tool of a lower rate of corporation tax. Recently, we looked at the Republic of Ireland, which, because of its lower rate of tax, has been able to attract foreign direct investment. We cannot do that because of the tax regime.

Let us be honest: we have achieved a lot without the corporation tax lever. We have done that because of the skills of our people, our young population, our marvellous work ethic and the fact that Northern Ireland offers great connectivity and is a gateway to Europe. We will continue to push all those issues, but there is no doubt that, if we had a lower rate of corporation tax, we would be able to do much more.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Given the delay in the devolution of corporation tax powers, will the Minister provide information on what the Executive plan to do to further reduce business operating costs as a way of bringing in further investment and increasing employment?

Mrs Foster: We are obviously looking at other measures. Enterprise zones are constantly talked about in this context, but, as far as we were concerned, enterprise zones were to be seen in the context of the ongoing Treasury work on the devolution of corporation tax. Indeed, enterprise zones in GB look at rating, simplified planning and telecoms, all of which are devolved to Northern Ireland. However, we are exploring the area of enhanced capital allowance to see whether that can be applied to Northern Ireland as a whole.

I say to the Member that one of the biggest costs of operating in Northern Ireland is energy, and the House will have to come back to that time and time again. I visited one of our large companies in the past number of weeks, a global company with installations in the US and Europe. They were very clear with me about the fact that

their energy costs in Northern Ireland were second only to those in Italy. That should be a matter of grave concern for us in the House, because, even though it is a very efficient manufacturing company — in fact, it is held up as an exemplar for the work that it has done around lean manufacturing — it has grave concerns about its energy costs. We need to revisit all these things, look at the single electricity market in particular and work with the regulator to see whether more can be done, because I have grave concerns about this at present.

Mr Nesbitt: Following on from the Minister's answer, does she support Bombardier's application for its own energy plant at Queen's Island?

Mrs Foster: I can fully understand why Bombardier is looking to put that in place. I had a meeting with it in and around the issue of its plant. I wish it well with its application. Indeed, others may be looking at that option. I had a meeting with the Green Investment Bank today, and I know that it is certainly looking at opportunities to invest in green opportunities with Northern Ireland companies. However, if every large company does what Bombardier is doing, the public service obligation (PSO) levy will transfer to the rest of the companies still on the grid. Bombardier is essentially taking itself off the grid, so the rest of the companies will have to pay the PSO levy, and prices will actually go up for them. That is a conundrum that we need to tackle, and I have tasked officials with addressing it as a priority. I met the chair of the Utility Regulator just last week. That is number one on my priority list.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Question 2 has been withdrawn.

G8 Summit

3. **Mr McNarry** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans she has to showcase businesses to the 39th G8 summit leaders. (AQO 3851/11-15)

15. **Mr Hamilton** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on how her Department intends to capitalise on economic investment opportunities generated by the G8 summit in County Fermanagh. (AQO 3863/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Again with your permission, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I will answer questions 3 and 15 together.

My Department is working closely with the Prime Minister's office, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and local stakeholders to maximise opportunities to showcase to a global audience Northern Ireland's business development and tourism offerings to visiting delegations as a positive place to live, work, visit, study, invest and do business with.

For the many international media who will cover the G8 Summit, a dedicated online presence has been developed. It will provide business and tourism information and opportunities to showcase the Northern Ireland offering directly to the media and visiting delegations. It will range from the food that they will eat to a number of visit programmes.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Simon Hamilton. Sorry, David.

Mr McNarry: Apology accepted, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker.

I thank the Minister for her very acceptable and professional answer. She will know that representatives from Outreach Five — Brazil, China, India, Mexico and South Africa — are also likely to be in attendance at Lough Erne. Can she add to her previous answer by saying what access she will have to those important potential investors?

Mrs Foster: We are already meeting some of the forward delegations that are visiting Northern Ireland and Fermanagh, and they are engaging very much with Invest Northern Ireland and the other partners. This is the biggest opportunity that we have had on the world stage. We must take the opportunities, and that is what we intend to do. As the Member might appreciate, there have been many meetings since it was announced that the G8 was coming to Northern Ireland, and I welcome officials from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Prime Minister's Office to Fermanagh on a very regular basis. We are certainly increasing their air miles to Northern Ireland, and we look forward to working with them to make sure that everything is all that we hope it will be. The summit will put on us on the global stage; not just Northern Ireland as a whole, but our companies and the tourism product that we have here. It will also give us an opportunity to upgrade some of the infrastructure in and around the area where the event is taking place.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Simon.

Mr Hamilton: Better late than never. Thank you, Deputy Speaker. The Minister will be aware that the G8 will put huge pressure on the existing telecommunications infrastructure in Fermanagh. What steps have been taken to alleviate that problem for the summit? Will the benefits of that be long-lasting for the people of Fermanagh?

Mrs Foster: Obviously, there has been a lot of talk about legacy in connection with the G8. I hope that part of the summit's legacy will be the telecoms infrastructure left behind after the event takes place. I am keen that operators seize that opportunity and leave an infrastructure that will benefit everyone in the vicinity after the event takes place.

I wrote to the chief executive officers of the main telecoms companies encouraging them to review and reprioritise their investment plans with legacy in mind. I view legacy as improving existing mobile services, showcasing 4G, avoiding inadvertent roaming and improving basic and superfast broadband. I am hopeful that it will take place. I have written to them very recently and hope to meet them in the near future to hear their specific plans for the G8.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. It is important that we use the G8 summit to showcase everything that is good about Fermanagh, but will the Minister detail how the G8 summit can take place in a way that will be a benefit to the citizens of Fermanagh rather than a hindrance or annoyance as they go about their daily life in that busy week?

Mrs Foster: Undoubtedly, there will be some disruption. We must try to ensure that it is kept to a minimum, particularly for the young people who will be sitting exams on the Monday and Tuesday. I understand that the maths GCSE will happen on the Monday, so we must ensure that those young people get to their school in time to sit their exam. Obviously, while people can put up with a little bit of annoyance for a couple of days, we do not want to have an

impact on young people's lives going forward and prevent them achieving their GCSEs.

We have also met local stakeholders, the council, the Tourist Board, Invest Northern Ireland and, of course, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Prime Minister's Office. We have, of course, been speaking with the Police Service of Northern Ireland and its colleagues to ensure that we will be able to get those young people in and out and that we try to keep disruption to a minimum. There will be disruption — I think most people accept that there will be disruption — but the benefits and lasting legacy that will come afterwards will far outweigh the disruption around that weekend and the two days at the beginning of that week, 17 and 18 June.

Mr McDevitt: Another legacy that, one would think, the Minister and the Executive would hope to see from the G8 would be a significant increase in visitor numbers and the establishment of Fermanagh and Northern Ireland as a desirable destination. Given the importance of many of the G8 countries as tourism markets, will the Minister tell me what specific steps Tourism Ireland is taking to maximise the impact of this event from a tourism perspective?

2.15 pm

Mrs Foster: Tourism Ireland has been very much involved with our planning. As you rightly say, a number of the countries that will be in the Lough Erne golf resort over 17 and 18 June and indeed before and after it are target countries for Tourism Ireland. It has been working very closely with its representatives in those markets to make sure that it gets stand-out. When I was in Brussels at the Northern Ireland showcase that took place back in March, I was very pleased that the G8 summit was one of the key elements. That, again, was through Tourism Ireland. It is about partnership. It is about making sure that we all work together to get the most out of this because, as I said, it is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

Mr Elliott: This is a follow-on to the Minister's answer on communications in the area. I notice that some of the proposals for the mobile telephone communication masts are for temporary masts. I wonder whether the Minister can comment on that. Will she press to have those on a permanent basis as opposed to a temporary one?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. He is right to say that temporary masts are being put in place for the event. However, Vodafone has already indicated that it intends to leave any temporary infrastructure installed for the summit there until it is replaced by more permanent arrangements. That is a very good move by Vodafone. The Everything Everywhere investment will ensure that we have good 3G coverage in Fermanagh, something which, the Member will know, has been lacking. If companies are putting in temporary provision, we want to encourage them to leave it there until something more permanent can be put in place. I am pleased to say that that is what is happening with those telephone masts.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Questions 4 and 5 have been withdrawn.

Tourism: Visitor Numbers

6. **Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the 4.2 million visitor target by December 2014. (AQO 3854/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Despite the very challenging global economic conditions, I remain positive about our prospects for achieving our Programme for Government targets to 2014. Full-year figures for 2012 on visitor numbers are not yet available. However, there are many encouraging indicators of the success of the ni2012 campaign. I am encouraged by a 10% increase in hotel occupancy rates during 2012 and by the excellent first year visitor numbers for new attractions such as Titanic Belfast and the Giant's Causeway visitor centre. We continue to build on the momentum of ni2012, with exciting events happening this year such as the UK City of Culture, the World Police and Fire Games and, of course, the G8 summit in Fermanagh and beyond into 2014 with the Giro d'Italia.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her answer. Are there any specific visitor targets for emerging economies such as the BRIC countries — Brazil, Russia, India and China? Further to that, given the British Government's stalling on corporation tax, does she agree that we should focus on devolving and abolishing air passenger duty to increase visitor numbers and boost the economy?

Mrs Foster: Of course, in relation to air passenger duty, we have already reduced to zero the band for a lot of the countries that you just mentioned: Brazil, Russia, India and China. If we are able to get a flight from any of those countries direct into Belfast, they will not have to pay any air passenger duty. One of my clear priorities in tourism is to try to attract more direct flights into Northern Ireland and Belfast. It is important that we continue to push the Canadian market. That is my number one priority, because I feel that there is an open door for a connection to Toronto. We are also very much looking at the German market.

Brazil, Russia, India and China are not priority markets for Tourism Ireland in respect of Northern Ireland. Those are emerging markets. We undertake some work when we go to those countries to heighten awareness. Titanic Belfast has been a tremendous assistance to us in that regard, because Titanic is a global brand. We can talk about it to people from China, Brazil, Russia and India, and they know precisely what we are speaking about. We are proud to have that association, and we will continue to build on it in those faraway markets.

Mr Anderson: The Minister commented on the Titanic signature project. Will she further comment on the very great success that it has been since it opened in April 2012?

Mrs Foster: The First Minister and the deputy First Minister were at Titanic Belfast this morning to celebrate the fact that 807,000 visitors have come to it since it opened, which was just in April of last year. That is a tremendous success. They have come from 128 countries, from all across the world. That shows the benefit of having a centre like Titanic Belfast.

Just in case we have forgotten, do you remember what the Audit Office said, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker? Do you remember that it said that we would struggle to reach 400,000 visitors a year and that we would need 400,000

visitors to make it sustainable? We have doubled that figure — doubled it. I must pay tribute to the operators of Titanic Belfast for the marvellous work they do. They go right across the world to sell Titanic Belfast. It has been a tremendous success for us, and we should celebrate that today in the House.

Mr Dickson: Minister, given the excellent list of events that you have enumerated to the Assembly, how do you intend to counter the recent negative publicity that has gone around the world with regard to street protests and ongoing dissident republican threats?

Mrs Foster: By being positive and asking people to look at the success of ni2012.

One aspect of ni2012 that really caught the imagination of the people of Northern Ireland was the civic pride part. I was really pleased that it was not just the tourism industry that took on the "ni2012: Our Time Our Place" slogan. I have often said that the Wilson's Country slogan of "Our Time Our Spuds" was a tremendous take on "Our Time Our Place". Apparently, they are at it again for the G8, and I understand that they have another catchy slogan for that. That shows that tourism is everyone's business. It is important that we are all ambassadors for Northern Ireland and that, when we leave this place, we talk it up and welcome people to our shores.

I look forward to repeating the success of events like the Irish Open. We will hold the Northern Ireland Open Challenge in Ballymena this year. As well as that, we have the big events: the World Police and Fire Games and the UK City of Culture, which runs throughout the year. I have had the great pleasure of attending some of its events. Let us be positive and look to the future for tourism.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Question 7 has been answered.

Social Economy Consortium

8. **Mr Maskey** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many businesses will be created as a direct result of the new social economy consortium. (AQO 3856/11-15)

Mrs Foster: In October 2012, DETI appointed this consortium to design, manage and deliver a three-year social economy work programme. Social Enterprise NI represents a broad range of interests across the social economy sector in Northern Ireland and further afield. The objective of the programme is to identify and implement a programme of initiatives to enable the continued growth of a sustainable social economy sector.

Mr Maskey: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for her response. Is she able, at this point, to elaborate on what sectors of the broader social economy have been prioritised for potential growth?

Mrs Foster: The whole point of giving this to the social economy sector was for it to put forward its own work programme, and I have been very pleased with the way in which it has taken that on. It is really being led by the sector itself, although we, of course, have put money into the consortium to help it to do that.

We are looking at bringing forward a mapping report, which is due this month. It is a joint mapping report produced by my Department and the Department for

Social Development so that we know exactly what is out there in the social economy and can work on it.

I do not need to tell the Member that there are marvellous examples of social enterprises across Northern Ireland. That is the joy of the social economy. It happens in Irvinestown, west Belfast and in every city and town across Northern Ireland. We want to support the social economy consortium and let it grow in its own way, but in a sustainable way. That is the key element.

Mr Clarke: In relation to the previous question, will the Minister update the House on the development of the financial capability strategy?

Mrs Foster: A draft of the financial capability strategy, which is, of course, part of our Programme for Government commitments — it is commitment 48 — has been developed. The draft strategy has been informed, again, by a quantitative and qualitative evidence base and by wide stakeholder engagement. The Executive recognise the significance of this issue and the contribution that it can make to the quality of life of consumers and to the local economy. That was recognised by the fact that we included the need to have the financial capability strategy in the Programme for Government. I hope that it will go out to consultation in the very near future.

Mr Copeland: Will the Minister detail what action she has taken, perhaps in conjunction with the Minister of Finance and Personnel, to ensure that the social economy can avail itself of opportunities in the significant public procurement spend?

Mrs Foster: That, of course, is being looked at in some detail by the Committee for Finance and Personnel, and the question is probably more one for the Minister of Finance and Personnel. However, we would very much like to see more use made of the social economy in public procurement, because we believe that there are many sectors in which the social economy could deliver a better and more local service in an efficient and effective way. I want to see the social economy involved in public procurement, but perhaps the Member will ask the question again of the Minister of Finance and Personnel after 2.30 pm.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Question 9 has been withdrawn.

Energy: System Charges

10. **Mr Newton** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what the Utility Regulator can do to reduce system charges for large energy users. (AQO 3858/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I am very aware of the effect of electricity costs on large energy users. I recently met the chair of the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation to personally express my concerns regarding the matter. Following the recent publication of the pricing data comparison report, I asked the Utility Regulator to prioritise detailed analysis of the reasons for the high costs experienced by industrial consumers in Northern Ireland.

Mr Newton: I thank the Minister for her answer so far. I note that she referred to the high energy costs in answer to a previous question. Will the Minister encourage the regulator to set about establishing the potential for a working group or a committee to look at this important

issue, which she referred to previously and in answer to this question?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. Obviously, the regulator is independent, and it will be for him to decide whether to set up a working group. I would very much welcome that, because there needs to be more dialogue in and around why our prices are what they are. I recognise the regulator's commitment to undertake further analysis to try to understand why costs are high in Northern Ireland. I understand that he has identified three additional pieces of work that are considered to have a direct impact on the issues. He is looking at the review of the competitiveness of the industrial and commercial (I&C) market; at robust scrutiny of network price proposals; and at work to integrate the wholesale market with western Europe. So, different strands of work are ongoing in the regulator's office, and I welcome that, but Members need to be aware of the different pressures that we have in relation to energy costs and the impact that that has on our business community.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Does the Minister agree that domestic consumers should not be forced to pay more to reduce energy costs for larger users?

Mrs Foster: I do not think that that will necessarily be the outcome of this piece of work. I want the regulator to look at why our prices are so high at present for large energy users. Is there a subsidy coming across at present from domestic consumers to business consumers? Are they having to pay more in relation to domestic consumers having lower rates here than they do elsewhere? So, I do not think that we should be prescriptive. We should look at all the evidence that the regulator brings forward to ensure that we have a fuller picture of what is happening in the energy scene and particularly in the single electricity market.

2.30 pm

Finance and Personnel

DARD Headquarters: Business Case

1. **Mr Copeland** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail whether he has received the business case for the relocation of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development headquarters to Ballykelly. (AQO 3864/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): Neither I nor my officials have received any business case for the relocation of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's (DARD) headquarters to Ballykelly.

Mr Copeland: Thank you very much, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. Will the Minister confirm whether, to his knowledge, any discussions have taken place with DARD staff and their unions about flexible working arrangements so that all staff are not required to work from the new location at Ballykelly?

Mr Wilson: Some work has been done with DARD staff to assess their response to the relocation. Among DARD staff, 86% indicated that they are not content to work in Ballykelly. There are, of course, a range of

Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) and corporate HR procedures that can be used when staff are unwilling, or unable on some occasions, to move to a new location. Those procedures will assist staff with locating to other Departments or will help them with the move to the new location.

Mr Dallat: I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he agree that, whatever wrangles there may be about the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, the site at Ballykelly must not be allowed to lie for decades growing benweeds? That is one thing that is for certain. Will he undertake to initiate an Executive task force or something of that kind so that we can get the best people together to ensure that that does not happen and that the site does not become another Long Kesh?

Mr Wilson: I do not think that there is any need for the Member to implore me to do that. The First Minister and deputy First Minister are cognisant of the fact that this is an important site in an area where there is a great need for economic regeneration. Whether it is a site to which DARD will relocate or whether some other activity will take place on it, we do not want to leave the site with the grass growing underneath our feet. It is an important economic asset, and it should be developed. It should then be able to return some economic reward to the area and to the Executive. The First Minister and deputy First Minister are already exercised about the site and wish to make sure that it is put to good use.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. In the relocation of a Department, does the Minister support the Bain report's recommendation that public sector jobs should be fairly distributed to towns outside Belfast?

Mr Wilson: First of all, the Bain report is not a report that the Executive have adopted. Considerable costs are involved in the pilot project that the Bain report put forward. In fact, I think that the costs in the Bain report were about £40 million for relocation. At a time when we have such demands on the Budget, I do not think that that will necessarily be a priority.

However, the best opportunities can come when the Executive are taking on new functions. So, when a new function is being taken on or in situations when opportunities arise because of lease changes or whatever, where it makes economic sense, we of course want to see the impact of Executive activity spread across Northern Ireland. In fact, one objective of the Programme for Government is to ensure that economic prosperity and activity are widespread across Northern Ireland so that no one and no area feel excluded.

Mr Allister: As Finance Minister, do you think it acceptable that such a major decision was made by a Department without providing costings, particularly when that is compounded by the fact that the shortlisting was done on the basis not of specific sites but of district council areas and the decision to appraise only the Ballykelly site was made by ministerial direction? Does all that not suggest a railroading that compounds the lack of costings?

Mr Wilson: Ministerial direction is not an unusual mechanism to use for decisions. However, such a ministerial direction has to be accepted by the Executive, and there has to be an Executive decision on it. Of course, a decision simply cannot be made without costings being

produced. A business case would have to be produced in which all the costs and implications are exposed and open for scrutiny and question, and, at that stage, value-for-money considerations can be looked at.

Ministerial direction has been made, which is the first stage of the process. I have not accepted that and have referred it to the Executive. The Executive will discuss it, after which the normal business case process will have to be followed.

Departmental Underspends

2. **Mr Campbell** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the Secretary of State's comments on departmental underspends. (AQO 3865/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Secretary of State recently suggested, somewhat scathingly, that Northern Ireland Departments currently underspend, and, somehow or other, she regarded that as an example of economic underperformance. As in so many cases, the Secretary of State displays either a lack of understanding or a lack of briefing about Northern Ireland affairs. I am not sure what she was actually referring to. If she was referring to the fact that we have Budget flexibility arrangements, which were negotiated by the Executive with the Treasury and which allow us to carry money over on our capital and current spend budget every year, we are perfectly entitled to do that. That arrangement was sought so that we could have good, prudent financial management and not a frenzy of unnecessary spend at the end of a financial year.

If the Secretary of State was referring to money that was reallocated to Departments in monitoring rounds, that also makes good economic sense. If projects cannot be carried forward, the money is reallocated to another priority. Indeed, in some cases, we were able to initiate new areas of spending that were beneficial to the Northern Ireland economy.

If she was referring to money that the Department of Justice carries over, the First Minister and deputy First Minister, and the negotiating team at the time when policing and justice powers were devolved, negotiated that with the then Government. So, I am not sure what she was referring to. Our record on underspends is much better than that of previous direct rule Ministers when they were in charge.

Mr Campbell: I thank the Minister for his response. Whatever the Secretary of State was referring to, and given the Finance Minister's reference at the end of his response, will he give us a brief comparison of the current underspend and the underspend of a predecessor Secretary of State under direct rule?

Mr Wilson: I will make a comparison between last year and the last year of direct rule; I have the figures here somewhere. With current expenditure, we averaged 0.8% underspend in each of the past four years compared with 2% under direct rule. With capital expenditure, our average underspend was 1.5% compared with 9.6% under direct rule. Do not forget that some of the money that was then underspent and was left in the end-year flexibility as a result of direct rule Ministers' inability to spend money was snatched away from us by the current Government when they decided that end-year flexibility money should just

disappear. We lost £360 million because of that decision, so we suffered doubly. We did not spend the money at the time, then it lay in the pot and was snatched from us. Our record has been fairly good, and maybe the Secretary of State ought to think about that before she starts to lecture us.

Mr Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his responses so far. Does he agree that even greater flexibility in the resource allocation process could enhance forward planning and reduce the incidence of underspend?

Mr Wilson: I would be a bit concerned about looking for greater flexibility there, in so far as it is important that when money is allocated for a particular financial year, it is spent in that year. Money benefits the economy only if it is spent; it does not benefit the economy if we hold on to it.

Although it is always nice to have a pot of money to dip into for a contingency, for the purposes of the delivery of the Programme for Government and services in Northern Ireland, we do not want too much flexibility. Otherwise, I suspect that Ministers would hold on to some money, sometimes for prudent reasons and sometimes because they had projects further down the road for which they wanted to put money aside.

That is one of the reasons why, when we discussed flexibility with the Treasury, we suggested the limits that were set at that stage, which were 0.6% for current budgets and 1.5% for capital budgets. That is probably a comfortable figure to live with. It ensures that we spend money and, if there is an underspend, we do not have to spend it quickly at the end of the year.

Mrs D Kelly: I note that the Minister's answer consisted primarily of excuses at a time of record high levels of youth unemployment and a lack of political decision-making at the Executive. It might be helpful were he to outline whether he posed some of those rhetorical questions to the Secretary of State and, if so, what her answers were.

Mr Wilson: I think that the lady fails to listen to answers. Maybe someone in the SDLP writes a question for her, which she then feels that she has to read out, regardless of what has gone before.

Where were the excuses? There were no excuses. I explained that we deliberately negotiated the Budget exchange scheme that enabled us to carry money over from one year to the next. The reason for it was to give us that flexibility at the end of the year.

All Departments, including that of her Minister, surrender and bid for money in monitoring rounds. Indeed, there are many things that her Minister could not have done had it not been for monitoring rounds.

I know that the SDLP has a love/hate relationship with the Police Service of Northern Ireland, but it makes absolute sense to be able to carry money forward for projects. Additional flexibility for the police budget is what was negotiated.

Those are not excuses; those are explanations of how we sought to have good management of money in the four-year period of the Budget.

Ulster Bank

3. **Mr Douglas** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he will ask HM Treasury to intervene in relation to easing the credit restrictions imposed by the Ulster Bank. (AQO 3866/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I wrote to the Chancellor earlier this month about a number of banking-related issues, including the position of the Ulster Bank. *[Laughter.]* I do not know what is so funny about writing to the Chancellor. I would have thought that that was a reasonable thing for the Finance Minister to do. I am sure that the honourable lady has a reason for her nervous laugh. After asking a question like that, I would have a nervous laugh as well.

I am worried about the way in which impairments are affecting the ability of a number of banks in Northern Ireland to lend, particularly the Ulster Bank. As a result of impairments, the banks have to regularly write off losses on some of their property, which means that they are unable to lend to businesses. Not only that, but banks are chasing businesses that, they believe, have some cash. They do so to bring in as much money as possible to repair their balance sheet, regardless of the damage to the businesses from which they snatch that cash.

We have written to the Chancellor, and I believe that, in particular, he can bring some influence to bear on the Ulster Bank because it is part of the Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) group, which is wholly Government-owned. I also intend to meet the Chief Secretary to the Treasury sometime next month to discuss the issues.

2.45 pm

Mr Douglas: I thank the Minister for his response. Will he inform the House what Mervyn King had to say about the Ulster Bank situation in their recent discussions?

Mr Wilson: I welcome the discussions that we had with Mervyn King, who was governor of the Bank of England at that stage. Of course, this is not a devolved matter but something for the Government at Westminster. However, he was very blunt and made it clear that, unless there were significant changes in the way in which the banking situation is handled, we could be in for a very long period in which economic activity in Northern Ireland is seriously affected by the inability of the banks to lend and, furthermore, by the actions that the banks would take — taking money away from businesses to repair their balance sheets.

He suggested a number of things. He said that the first thing that the banks need to do is come clean and simply state the scale of the problem. His second suggestion was for us to separate the clean part — I think that that was his term — of the banks' activities from the bad part of the banks' activities. Those are some of the things and mechanisms that I want to discuss with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury when I meet him later.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Further to that, has the Minister received any assurances from Ulster Bank following the recent IT glitches at the bank? Does he believe that it has finally got the problem under control?

Mr Wilson: I am not an IT expert, and I suspect that the people whom I speak to in the Ulster Bank are not IT

experts either. They take assurances from the anoraks and geeks with the technical knowledge who deal with such issues. I am sure that Members will recognise those technical terms.

The initial defect last summer caused great disruption. The bank thought that that was the end of it, but there was then the second glitch, which, thankfully, was not as disruptive. All that I can say is that, in the conversations that I have had with it, Ulster Bank has assured me that it believes that it is now on top of the technical problems.

Mr Kinahan: Will the Minister give his opinion on how successful the provision of funds by Invest Northern Ireland has been in addressing the failure of the banks to lend to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)?

Mr Wilson: I think that, to date, it has been very successful. Those loans have been well oversubscribed. Invest NI is allocating money on target. Indeed, I suspect that it is likely to come back to me in the June monitoring round looking for more money. The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment can probably give the Member greater detail on this, but Invest NI recently opened the loan facility to the very smallest of businesses. Therefore, we now have a full range of loans, from very large loans of over £2 million right down to very small loans. Those have been well received and are well oversubscribed.

That will never fully fill the gap or do the job of banks. What we really need is an operating banking system in Northern Ireland. Nevertheless, the Executive and the Enterprise Minister are right to step in and try to fill whatever part of the gap that they can fill. Do not forget that the beauty of the schemes that have been put in place is that they have also succeeded in drawing down some local money that was never used here before; for example, money from pension schemes, which used to go outside Northern Ireland. Those contributions made by people in Northern Ireland are now being used to benefit local businesses.

Welfare Reform: Rates Support

4. **Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many individuals who receive a reduction in their rates through the lone pensioner allowance, the disabled persons allowance or the housing benefit rate relief scheme will lose some or all of this assistance as a result of welfare reforms. (AQO 3867/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Department recently closed the preliminary consultation on localising the rate rebate scheme. I am considering the responses to that. The process will then inform us on discussions and decisions that we have to make.

It is probably too early to indicate who or what will be affected by changes in the funding arrangements, particularly the 10% cut that has been imposed across the United Kingdom. However, as the consultation document indicated, we will have to make some very hard decisions as we now have to prioritise who we help, given that we will have less money available. Those decisions will probably be put off for a while, because the Executive have decided to put money in, for the next three years at least, to fill the gap left by the 10% cut from the Treasury when the issue was devolved. I have to consider the various options. Once I have considered them, a paper will go to the Executive.

That will go out for consultation, and a new scheme will have to be put in place by the end of 2014.

Mr P Ramsey: I thank the Minister for his preliminary response to the question. Does he not accept that for those people identified in the question — lone pensioners, older people, people on disability benefits, and people who are dependent, through housing benefit, on rates relief — there needs to be a new scheme to afford them the opportunity to passport into the new arrangement or they will become further marginalised?

Mr Wilson: First, the consultation that is out at present is to identify who the priority groups should be. If we have less money available, not everybody who is a priority at present can remain a priority. There are a number of options, and I do not want to go into them and their disadvantages now.

As far as the groups that the Member mentioned are concerned, they are important priorities. How we will facilitate them, and whether we can facilitate them all to the extent that we are doing so at present, is what we need to outline in the second consultation document. Of course, he, along with other Assembly Members and everybody else who is interested, will have the opportunity to make a contribution.

I want to make it clear to the Assembly that, since we will finish up with less money available for the scheme, we are going to have to look at the groups we continue to support. If we continue to support all groups, we cannot support all of them to the extent that we are doing so at present. Those are the hard choices that are going to have to be made.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answers so far. Will he assure us that vulnerable groups such as pensioners will be protected from the worst excesses of benefit cuts, taking into account that we have one of the meanest pension schemes in the developed world? Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Wilson: I said to the Member in a previous answer that there are groups that should continue to be given support. From the consultation so far, that is clear. We cannot support everyone. Even the interim arrangements we are putting in place to continue the scheme as it exists at present will cost the Executive an additional £47 million in three years. That cost will only escalate as time goes on, as more people qualify and as the level of rates goes up. Even if the level of rates stays constant, inflation means that the cost of that support goes up. So, we have decisions to make.

The groups to which we decide to give less support or take out altogether will be in the consultation document, which I hope to bring to the Executive in May, or at least before the summer. After that, it will go out for consultation. All of the issues that Members have raised will be pertinent to the discussion that arises from that consultation document.

Commercial Rates

5. **Mr Byrne** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the timeline for the review of the commercial rates system. (AQO 3868/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I assume that the question refers to the non-domestic revaluation. Land and Property Services (LPS) is issuing 54,000 letters to businesses across Northern Ireland to seek information from them on the details of their leasing arrangements, levels of rent, etc. All of that will, hopefully, be collated by late summer. I thank the Member for raising the question, because I want to emphasise and make it clear that we need businesses to respond to those questions. That gives us the raw data on which to make decisions about how changes in valuations will be brought about. If we do not have the data, people cannot complain if they feel that the exercise has been incomplete. I welcome the fact that I can say that here today.

It is a complex process, and we will continue to engage with the business community until we have a full understanding of where the market is at present. LPS will complete the valuations by the autumn of 2014, and that will allow councils to do their calculations on rates and allow us to decide whether or not we need to have some kind of interim rate arrangements. For example, what will we do if there are big increases for some businesses? It will also let the business community know the impact. The new rates will then be billed in April 2015.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for his answer. In the drawing up of the rateable valuations in the past, the criteria have centred around the size and location of properties, the number of rooms, etc. Is the Minister or his officials giving any consideration to including other criteria, such as the type of use that a building is put to and the rate of turnover or level of sales in that business?

Mr Wilson: That suggestion has been made by a former pupil of mine, who also happens to be one of the lobbyists for traders in Belfast city centre. I sometimes wonder if I taught him much economics. I look at the Member for the Green Party; I have quite a few failures amongst my students.

I will give you one answer to the sales tax idea — Starbucks. A sales tax will be to the disadvantage of small businesses and those who cannot afford to engage smart, expensive accountants to enable them to avoid the tax. Since we have to gain a certain amount of money from rates, if the people who can employ the clever accountants avoid the tax, those who cannot — and that tends to be the smaller businesses — will pay the tax. That is one of my answers to the suggestion that, somehow or other, the payments for property should be based on sales. I do not think that it is a good idea, and I do not think that it is workable. If you want to find ways of chasing people from the high street, you introduce a sales tax and simply make goods bought through shops more expensive. Where do people go? The internet.

Mr I McCrea: Can the Minister outline what effect the review of public administration will have on any revaluation transitional relief scheme?

Mr Wilson: It is a bit early to say. When the new rates come in, two factors will influence that. First, if there is a huge difference between the rates that some businesses currently pay and what they will pay after the revaluation, there may well be need for a transitional scheme. In past revaluations, there have been transitional schemes for properties that had an increase of, I think, more than 25%, because you cannot allow a big jump like that when properties are unprepared for it.

Secondly, as a result of the review of public administration (RPA), there may be huge differences in the rates charged in one district council area — we are talking about a district rate now, not the regional rate — and another council area. I have made it clear in answers to the House on a number of occasions that the Executive have set aside money. Indeed, the Environment Minister has been promised the money for that, to allow for some transition there, too.

The exact nature of the transition scheme has not yet been decided.

3.00 pm

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That concludes Question Time. I ask the House to take its ease while we make a change at the Table.

Mrs D Kelly: On a point of order, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I ask that you read the record of the Minister's response to my question, in which he erroneously and outrageously suggested that I read a pre-prepared supplementary question. He replied in a sexist manner. Furthermore, the Minister has a record of sexist abuse. I also ask you to note that the Minister failed to answer the question.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I will refer that to the Speaker for review.

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

Private Members' Business

Economic Initiatives and Sustainable Employment

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly calls on the Executive to target resources towards economic initiatives and sustainable employment to ensure a reduction in the numbers of young people, apprentices, graduates and skilled workers who are emigrating to seek employment opportunities elsewhere. — [Mr Boylan.]

Mr Hamilton: I apologise for missing the earlier part of the debate. Proceedings in the House moved a lot quicker than I had expected, and I was engaged elsewhere in the Building. However, we are so well served by Hansard that I have been able to read all the previous contributions of Members. Having read those, I am quite glad that I missed the early part of the debate, although I am sure I will not raise the standard too much.

I welcome the debate to the extent that it gives the House an opportunity to discuss economic matters that are affecting people. For all the debates in the House on matters of great concern, this is the issue — employment, jobs and the economy — that everybody right across this country, regardless of class, creed or background, is most concerned about.

It is undoubtedly the case that we in Northern Ireland have a growing problem with unemployment. Our figure is at 8·5%, which is the highest we have had for 15 years. However, as bad as it is at 8·5% and growing, it is worth noting that it is far better than in the Republic of Ireland, where the figure is 14%. The EU average is 12%. Those of us who can remember the 1980s can recall a time when unemployment in Northern Ireland was at 15%. I cannot remember that — I am much too young — but I have been told by others that it was 15%. There are people laughing at the back.

There were times when unemployment was very much worse in Northern Ireland than it is now. That is, of course, cold comfort to the 8·5% of people who are looking for work and cannot find it. It particularly acute — this is the emphasis of the motion — for young people. Youth unemployment in Northern Ireland has risen to 21,000, which is 21·3% of people aged between 18 and 23. However, again, it is worth noting that that figure is better than in the Republic of Ireland, where it is 30%, and the EU, where the average stands at 23%. There are economies that are doing very much worse than ours.

It is also worth pointing out that we should not always equate unemployment exclusively with a loss of jobs. If the Social Development Minister were here, I am sure that he would tell us that a lot of people who have registered for jobseeker's allowance have moved from other benefits, principally employment and support allowance, and incapacity benefit. It is not always people who have been in work and have lost jobs who are increasing unemployment levels in Northern Ireland to 8·5% of the working population.

Mr Flanagan: I thank the Member for giving way. To pick up on that point: the Minister for Employment and Learning recently made a statement to the House on economic inactivity in which he revealed that, of all the people who had transferred from incapacity benefit to jobseeker's allowance, only 0·6% had managed to find a job.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Hamilton: I think that highlights some of the problems and concerns that many of us have with the very swift move, in some cases, of people from one to the other. We may see our economic inactivity figures, which have historically been the worst in the United Kingdom, go down, which, on the face of it, looks quite good, but the net effect might be an increase in those seeking unemployment benefits.

However, I think we all understand and appreciate that there are very good reasons why unemployment has been increasing in Northern Ireland. It is not just in Northern Ireland that this has been happening. I pointed out the EU average and what is happening in the Republic of Ireland and, indeed, in other jurisdictions not because I am flippant about the fact that we are not as bad as some other places but because it perhaps shows that, compared with the 1980s and, indeed, other recessions and downturns, our economy is a bit more robust now than it was in the past.

We are in the position that we are in because of the very good reasons of global forces that are beyond the control of national Governments, never mind our own very small, in a global context, regional Government here in Northern Ireland. Those difficulties are exacerbated by a national Government in our own country, in London, that are hell-bent on pursuing a policy of austerity. It is not helped by the fact that one of our key markets south of the border in the Irish Republic is in the doldrums and the fact that the euro zone is in such turmoil. It is harming our ability to export. The economy Minister has been encouraging people to export more, and a key market in the Irish Republic is suffering, and the euro zone is suffering quite deeply. Some of our key markets are struggling, and that is why I commend the efforts to expand into new markets, particularly those in the Middle East, where they do not know what the word "recession" means.

I think that we have a more robust economy, and, in part, the question that is posed in the motion is answered by the fact that we have our own Assembly and Executive. We are more robust because we have our own Assembly and Executive and our own Ministers who have concern about what is going on in Northern Ireland in a way that direct rule Ministers would not have had in the past. That is why you get the likes of the economy and jobs initiative, with £200 million invested, including a package of around £10 million for youth employment, as well as measures such as the small business rate relief scheme and other initiatives. Invest Northern Ireland, in spite of everything, is hitting all of its targets in creating jobs, getting investment and getting research and development up.

From when I was at school, I can remember most of my classmates leaving after their A levels and going to university in Scotland and England, never to be seen again.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the Member draw his remarks to a close, please?

Mr Hamilton: Capping student fees at £3,000 a year helps to keep some of our best talent here. Our job now is to create jobs for those people, and I commend the Minister and her Department and Invest Northern Ireland for the work that they are doing to try to overcome some of the worst problems of this downturn.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: In supporting this motion, I think that it is important to recognise that this is an exceptionally difficult juncture in our economic history. Reference has been made to the international dimension of the economic downturn, and, of course, it has an impact. It has a disproportionate impact on the underdevelopment of our economy, so it is a very difficult time for Executive Ministers acting as part of their individual briefs or acting in co-operation with each other to address this question.

Nevertheless, the motion reflects the commitments in the Programme for Government, and, notwithstanding the international economic conditions, which continue to change and not necessarily in the immediate circumstances for the better, these are issues that we have to take account of but plan for a different future.

Notwithstanding the ongoing discussions on corporation tax and, perhaps in time, other fiscal power that the Executive might take for themselves after negotiations with Treasury officials, we should be paying attention to the comments of the previous Member who spoke on the experience of the generation that he attended school with. From the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, we have a generation of young people who are preparing to come onto the labour market, and, in a very short number of years, they will be joining the workforce. The question is this: have we done as much as we can to ensure that they get the opportunity to develop their skills, talents and abilities to play meaningful roles in a growing economy?

I think that, notwithstanding the limits that I referred to, we could do more. We could address, within our existing powers, the synergies between, for instance, the Planning Service, the responsibilities of the Department for Learning and Employment (DEL) and the responsibilities of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI). I think that we have good Ministers who are capable of addressing those issues in the here and now. If we take as a lead-in time the two or three years that today's 15-year-olds will spend preparing to come on to the labour market, we should ask about what we can do in the meantime with a focused approach of co-operation and support across Ministers to deal with the issues.

In the limited time since the re-establishment of the Executive and Assembly, we have come across issues. Some are legacy issues, while some are to do with the arrangements that were made at the time of the signing of the Good Friday Agreement and the disposition of the portfolios through the various Departments but that may not fit the current realities. Yet, I think that we are a maturing Assembly. We have sustainability in the political institutions. We work our way through some very significant challenges and difficulties, and, at the end of the day, we take a collective approach, which means that people stay at the table until solutions emerge.

I welcome that there are indications that all the Members present and all parties will support the motion.

One of the things that we can do to enhance delivery and make it a practical reality is streamline our product

to attract inward investment, build up our workforce's ability to increase its capacity and skills level to ensure that it is best placed to take up, enhance and support the development of opportunities.

That is a challenge that we cannot pass on to anyone else. It is the responsibility of those whom we support and elect as Ministers. It is also the responsibility of their respective parties, through their commitments to economic expansion and development, to ensure that we have a co-ordinated and comprehensive approach to that question. I do not think that it has always been coherent or cohesive, but we can do something about that. For that reason, I support the motion.

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat.

In my constituency, and within a seven-mile radius of where I live, there are several manufacturing and engineering companies. In my engagements with those companies, one issue that has been flagged up is the need for investment in the replacement of machinery. In many cases, companies are still engaged in what they call "cutting and drilling". They talked about the need to invest in laser machinery that would allow them to create more exports, a higher turnover and, therefore, employment. It is my understanding that the manufacturing and engineering sector in County Tyrone employs at least 5,000 people. We should not take that for granted. Most businesses in County Tyrone are indigenous.

As I have been told, success is not a destination. We have to continually improve quality and processes. I have been informed that the EU cohesion policy provides for possibilities to invest in a wide variety of sectors. In fact, one of the aims of the European regional development fund is to:

"contribute towards the financing of ... productive investment which contributes to creating and safeguarding sustainable jobs, primarily through direct aid to investment primarily in small and medium-sized enterprises"

Perhaps that could be explored.

Where sustainable employment is concerned, we need government programmes that are aimed at those who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) to deliver genuine potential for full-time employment. I welcome measures to tackle the situation that many young people face, and there is a need for proper training and hope for full-time employment. We need a comprehensive system that offers genuine skills training with accreditation.

I am concerned that many young people in the Dungannon area are falling under the NEET designation and will become economically inactive for long periods of time. Many of the courses that are on offer become a conveyor belt where people are put into work placements to carry out menial tasks over a 12-week period only to return to the NEET designation. Although those placements offer work experience, many people see them as a way of manipulating jobless figures as opposed to being a genuine attempt at training. I call on the Minister for Employment and Learning to look at long-term courses, such as apprenticeships, or at courses that are based in education to allow participants to gain qualifications that they can use to gain meaningful employment.

I am alarmed to see that my own constituency in County Tyrone has some of the highest rates of youth emigration. We need to do more to stop young people from being forced to leave. It is obvious that many young people are moving away to find work, which is a loss to the entire community. Many of them are well educated and skilled, and their loss will have an impact on the future of the area to operate competitively to attract inward investment. Not only does that impact economically but it impacts socially, as many sporting organisations find that their teams are decimated as young people move away. I know of areas where GAA clubs cannot field a full side, and I expect that that is the same in soccer, rugby and other games.

3.15 pm

The British Tory Government must allow the Assembly to devolve economic powers to the North if we are to begin to address the economic woes that are driving our young people and our future away. I support the motion.

Mrs D Kelly: I welcome the fact that the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment is in attendance for this afternoon's debate, even though the motion calls on the full Executive. I fully accept the Minister's earlier response when she said that responsibility lies with a number of Ministers.

I want to speak on the motion because I have a son who has had to emigrate to Australia for work in the construction industry. Therefore, from personal experience, I know of the difficulties that are faced by young people and their parents. That is not to say that wider horizons do not help to grow an individual. I hope that my son will return home and that there will be employment at some time in the future, as do many mothers and fathers hope for their children.

Members' contributions noted the general high level of youth unemployment not only in Northern Ireland but throughout Europe and further afield. Nonetheless, the motion:

"calls on the Executive to target resources towards economic initiatives and sustainable employment"

to help ebb the flow of our young people. The Executive should be doing much more than that. There ought to be greater urgency around the Executive table on making decisions that will create jobs. It should be a priority that exercises ministerial minds daily.

The social investment fund, for example, was much heralded as a way to target resources at areas of disadvantage and to promote cohesion across our communities. However, as I understand it, none of that money has yet been spent. Therefore, I hope that the ETI Minister will ensure that her voice is heard at the Executive table so that some of that money might be spent on good, sustainable projects.

A number of policy initiatives in Northern Ireland ought to be revised in light of best practice elsewhere. I am indebted to the Assembly's Research and Information Service staff for their work in preparing background papers for this afternoon's debate. In particular, I note the First Start scheme, which is similar to schemes in Sweden and Finland, where there is a shorter period of unemployment — three months in some areas and no unemployment —

so that earlier intervention can take place and help young people to find jobs.

There is also a recommendation in the Nevin Economic Research Institute's report that people who have to participate in work experience schemes should have greater flexibility to allow them to seek jobs at the same time as engaging fully with the work experience placement. Therefore, I ask the Minister for her view on any revision of some of those schemes and whether those initiatives ought to be promoted around the Executive table.

Some Members noted how adverse health implications resulting from unemployment can affect young people and their families and last longer than the period of unemployment. My party colleague Pat Ramsey touched on the high rates of suicide, particularly among young males, which has a correlation to long-term youth unemployment. So there is an imperative for the Executive to get their act together on some of those policy revisions and resources that are at their disposal to —

Mr Flanagan: I thank the Member for giving way. The Member says that the Executive need to get their act together. The Member needs to realise that her party has a Minister in the Executive, too. Is she putting any internal pressure on him to finally resolve the situation with PPS 21, which means that non-farming rural dwellers cannot build a house in the countryside? If relaxed, it would allow many homes to be constructed, and it would give people in the construction sector a much-needed opportunity for employment.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that interventions should be brief. The Member has an extra minute.

Mrs D Kelly: I welcome Mr Flanagan's intervention, not least because I recall, as a Craigavon councillor, the current Education Minister saying at one time that no houses should be built in rural areas because they were already oversubscribed. Perhaps a debate needs to be had within Sinn Féin.

I note with interest that the SDLP was at the forefront of condemning PPS 14 and consigning it to the history books. On a personal note, as a rural dweller, PPS 21 causes me some concern in relation to non-farming dwellers. I have made representation to the Minister about that and about rural businesses and their siting. So I assure Mr Flanagan that I am well up to speed on the needs of the people whom I represent. I would also be interested to know whether Mr Flanagan is using his influence —

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask the Member to draw her remarks to a close, please.

Mrs D Kelly: — to get his Ministers to get their act together on the social investment fund and whether he believes that social housing should be a priority in creating jobs.

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): This is a very important debate, and I am a little disappointed to see empty Benches all around the Chamber. People always tell me that they are very concerned about the youth unemployment figures, but that does not appear to be the case here this afternoon. However, I welcome the fact that Members who are in the Chamber contributed to the debate.

Mr Hamilton: I better not go.

Mrs Foster: No, you better not leave, Mr Hamilton. It was a good debate, and there are a lot of issues that I want to address. The previous Member who spoke said that this was an Executive-wide issue. A number of contributions referred not to my ministerial responsibility but to that of others. I will, of course, point my ministerial colleagues in the direction of this debate so that they can read what has been said in connection with their Department.

From our perspective in Northern Ireland, we are a small open economy. We and our key trading partners have had a sluggish recovery, which continues to impact on many of our local businesses and act as a major drag for the local economy. That, in turn, has had an impact on the rate of job creation.

The Executive recognised the economy as our biggest challenge by putting it as our number one priority and publishing the economic strategy at the same time as the Programme for Government. In the economic strategy, we highlighted the fact that the key element was competitiveness and that the way to deal with that whole issue was to focus on export-driven recovery. We put that at the centre of our ambitions, and we recognise that, to do that, we need to rebalance and rebuild the Northern Ireland economy.

The rebalancing piece is looking to the medium to longer term. We want a sustainable economy that will grow our private sector. I found it interesting to read the PwC report recently. It talked about the lack of growth in the Northern Ireland economy and pointed to the huge disparity between the public and private sectors that was acting as a drag on such growth.

Another one of our key priorities is to rebuild and take immediate action on the local labour market. As Members will know, the Executive are committed to achieving £1 billion of investment in our economy. That is pending judicial reviews, of course, which seem determined to knock any priority that we have off the agenda.

That has been hugely disappointing for the construction industry. The lady opposite mentioned the fact that her son had to leave because he did not have a job in the construction industry.

It is hugely frustrating. Think about those firms that were looking forward to building the A5. Think about the amount of time and effort that they put into planning for the A5 and about those young people who were looking forward to getting out and doing the job that they had been trained to do. It is hugely frustrating for them.

I do take some comfort. I was with the Construction Employers Federation (CEF) on Friday evening. We had a good conversation about the state of the industry. The Federation of Master Builders (FMB) had a report out just yesterday saying that there are some tentative signs of stabilisation in the Northern Ireland construction industry. I welcome that, because we know the pain that has been inflicted on a lot of our young people in the construction sector, particularly in rural areas.

That was one reason that we introduced the £200 million economy and jobs initiative, which looked specifically at trying to help people to reskill themselves and rebuild their lives after a difficult period. It focused on people who had difficulties in the labour market, businesses facing challenges in key markets, and infrastructure investment.

As I said, that is all subject to court actions, judicial reviews and all those sorts of things that seem to hamper our desire to get on and build our infrastructure.

We have made considerable progress in implementing the economic strategy and the economy and jobs initiative measures. From my ministerial colleague in DEL, I understand that 333 young people have commenced DEL's First Start programme, 152 participants have commenced the Step Ahead 50+ programme and 40 placements have been undertaken for young people as part of DEL's Steps to Work programme.

In addition, 29 projects have been offered additional funding under the Northern Ireland European social fund programme to provide training and employment initiatives, which will benefit an estimated 11,000 or more participants, including 1,400 NEETs. I believe that it was Ms McGahan who referred to the issue of NEETs.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Minister for giving way. Does the Minister share my concern that young people labelled as NEET now have to fight with graduates, and often tradesmen and tradeswomen, for the jobs that would have been easier for them to access in the past? It is critical that help be given to entry-level graduates or that there be more employment opportunities.

Mrs Foster: I agree that there is a more crowded space for those who are unskilled. I know that my ministerial colleague very much wants to see them upskilling and having some skill to give them a chance in the job market. I certainly support him in that.

As well as that, Invest NI has a programme to help those who are NEET — I do not like the term NEETs, but I think we are all accepting of it in the House — to start their own business, and we provide some funding for that. That is important, to encourage aspiration, innovation and entrepreneurship across Northern Ireland.

We are, in Invest NI and the Department, focused on supporting growth projects that will lead to higher-value-added jobs. That has been the position for some time. However, we created the jobs fund to try to deliver more quickly on the ground jobs for people right across the spectrum.

Over the past two years, 2,600 people are now in work as a result of the scheme. Those are actual jobs created. The largest single project announced was the 336-job announcement by Capita Life and Pensions in Belfast. Others, though, are 164 jobs at Vion Foods, Cookstown; 116 jobs at BT in Belfast; and 79 new jobs at Decora Blind Systems, Lisburn. Jobs are being created, but we need more and we need to do things better, and I think that we all accept that.

The role for the economic subcommittee of the Executive is a real one, and I very much think that it is a subject that we will come back to. We are always looking for ways in which we can assist. The next meeting of the subcommittee should very much look at this area. The DEL Minister will obviously have a significant impact on what we discuss there.

3.30 pm

My Department, through Invest Northern Ireland and a number of others, works very closely with second- and third-level education providers. Some Members

commented that people were working in silos and needed to work better together. In my period in this office, we have never had a better working relationship with DEL. It works very well. We are supporting each other in different schemes, such as the Assured Skills scheme and the IT graduate scheme, which we work on together. We work together very well. That is always difficult for a coalition Government; I accept that, but our officials are working very well together.

The question is this: could we do more across government? Yes, we probably could do more across government. I think that that is a subject that we can address in the next economic subcommittee. You might think that a lot of ministerial decisions do not have an automatic economic impact, but most decisions that we take in our ministerial portfolios have an economic impact, and people need to accept that.

I want to talk briefly about social enterprises. We talked a little bit about them in Question Time today, but I want to recognise the unique contribution that the social economy plays in Northern Ireland. The big society, as it is called by the Prime Minister, has been going in Northern Ireland for a considerable time. Through our social entrepreneurship programme, we are seeking to encourage social enterprises in regions where, traditionally, there have been few, to build skills and capability and to try to make an impact at a very localised level. I am hopeful that that will take place, because there are some very good examples of how it can make a difference.

I am not going to go through all of the DEL schemes, but I think Mr Lyttle mentioned the youth employment scheme. It seems to be working well across the Province. It gives people the ability to have work experience and then to use it to try to get a job. DEL's flagship apprenticeship programme, Apprenticeships NI, enables those learners who have attained the minimum school-leaving age and are in paid employment to gain an industry-recognised apprenticeship qualification. That is not just for the sake of having a qualification. Hopefully, it will act as a way in which they will be able to attain long-term employment.

There are, of course, also the graduates. Although we accept that there is youth unemployment, and we tend to look at the NEETs, and what have you, we realise that quite a few graduates are struggling to find employment. The graduate acceleration programme, which comes from DEL, is available to all graduates who have a full degree and who have been out of work for 13 weeks or more. It is also available to graduates who are in employment of fewer than 16 hours a week.

As I said, there is a lot of flexibility between ourselves and DEL. I welcome that. I welcome the close relationship, but we need to encourage young people to look at qualifications in those areas where there are job opportunities. To me, those very much seem to be in the science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) areas. In November, DEL secured funding for an additional 500 undergraduate STEM places. Of course, students enrolled on STEM courses have a higher chance. I have visited a number of IT firms recently. Just last week, I announced 76 new IT jobs at Latens Systems in south Belfast. So, we are pleased to see that that sector is very strong, but we need to provide the skills to ensure that it stays strong.

I was hugely disappointed with the decision of the Prime Minister to defer the decision on devolving corporation tax. It remains a key element of what we are seeking to achieve for Northern Ireland, but, until a decision is made, we will continue to focus our efforts on a wide range of measures to rebuild and rebalance. The Secretary of State has signalled that our national Government is willing to negotiate on a package of measures in the interim. I very much welcome that. We will look at it as proactively and innovatively as we possibly can to try to see what we can do in the interim.

In closing, I agree that we need to exploit every opportunity to help businesses to survive, prosper and grow, and to ensure that there are opportunities for our young people, apprentices, graduates, and skilled and unskilled workers who live here in Northern Ireland.

Today, there has been a lot of talk about emigration. I recognise that forced emigration is a very nasty element to all that we are discussing here today, but I want to end on this positive note. Just last week, I was with a firm called Axiom, and I went around talking to the young people who were employed there. Most of them had worked in London or, indeed, further afield at some time in their early careers.

I very much welcome the fact that young people go away to look at new horizons and, perhaps, get some experience. However, we must have available jobs for them to come back to when they have had that experience. The fact that we have attracted global firms into Northern Ireland gives them that opportunity. I only wish that I had had the opportunity when I was a young graduate to go away and come back to a firm such as Allen and Overy, Axiom Law or Herbert Smith Freehills — global law firms that are now situated in Belfast. I very much welcome that.

I look forward to the rest of the debate. I thank Members for taking the time to contribute.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom an rún atá faoi chaibidil againn inniu a mholadh.

I would like to formally wind up the debate, which was proposed and moved formally by my colleague Cathal Boylan. Like the Minister before me, I thank the contributors to the debate. I also thank the Minister for her attendance throughout.

The Minister ended her contribution by talking about forced emigration and emigration. There is a great difference between emigration for adventure's sake or for career or life opportunities and what is happening to many of our people at this time: forced emigration of young people and people who are not so young, including whole family units. That is why the motion urges the Executive to target resources towards those areas where emigration is currently taking keenest effect.

I believe that the wider Executive and individual Departments do not fully appreciate the social impact, in particular, that forced emigration is having on our communities — some more than others. The word "emigration" needs to be stated here, and time and time again. The fact is that emigration levels in some communities are at their highest since the great hunger. There is a new exodus.

I could be very specific, like some MLAs are when they represent their constituencies. I put this in the public domain very recently. Dromore and Trillick are a small town and village that are five miles apart in west Tyrone. There are currently 160 young people in Australia from Dromore and Trillick alone. The reason that I know that for sure is that I met a group of young people and asked them to write out a list of their friends who are currently in Australia. The list quickly reached the figure of 160. To highlight the point in the local community, the young people concerned drew a map of Australia on the ground in Dromore and arranged 160 pairs of shoes inside that map. That highlights the fact that we are talking about real people here, not just statistics. We know their names, their destinations and the reasons why they have emigrated.

I would argue that in most cases, those young people have been forced to emigrate. They did not emigrate by choice. That is having a big social impact. Recently, I have said publicly that I have met many grandparents in my constituency office in Omagh who are distraught because, one minute, they are leaving their grandchildren to school and, the next week or fortnight, they are only able to keep in touch with them by Skype, because of forced emigration.

I am highlighting the forced emigration aspect of the debate because I would like the Executive to have a specific focus on stemming the tide of emigration in the areas that are worst affected. That means specific job creation and job retention plans for the specific communities that are worst hit. From the answers that I get to tabled questions, I do not get the impression that there is a real appreciation of the social and, indeed, economic impact of emigration at this time.

Cathal Boylan said that emigration is perhaps welcome in some cases because it masks the unemployment figures. Simon Hamilton made a relative positive out of the unemployment figures here, but I think that the scale and proliferation of young people, in particular, who are emigrating or who have emigrated strongly mask and disguise the real figures.

Minister Foster mentioned the fact that there were good working relations between DETI and DEL, which is a good thing. I want to thank DEL because, in the recent past, it supported me as a local MLA in holding a jobs and information evening in the targeted area of Dromore. It provided careers advisers and employment service people to advise people on the various schemes to help them into work. We were reasonably successful in attracting up to a dozen local employers that are recruiting at this time, and that put out a positive message to the families affected.

I think that this is a hugely important issue. I have some sympathy with Minister Foster's point about the lack of interest in this debate given the relatively small numbers in the Chamber at various points, although I emphasise that that does not extend to my party. The media often accuse us of not focusing on the real issues. This is a real issue, and I obviously want the media to report on elected representatives identifying and debating the real issues.

The A5 has been mentioned in the debate as well. That is an economic imperative for the area and community west of the Bann that has been worst hit by emigration. The Institution of Civil Engineers recently said that every £1 invested in infrastructure yields £2.84 in local economic

activity. If you multiply that by £330 million, you have your £1 billion investment. It also said that for every £1 million invested in infrastructure, 28.5 jobs are created. So, the figures are clear: the A5 project would be a major shot in the arm, not least for the construction industry. That is why it must not be lost and why we must all redouble our efforts to ensure that it happens.

Finally, I want to commend my party colleague Martina Anderson MEP, because she is organising a conference in County Cavan on Friday 7 June called Guarantee Our Future: Addressing the Issue of Youth Unemployment. Martina has invited speakers from the European Commission, the European Parliament and representatives from youth organisations throughout Ireland and, indeed, Sweden. I encourage anyone interested to engage in that.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly calls on the Executive to target resources towards economic initiatives and sustainable employment to ensure a reduction in the numbers of young people, apprentices, graduates and skilled workers who are emigrating to seek employment opportunities elsewhere.

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Mr Deputy Speaker.]

Adjournment

Antrim Area Hospital: Sexual Assault Referral Centre

Mr Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes. The Minister will have 10 minutes to respond. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes.

Ms Brown: I am pleased to have secured this debate. I welcome the opportunity to bring the issue of the opening of the sexual assault referral centre before the Assembly today.

Let me be clear from the outset: I welcome the overall approach taken by the Health Minister, the Justice Minister and the PSNI in establishing that centre for victims of sexual violence. I think that it is an example of joined-up government, and other projects could and should learn from it. My intention is not to be critical of any Minister or organisation. I want to work with them. However, I have some concerns, and I want to examine whether there is more that we could do at this stage to ensure that the centre truly meets the needs of all those who will use it.

3.45 pm

I hope to use the debate to continue to raise awareness of the daily abuse that is experienced right across Northern Ireland and to highlight the need for the greater promotion of sexual and domestic violence issues. By way of background, domestic violence policy currently sits with two Departments: the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) and the Department of Justice. A joint action plan was published in April 2012 by the two Departments that outlined their commitment to tackling domestic violence and abuse. The action plan outlined how exactly they would set out to make a real change.

The most important part of that strategy centres on the development of the sexual assault referral centre (SARC). Known as the Rowan, the new SARC is located at Antrim Area Hospital and will be the first facility of its kind in Northern Ireland. It is due to open in just a few weeks' time in May 2013. The centre has the potential, if fully realised, to offer victims of abuse a first-class service by dealing with their specific needs in a professional, sensitive and reassuring manner. We have a great opportunity to make a real difference to the lives of those affected by abuse.

We need to accept that domestic violence is prevalent in our society and that sexual violence is increasing. Through acceptance of the problem, we can deliver a healing process and can reassure victims that, when they get the courage to seek help, they will get the best service that we can possibly offer. Therefore, it follows that, if we are taking steps to reassure victims that the right thing to do is to come forward for help, there is an onus on us to ensure that they will not be let down by any aspect of the help that we offer.

I have some concerns about what exactly is being provided at the Rowan and whether it will fully meet the needs of victims. My first concern is about the opening hours of the centre. It is proposed that the core business hours of the centre will be from Monday to Friday from 9.00 am to 5.00 pm. That strikes me as a very administrative approach that is more akin to the opening hours of a health centre. Perpetrators of domestic and sexual violence do not carry out their attacks to ensure that they fit in with office opening hours.

When developing a policy, we sometimes have the tendency to not be too radical, and we work round existing templates and look at the low-cost options just to get something up and running. However, not being radical about domestic and sexual violence puts lives at risk. We must do more. The Archway SARC in Glasgow is staffed and open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with doctors always on call. That offers the victim a premium service, which is what they deserve in the immediate aftermath of an incident.

I am slightly reassured by the Minister's correspondence to the Committee, in which he stated that there will be an on-call response service in the evenings and at weekends and that opening hours have scope for change. However, I have to really press him on that. On what basis were those opening hours suggested? Will he set out his Department's findings on what statistics were considered to conclude that those hours are the most likely times in which the service will be used?

It may well be that the Department is right and that the office-hours approach works best. However, my suspicion is that many victims face their worst attacks at night or at weekends. By the time Monday comes, the trauma has eased and what passes for normality returns, until, of course, the next attack occurs and the cycle continues. I would be much more reassured if the view was that we will open the centre 24/7, with medical support on hand, and then subsequently refine the opening hours if it proves to be that the statistics support a nine-to-five approach.

I am not immediately reassured by the notion that, at some point in the future, services will be extended to meet need. I do not see that approach in many areas of public policy. Rather, it is about costs, savings and managing on less. However, given that we are where we are, I would appreciate it if the Minister and his officials could give clarification on the trends that they will look for. Will the service have to be stretched to breaking point for many months before they step in and increase the core business hours? Will there be client thresholds and time frames to be met before the service runs core business hours at the weekend?

If we look at the most recent figures from the PSNI and Women's Aid, we can begin to appreciate and get an idea of the type of demand that will be placed on the Rowan. For example, Women's Aid handled over 43,000 calls in 2011-12, while the PSNI responded to an incident that was motivated by domestic violence every 21 minutes. That means that there were 25,196 reported incidents last year. Of course, not all those cases involved sexual violence, and, because of the under-reporting of cases, it is difficult to compare numbers. However, we know that the number of rapes reached its highest level in the past 10 years in 2010-11, with 550 offences recorded. So, even with that very unscientific look at the figures, we can see that a

great number of people could come forward for help. We have a real opportunity here to offer a life-changing facility for victims and families alike. That is why I am so focused on getting it right.

I was encouraged to learn that the support on offer will be very much victim-led, but I have further concerns about how exactly that will play out. When victims attend the Rowan during core business hours, staff will help to support them to make a self-referral for counselling to the agency of their choice. I understand that that may be guided by geography, through previous experience with an agency or by specific care needs. So, if a victim from Fermanagh, for example, were to travel to Antrim, it would, of course, be reasonable for them to choose a service closer to home. We have to keep in mind what victims are going through. It is an extremely traumatic time in their life. They may not be able to fully process the information being discussed or provided. On that basis, I would appreciate it if we could get some sort of clarification on whether there will be a time limit for the victim to consider their options and to make a reasoned and balanced decision on whether to seek prosecution.

More important in any SARC is the role of independent sexual violence advisers (ISVAs) or independent domestic violence advisers. I have not seen a reference to such advisers in the Rowan, and I feel that their provision and the subsequent funding for the relevant supporting organisations that would be affected is an absolute necessity. Along with doctors and nurses, ISVAs should be on hand so that practical and emotional support can be offered in person to victims, enabling them to make informed choices about what help or counselling they might receive to deal with the aftermath of an attack. I therefore ask the Minister to confirm whether independent sexual violence advisers or independent domestic violence advisers will be part of the SARC set-up. If not, why not?

That leads me to accommodation. I appreciate that we are not trying to operate a hostel at the Rowan, but we must be able to ensure that, for a short period in the midst of great trauma, there is space and time for victims and, if need be, their children to feel safe and secure. That will also help the PSNI investigation, if there is one; I will turn to that in a moment. The provision of emergency accommodation would be invaluable at this stage for a victim, even more so when children are involved, particularly if the father is the perpetrator. If we cannot provide alternative accommodation in the immediate aftermath of abuse, I fear that we will place victims right back in the heart of the environment that they are trying to escape. We need to develop a cohesive strategy that has the victim at its core, not a merry-go-round referral system that leaves the victim feeling discarded and alone.

We need to understand and appreciate that the majority of cases of domestic and sexual violence, if not all, result in serious mental health problems, such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder and suicide. Additional health problems include physical injuries, gynaecological disorders, adverse pregnancy outcomes and sexually transmitted infections. Again, I stress that thorough care needs to be provided to ensure the individual's long-term well-being.

I mentioned PSNI investigations a moment ago. Recently, I wrote to the Chief Constable about forensic evidence, as I believe that we need more information on the process.

I asked him where the forensic evidence will be stored, for how long and whether there is an optimal time limit for capturing evidence. These requirements should be factored in to any timetables for victims using the services at the Rowan. The immediate aftermath of an attack will be the most confusing time for the victim. It would not be unreasonable for the victim to take time to consider their decision on whether to prosecute. Ultimately, they should feel empowered through the process.

In closing, I pay tribute to the brave women, men and children who find the courage and strength to seek help and to organisations such as Women's Aid that provide them with refuge. They should know that they are not alone in their battle; we are here to help. The Rowan should become a beacon of hope for those suffering abuse, and I hope that many a new start will emerge after their first contact with the service. However, we must get every detail right to ensure that that is a reality. I commend the Health Minister and the Justice Minister, their officials and those involved in the PSNI for all they do to help victims of domestic and sexual abuse. I hope that, through the debate, we can recognise this as a most critical area of work that deserves our utmost effort in moving forward.

Ms S Ramsey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate on behalf of the Health Committee. Although it is an Adjournment debate, I felt it important to say a few words as Chair of the Committee and to update Members on what the Committee has done thus far. I commend Pam, who is a member of the Health Committee, for securing the Adjournment debate on this important issue.

The Committee held a briefing with departmental officials on 27 February to learn more about the sexual assault referral centre — to be known from here on in, as Pam said, as the Rowan — which is to be opened next month. The Committee is pleased that this joint initiative between the Health and Justice Departments is finally going to become a reality and will offer people in our communities who have been the victim of sexual assault the specialist care and support that they need. I am delighted that the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Health are here, in whatever capacity, to listen to Members' concerns and issues.

People are sometimes mistakenly of the view that sexual violence does not really happen in our society or does not happen to very many people. In fact, the statistics show that 23% of women and 3% of men experience sexual assault as an adult. Last year, over 1,700 sexual offences were recorded by the PSNI. It is a very real issue that needs to be tackled head-on. There should be no taboo about people reporting sexual assaults. When people seek help, they should be treated with dignity and by experts who can best advise them of what options are available to them. The Rowan will serve that purpose. It will be staffed by people who can provide the appropriate medical care, including sexual health services. People will be signposted to the relevant organisation that can provide counselling and ongoing support.

The Committee very much welcomes the fact that these services will be available in the Rowan, providing a clear pathway for victims and survivors of sexual assault to access health and criminal justice services. However, as

Pam said, the Committee has a concern about the opening hours, which, at the moment, are planned to be Monday to Friday, 9.00 am to 5.00 pm, with an on-call service during weekends and evenings. I suspect that that is not when people are most likely to require services, and I hope that the Ministers — the Minister who will respond and the Minister of Justice, who is here as a constituency MLA — will keep a close eye on this. The reality is that those who carry out such heinous crimes do not do so on a Monday to Friday between nine and five, and we need to be aware of that.

There is also the issue of access to counselling. The Rowan will not provide ongoing counselling for people but will refer them to other organisations. The Committee has written to one of the main counselling providers — Nexus — and it has confirmed that its waiting lists are long, up to four months in some areas. So, there is concern that extra resources do not seem to have been allocated to counselling services, despite the fact that the opening of the Rowan could result in more people seeking counselling.

The Committee for Health will visit the Rowan shortly after it opens on 8 May, and we will be joined by members of the Justice Committee. It is important that Committee members, on behalf of the Assembly, show their support for the centre. We will welcome the opportunity on that visit to tour the new facility and speak to staff.

The Committee is of the view that sexual violence and sexual assault need to be given a higher priority. The opening of the Rowan sends out a clear message that this is the case. The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety will brief the Committee in June on proposals for the new sexual violence strategy. Like other Committee members, I look forward to hearing from the Department on that.

I appeal to the Health Minister, who will respond to the debate, and to the Justice Minister at a later date to take on board the genuine concerns of Committee members. Although this is a state-of-the-art, top-class facility, there are genuine concerns about people being able to access it and access counselling after reporting a rape or sexual assault.

4.00 pm

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: I thank Pam for securing today's debate.

My particular concern is also about the opening hours. Many of the cases of sexual abuse and harassment that come across my office threshold deal with violence in a marriage or partnership. Very often, these are in very controlling circumstances. It requires enormous courage for a victim to leave the home, where there is a very controlling and dominating environment, to report the circumstances of an incident. That is all the more difficult if there are children in the family home whose interests are to be protected. How to make the service more accessible to people at the moment when it is required is a challenge that should be examined.

I applaud the initiative, but the experience should be very carefully studied. Any experience that organisations such as Nexus can contribute would demonstrate the need for what I would describe in these circumstances as a rapid response. There has to be an opportunity for sanctuary,

if necessary, and certainly an opportunity for support and treatment. We have to recognise that it is exceptionally difficult for people to break out of the oppressive relationships that can sometimes exist and that often characterise incidents of sexual abuse. I ask the Minister to consider whether the response is as comprehensive as it needs to be and whether we could adopt a flexible approach, with the intention of adding value to what is already on offer.

Mr Kinahan: I, too, thank Pam for bringing this subject to the Assembly. It is phenomenally important. Many years ago, when I was working for Short Bros, someone told me about all that was going wrong among families in Glasgow and said that it was as bad, if not worse, here in Northern Ireland. Having heard the statistics earlier, we realise how bad it is and how important such a centre is to Northern Ireland. Therefore, I very much welcome the joint working of various Departments and the fact that the Committee is represented here today.

I am keen to know how well the centre will work with all the excellent organisations here in Northern Ireland — Women's Aid, Nexus, the Rape Crisis Centre or any of the many others — to make sure that everyone works together and no one makes it more difficult for anyone else.

It is very good to have this centre at our hospital in Antrim. I would like to congratulate the previous Minister on getting this started during his time. I was there when the foundation stone was laid in February 2011.

Looking at those involved and the key elements, I see no mention of an alcohol or drugs specialism. I wonder whether those will be included. Maybe that is what Pam was touching on when she was looking at specialisms. There are many sides to this that all work together.

I also share the concerns about the Rowan centre being open only during the week. What we see at the moment in Antrim Area Hospital is everything happening at the same time, over the weekends and at night. There are too many ambulances and too many people there at the moment, and there are recent reports that those from other departments often have to help in the hospital. I congratulate all of them on doing that when short-staffed, as they often are at the moment. I wonder how we are doing with the Rowan centre. Have we got everyone recruited? Is it on target? How will it function beside everything else that goes on in that hospital? It is fantastic to have it in south Antrim, and I congratulate all involved. I look forward to hearing about its success.

Mr Ford: I also congratulate Pam Brown on securing the debate. The very fact that we have managed to have the presence of the Chair of the Health Committee shows that, unusually for an Adjournment debate, this is not just a constituency issue, although it clearly is a significant constituency issue for those of us who represent South Antrim. For the sake of Hansard, I should record that I am speaking as a constituency MLA, as Sue Ramsey referred to earlier, although I suspect that some of what I say may be slightly influenced by the other job that I do.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the Member speak closer to a microphone so that everyone can hear him more clearly and his contribution can be recorded accurately?

Mr Ford: Sorry, I thought that Members would not want to hear any more.

We need to recognise that in the Rowan centre we have a first-rate centre being provided for Northern Ireland. It is something that I was very pleased to be able to see, as Danny Kinahan has just said, with the previous Health Minister when work started on it during the previous Assembly mandate. It is unfortunate that it has taken so long to get the centre built, and there is still work to be done to get it right, but we should recognise the fact that we will now have a specialist facility that will do the important job of providing the care services, alongside the justice services, that the victims of domestic and sexual violence require. That is a key way of ensuring that people are able to give best evidence and cases will stand up in court. At the same time as ensuring that people's needs are met in the aftermath of those troubles, it will ensure that the perpetrators are made amenable for what they have carried out.

There are clearly issues, which other Members have highlighted, where work remains to be done to see that we get things absolutely right. I am not sure that we need to be too concerned at this stage about the opening hours, because there will be staff on call out of hours. The important thing is to see that we get the centre started in a way in which it can continue to make progress and that, in particular, the responsible agencies learn the lessons, see how things work in the early days and are prepared to adjust the way in which the centre works to meet the needs of the clients who will come to them. The opening hours have been mentioned by everybody so far, I think, but it will not be a purely nine-to-five facility. There will be opportunities for specialist staff to be brought in as and when needed.

Of course, it will not be the only place in Northern Ireland providing services. Services will still be provided by health facilities and the police across Northern Ireland. The important thing is that we develop a centre of expertise; that we are able to meet the needs of those with the most complex needs; and that we bring the services together in a way that is only going to be possible from now on. We should be extremely proud of the progress that is being made. The fact that both the Health Committee and the Justice Committee are taking a close interest shows the value that will be achieved for all our people in seeing that the centre makes progress.

It is extremely valuable that, by concentrating the expertise, we are able to provide better services. We often hear demands that services be provided everywhere, but the reality is that those who need the services at the Rowan will be much better off if they have to travel for half an hour or an hour to be there and get all the services in one place than would be the case if we attempted to provide services everywhere. Services cannot be provided on a top-quality basis everywhere.

There are questions that will need to be asked. We will need to look at the practice as the centre opens and starts its operation and people see how it works. However, I believe from what I have seen — if I may temporarily put on a ministerial hat — that things are being got broadly right. If we learn the lessons, we will ensure that they continue to be made better. I look forward to hearing from the Minister who has primary responsibility at the end of the debate about how that will be done.

Mr Clarke: I am pleased to follow Mr Ford in his capacity as a Back-Bencher. It is positive that we now have

something. We have had nothing such as this in Antrim to tackle domestic violence or sexual abuse, so the positive from the debate is that we now have a centre.

There may be criticism about its opening times and whether it should be open 24 hours a day. However, it is interesting, given that it is not a 24-hour centre, that the Minister has already given an assurance that there will be a 24-hour response. That is an important feature from the outset. The centre will operate from 9.00 am to 5.00 pm, and people will be referred there in the first instance by the police. It will be open more fully in September. I read some interesting comments by the Minister that from day one there will be a 24-hour on-call response in practice. That should be heartening for the individuals who will need the service.

In concentrating on those who need the service, it is a sad reflection that we have to provide such a facility in our Province. That is obviously because of the problems associated with some of the families who suffer domestic and sexual violence.

I will take a cheap shot at the Minister of Justice while he is here. I know that he is here as an individual Back-Bencher, but I will be quite happy if he wants to come forward. There is an opportunity here. We know from talking to people who have suffered domestic or sexual violence that it is sometimes difficult for them to come forward and sometimes the justice weighed out does not necessarily fit the crime. The Minister is here today and he is listening, and I say to him that some of those aspects need to be reviewed, particularly the sentencing of people for those crimes.

I know that you are going to pull me back to the subject of the Rowan centre —

Mr Ford: Will the Member give way?

Mr Clarke: I will indeed.

Mr Ford: Were the Member to acknowledge some of the work that has been done by the Department of Justice on better services for victims and witnesses, he might acknowledge that some progress has been made. If he is asking a Minister to deal with sentencing issues, which are a matter for the independent judiciary, we are on slightly dangerous ground in this Chamber.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I draw all Members back to the subject of the debate. The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety is here to respond shortly.

Mr Clarke: Thank you for your guidance, Mr Deputy Speaker. I take on board what the Minister of Justice has just said.

The Rowan centre is on a brownfield site that has been developed. From what I have read in some reports, it is state-of-the-art. The PSNI statistics show that 1,892 people reported in the past 12 months, which is 1,892 people too many. We are also aware of under-reporting. The Rowan centre can work with the individuals who are referred to it, but we also cannot forget about the cases that go unreported.

Confidence has to be built into the system so that people can report their aggressors. That will enable us to tackle the root problem as opposed to having to care for people after they have been sexually abused. That is the sad reflection. As I said, it is sad that we have had to provide

this facility in this area because of what is happening in the background.

In her opening remarks, Pam talked about not necessarily wanting a premium service. I agree fully that it does not seem to be a premium service at the outset, but the fact that we have something now should give some individuals hope that they will have somewhere to go in the short term. I appreciate that a lot more work needs to be done to tackle domestic violence.

The Health Minister's comments about the 24-hour call-out service should give comfort to some individuals who are, perhaps, critical of the fact that the centre is not open 24 hours a day. The Minister has been forward-thinking since he came into office. I am not here to be a cheerleader for him, and sometimes I do not agree with what he does, but he will be the first to recognise that, if there is a particular problem and we need to adjust the service to offer more hours, that will be done. I have every confidence that the Minister will rise to that challenge, and I support the fact that the Rowan centre has been built in Antrim.

The Chair of the Health Committee is here. Although the centre is far from her constituency, she has taken a wider interest in the related health issue. Although the centre is complementary to Antrim, it is fairly central for those who will have to travel from other parts of the Province. I assume that this is why that particular site was picked.

I thank Pam for securing the debate.

4.15 pm

Mr Girvan: I thank Pam for bringing forward this afternoon's Adjournment debate. Much of the detail has already been covered. As Trevor said, it is very sad that we have to open a centre to deal with assault referral. It is one of the plights of our society today. It has probably always existed, but was kept very much in the background.

The referrals that the PSNI will make might help those who have suffered an assault to come forward. It might enable evidence to be gathered and ensure that certain people are prosecuted. That is something that happens, because people do not necessarily report it at the time. They wait a length of time, and it is then difficult to gather evidence. When somebody presents to A&E, or is referred by the PSNI, there will be an opportunity to gather evidence. It is good to see a joint approach between the Department of Justice and the Department of Health in relation to the way forward on this matter.

I appreciate that a couple of million pounds has been spent on building a state-of-the-art facility. There have been comments about the structure of 9.00 am to 5.00 pm, Monday to Friday. We feel that the referral programme, and the counselling which will be available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year, will go some way to dealing with this. However, we ask the Department to look at the volume of people being referred to A&E — perhaps having been brought by the police — who may have been the victims of sexual violence. Sometimes the hours of opening could be looked at to correlate with the peak times when that does happen.

I appreciate that there are a number of factors contributing to why people have suffered. I believe that alcohol and the misuse of drugs fuel a number of the incidents. For certain people, when the drink goes in, the wit goes out. Their

moral conscience does not always kick in when it should, and things go further than they were ever meant to. That needs to be looked at.

I welcome the opening of the facility. I hope and pray that we can —

Ms S Ramsey: I thank the Member for giving way. Just to clarify, the Health Committee is not in any way critical of the opening of the centre. We welcome it and want to play our part. Our concern is that we need a twin-track approach. Let the criminal aspect work away, but if we want to help victims become survivors, we need to look seriously at why people are having to wait four months plus for services.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Girvan: I thank the Member for her intervention. Yes, immediate action needs to be taken. I appreciate that the referral programme comes from outside agencies and feeds into this programme. The Justice Department and what it deals with is one aspect. A bigger problem is the emotional difficulties that the victims have to deal with afterwards. There are also physical difficulties that need to be addressed. Having a facility such as this, which specialises in actually dealing with those aspects that, probably, everyone takes for granted will be dealt with by a hospital or whatever — having somebody who is specially trained to deal with that is vital.

I welcome the Committee's view. I was only referring to the opening hours, and maybe looking for an extension of them, and reviewing that as time goes on. The referral programme coming from the PSNI and A&E is one way. However, from September, there will be the opportunity for self-referral, which might enable more people to report.

This is the first such centre in Northern Ireland. As such, we are dealing with it on a regional basis. Antrim Area Hospital has a very large catchment area and is literally 30 minutes from Belfast. So, unfortunately, there will be people who have to travel from Belfast to this facility.

This is only maybe the first of many such facilities. I appreciate that there are a number of such facilities throughout the United Kingdom, and I have read the report, which details how they operate and the number of people who present at them. In light of that, I welcome today's debate. I hope that we look at the opening hours further down the line, because that is something that, sadly, we have to address.

Mr McDevitt: I am very happy to contribute to this debate as a member of the Health Committee. As Ms Brown concluded, it is important that we all pay tribute to the courage of men, women and children who report sexual assault, rape and other forms of sexual violence. It takes a huge amount of courage to break out of a crime that is based on one person's attempt to exercise control over another person's body. We are only able to properly debate this because a sufficient number of people find that inner courage and decide to break out of the domination, abuse and control that someone else is trying to exercise, or has exercised, over them.

I also echo what colleagues said about the fact that we must accept that this is only a small part of the problem. The problem is much more widespread than the figures suggest. There is a cultural issue in our society with men in particular finding it impossible to appreciate the right of

women, children and other men to their own bodies and the right, sanctity and integrity of someone's body. There is a cultural undercurrent that leads people to think that it is OK to abuse, rape and sexually assault another human being.

One thing that is particularly important about the SARC is that it is healthcare led, in that it looks at the victim of this crime as a human being in need of support, counselling and treatment. Unfortunately, the sad reality is that the victim is also often in need of examination, and, if they are able to allow that to happen, have to consider whether they will allow their body to be considered as a place from which forensic evidence can be retrieved. The context in which things like that happen is very important. It needs to happen somewhere where someone who has suffered the most awful abuse will immediately feel safe. A healthcare setting is, in our society, the place where people are most likely to feel safe at such a time of crisis.

I share colleagues' concerns about the initial pattern of opening hours that is being proposed. It does not fit, certainly not with our experience in south Belfast, that sexual assaults happen between 9.00 am and 5.00 pm, Monday to Friday. In fact, most of the statistics suggest that sexual assaults occur at weekends and over holiday periods in particular. One of the sad realities of Christmas is that, if I am not mistaken, it is one of the periods with the highest episodes of domestic violence and sexual assaults within existing relationships or within established families.

It is really important from a very early stage that we send out a signal to those who work with people who are victims or those who, through no fault of their own, find themselves as victims of a sexual assault or of sexual violence, that there is somewhere available to them all the time, all year round.

One point that has not been made, which I would like to focus on, is the need to ensure that the existence of this SARC is very well known in the system. PSNI officers across the districts, across the shifts and across functions must know about it and know that they must immediately consider bringing a victim to the SARC or offer that possibility. The same applies to GPs and to men and women who are members of the clergy in all our different faith traditions. It will have to apply to teachers in secondary schools and to university lecturers. I know from personal experience that university lecturers increasingly find themselves indirectly having to pick up some of the issues that arise out of a sexual assault that, for whatever reason, has not been reported immediately.

It will also be very important that, when the centre is open for self-referral, as Mr Girvan said it will be, people know about it. If it is open for self-referral, it seems a bit strange that it will be open only from 9.00 am to 5.00 pm on Monday to Friday. That is not the concept of self-referral. I know, and I think that many of us do because I suspect —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the Member draw his remarks to a close, please?

Mr McDevitt: I will conclude on this point. I suspect that all of us have encountered people who have found themselves in a crisis situation. They need help then and there, and a healthcare situation is the place where they are most likely to feel comfortable getting it. I wish the Minister, the Department and the officials every luck with it.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): First, I thank Ms Brown for proposing the Adjournment debate, which provides me with an opportunity to draw attention to a key initiative in raising the standards of care for all victims of sexual violence in Northern Ireland. I have been impressed with the considered and valuable contributions today, and I hope to respond to the points raised during the debate.

All of you will be aware that sexual violence is a problem in Northern Ireland, and you will know that it affects people from all cultural, social and ethnic backgrounds and all age groups. That is borne out by statistics, some of which have been quoted already. In a 12-month period, the PSNI recorded 1,892 offences. That is a huge number, but we believe that it is only the tip of the iceberg.

The sexual assault referral centre, built on the Antrim Area Hospital site and also known as the Rowan, is a joint partnership project between my Department and the PSNI. The specialised centre will offer a range of services for victims of rape and sexual assault, including immediate medical attention, forensic examination and support for victims in making contact with the appropriate agencies and organisations for services such as counselling, criminal procedures, and so on.

The service will go live on Tuesday 7 May 2013, commencing with PSNI referrals in the first instance, before a full roll-out of the service from Monday 2 September 2013. A staged approach to the implementation will enable the new practices and protocols to be embedded and was normal practice for other SARCs previously established in GB. Importantly, as a victim-focused regional facility, one of the key benefits of the SARC will be that people can self-refer from September 2013 onwards.

All victims who are referred to or attend the Rowan will be offered a range of services, including a comprehensive assessment of their needs, and, depending upon those assessed needs, various support and agreed care pathways will be followed. The emotional needs and psychological well-being of the victim will be considered as part of their consultation. The Rowan will be open to deal with a victim at any time on a 24/7 basis, 365 days a year, and all victims seen at the Rowan will receive the same level of specialist support whether they attend out of hours or during core hours.

In many instances, sexual violence may form part of domestic violence. Where that is the case and children are involved, a referral will be made to social services and child and family services. In such cases, if victims are perceived to be at high risk, a referral will also be made through to MARAC, which is a multiagency approach that puts in place a safety plan for victims of domestic violence who are considered to be at high risk of death or serious injury. Victims will be referred to the appropriate support services, with their consent, and into statutory services, where that is mandatory.

For adult victims who self-refer to the Rowan, staff will provide support in reporting the crime to the PSNI, should they choose to do so. All cases of sexual assault, rape or sexual abuse of children and young people under 18 will be referred to social services.

4.30 pm

The response and support that are offered will reflect the needs and wishes of the victim whom the Rowan is supporting at the time. For those who are in acute distress and who are considered at high risk of suicide, each health and social care trust will provide mental health response teams both for children and adolescents, as well as for adults. Those teams are complemented by the 24/7 support of Lifeline, which my Department funds.

For many victims in the aftermath of an assault, there may be many issues to think about, including counselling. Although some victims may require or request immediate counselling support, others may never opt for formal counselling. If a victim requests counselling, the Rowan will assist in making the necessary onward referral.

My Department recognises the enormous contribution that voluntary organisations have made in tackling sexual violence not only by delivering support services for victims but by developing and influencing government policy. A number of voluntary organisations have been at the forefront and have been instrumental in addressing sexual violence in a very positive and, importantly, an empowering manner. There are a wide range of service providers across Northern Ireland in the statutory and voluntary sectors that deliver services to children, young people and adults who have been sexually assaulted. The Rowan will provide each victim with a copy of the regional directory of services entitled 'Have You Been Affected by Sexual Violence or Abuse?', which my Department first published in March 2010.

The Rowan will also provide the victim with an information pack to take away that provides detail on what to expect post-assault and that covers issues such as how they might feel, what they may experience and how to take care of themselves.

I hope that Members will join me in congratulating the many agencies that have been involved in establishing this important facility. The Rowan is Northern Ireland's first SARC. It is a significant step forward in supporting the victims of rape and sexual assault in a safe, secure and confidential environment. Working in partnership with the voluntary sector, we will provide better support to the victims and survivors of sexual crime, and we will seek to bring those responsible to justice.

Various Members raised two or three issues during the debate. Mr Kinahan wanted to know about the centre's role in dealing with drug and substance abuse. That is not the purpose of the facility; other facilities specialise in that area. The centre is a sexual assault referral facility. Granted, there will be some who attend who have drug and substance issues, and there will be some who are there because others have drug and substance issues that have been borne out in their behaviour in a very negative way. However, the centre's purpose is to deal with sexual violence. I do not think that that focus should be diluted in any way, shape or form.

The Chairperson of the Committee, Ms Ramsey, raised the issue of NEXUS and waiting times. I can confirm that NEXUS waiting times have come down considerably since this time last year. I believe that that is in no small measure due to the £150,000 of additional funding that it received from Health and Social Care. For example, waiting times for outreach and evening appointments as

of 1 April 2012 were 10 to 12 weeks in the Belfast Trust. That is down to five to six weeks. The same drop from 10 to 12 weeks to five to six weeks has occurred in the South Eastern Trust. The waiting time in the Western Trust was four months, and that is now down to two weeks. There are other examples. There has been a considerable reduction in waiting times for NEXUS, which carries out a very important role.

The number and range of Members who stayed this evening for the Adjournment debate is a demonstration of the importance of the issue. Ms Brown, who secured the debate, has requested a meeting with me and Minister Ford. Minister Ford is quite capable of answering for himself in due course, but I have very happily agreed to meet Ms Brown to talk further about the issues.

Obviously, this is a new project. We are delighted to have the facility. However, it is important that it is not just a lovely building to go to but that the function and purpose for which it has been established actually meets the needs of the people who use it. I will be very keen to ensure that that is the case and that we can satisfy Ms Brown and others that that will be the case. I am happy to have that meeting and to address any issues with which she may feel that there are still weaknesses. We can deal with many of the concerns and ensure that people who are referred, or who self-refer from September, to this facility are dealt with in a caring and compassionate manner and in a safe environment, which will assist them to deal with the trauma that has been inflicted on them and, hopefully, assist the PSNI in bringing prosecutions against the individuals who have inflicted that trauma and bring them to justice for their heinous activities.

Ms Brown: I thank the Minister for giving way. As you stated, information leaflets and pamphlets being made available to victims of sexual assault can lead victims into further danger if they have to return to their abuser because they have that kind of literature on their person. Will the Minister take on board my comments about the positive role that independent domestic violence advisers could play if they were brought into the SARC, as they are available in some SARCs in other parts of the UK?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that interventions should be relatively brief. On this occasion, I will allow the Minister to respond.

Mr Poots: I understand that my time has gone, Mr Deputy Speaker. I will happily deal with those issues in our meeting with Ms Brown.

Adjourned at 4.37 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 29 April 2013

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Executive Committee Business

Water and Sewerage Services (Amendment) Bill: Royal Assent

Mr Speaker: I inform Members that the Water and Sewerage Services (Amendment) Bill has received Royal Assent. The Water and Sewerage Services (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2013 became law on 25 April 2013.

Criminal Justice Bill: Royal Assent

Mr Speaker: I inform Members that the Criminal Justice Bill has received Royal Assent. The Criminal Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2013 became law on 25 April 2013.

Private Members' Business

Londonderry and the North-west 1613-2013

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 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.

One amendment was selected and published on the Marshalled List last week. However, I am sorry to tell the House that Mr McClarty is unwell and has had to withdraw his amendment.

Mr G Robinson: I beg to move

That this Assembly recognises the significant historical legacy that the last 400 years have given to Northern Ireland and in particular to Londonderry and the north-west region, with the 400th anniversary of the building of the city walls and the granting of charters in 1613 for the city of Londonderry and the town of Limavady; and hopes that there will be significantly increased tourism and additional employment opportunities resulting from a spectacular and momentous year.

Mr David McClarty tabled an amendment to the motion, which we would have accepted. I wish him a speedy recovery from his illness.

The north-west of Northern Ireland has been an integral part of Northern Ireland's history since the first settlers came to the site at Mount Sandel in Coleraine in 6000 BC, which confirms Coleraine's long history of settlement. Those early settlers' descendants include, on the entertainment side, Eurovision song contest winners Dana and Phil Coulter. Londonderry is the current UK City of Culture, and we must not forget our East Londonderry MP, Gregory Campbell, who has contributed significantly to political life during a lifetime in peaceful, democratic politics.

Coleraine was one of two communities developed by the London companies in County Londonderry. Some of the famous Coleraine-born individuals in the sporting arena are the rowers Alan Campbell and Peter and Richard Chambers, as well as Munich football hero Harry Gregg MBE. In politics, Andrew Bonar Law, a Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, had his roots in Coleraine. The ancestors of James Knox Polk, the eleventh president of the United States, were among the first Ulster-Scots settlers in the USA, emigrating from Coleraine in 1680. No list would be complete without the actor James Nesbitt.

Coleraine is also the home town of global youth football's Milk Cup and the international North West 200 road races, and golf hero Graeme McDowell hails from Portrush.

The second city of Northern Ireland, Londonderry, can be traced to the 6th century, when a Christian monastery was founded on a hill. In 1623, King James I granted the city a royal charter. The city of Londonderry was the jewel in the crown of the Ulster plantation. More importantly, the city was enclosed by massive stone and earthen fortifications — the famous walls. It was the last walled city built in Ireland and the only city on the island whose ancient walls survive complete.

Coleraine and Londonderry are home to campuses of the University of Ulster. Magee College in Londonderry was founded in 1865 to train men for the Presbyterian ministry, while Coleraine is the location of the university's administration buildings and is further noted as a world-class centre for research and biomedical sciences.

During World War II, Londonderry was a major naval base. Large numbers of American and Canadian servicemen were stationed in the area. Londonderry also witnessed the surrender of the German U-boat fleet at Lisahally at the end of World War II. There were also air bases around the city. Amelia Earhart gave the city a boost in history when she landed at Ballyarnett in 1932, becoming the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic. That complements the history of the various RAF coastal command airfields dotted along the north-west coast, where aviators spotted German U-boats and defended the convoys that helped to feed and supply the United Kingdom during World War II.

Along the coast, Downhill forest was part of the bishop's palace. Sadly, the palace is now a ruin, but the gardens are a wonderful place and are full of lakes and flower gardens, which is a great asset to the tourism sector.

There are differences about the exact date of the origin of Limavady. Estimates date from around the 5th century AD, but Limavady or, more correctly, Newtown Limavady was awarded its royal charter in 1613. Limavady is famed for being the area where Jane Ross collected the tune 'Londonderry Air' in 185. It was later used for the famous song, 'Danny Boy'.

William Ferguson Massey, often known as "Farmer Bill", served as Prime Minister of New Zealand from 1912 to 1925. Massey attended the peace conference in 1919 and signed the Treaty of Versailles on behalf of the dominion of New Zealand. Close by, the Brougher hoard was discovered. It is a hoard of gold artefacts from the Iron Age that Tom Nicholl found in 1896 on farmland near Limavady. It is considered to be the finest example of Irish gold-working in Europe.

With that extensive history, the north-west can prove its unique place in Northern Ireland's history. Indeed, we can claim the roots of Northern Ireland from the mount in Coleraine. They are great assets in selling our area to the tourist market, and they give great quality of life and pastimes, including our golf courses. The north-west is deserving of its place as a tourism gem, whether that is for its history, sport or the friendliness of the people. Despite difficult economic times, there is an opportunity to boost tourism and employment by selling the glories of the north coast. I hope that all Members will agree that the opportunity to boost tourism is there for the taking in such a historically significant year.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Beidh mé breá sásta le bheith ag labhairt ar an rún seo inniu. I am very pleased to speak on the motion. I wonder why the Members who brought it to the House did not do so earlier, rather than waiting until halfway through the year to bring it forward. I also wonder, like many in East Derry, why Coleraine was omitted.

Mr Campbell: Will the Member give way?

Mr Ó hOisín: No, I am just getting started.

2013 is a historic year for the entire north-west. Ultimately, the highlight must be the celebrations around the City of Culture, including the first ever visit of the all-Ireland fleadh to the North, the hosting of the Turner prize and the return of the Derry-Coleraine railway link, among others. Quantifying the benefits of these may take some time, but, undoubtedly, the legacy will be increased tourism, job opportunities and footfall, with the attendant associated economic activity.

The City of Culture has focused many in the north-west on our historical and cultural past, and I am particularly proud of the temporary return of one of Ireland's most spectacularly important national artefacts, namely the Brougher hoard, from the National Museum in Dublin, something for which I have campaigned for many years.

We have identified shared and Christian history, such as the legacy of Colmcille, and an appreciation of a shared tradition, not only locally, but along the north-west and north coasts of Ireland, the west coast of Scotland and elsewhere. Thankfully, that has re-entered the subconscious of the people here, and much debate has ensued.

There are many other cultural and historical milestones that we can all recognise as belonging to everyone here. We must look at the centuries-old tradition of the Irish and Scottish clans, their intermarriages and internecine disputes and the cross-fertilisation of ideas and trades that were inextricably linked. Indeed, there is the Irish kingdom of Dál Riada — that is the right pronunciation — across the North Channel and the influence that is manifest in place names such as Argyll, or Oirear Gael, meaning eastern Irish.

Other shared histories include the United Irishmen and the Young Irelanders, such as John Mitchel, the son of a Unitarian minister who was born in Dungiven in 1815 and whose writings were central to the political thoughts of P H Pearse, the leader of the 1916 rising.

Likewise, in recent years, we have seen a revisiting of the causes and effects of the communal slaughter that was the western front in World War I and the shared suffering of unionists and nationalists there. Less recognition is given to the fact that as many Irishmen from both traditions enlisted and died in the American civil war on both sides as did in World War I. That is a largely untold historical fact, which, no doubt, has great, powerful potential for the genealogical tracing of our diaspora and for the Americans in general and the benefits that might ensue from that.

As for marking the shared aspects of the early days of the 17th century, I remain unconvinced of how that might be done, while recognising the sensitivities of many here. There is no doubt that the events of that period were central to how history developed subsequently, but I am sure there are those who would not agree with holding

up the legacy of many brutal actions as something to be celebrated. Events that commemorate the invasion, conquest and suppression of indigenous cultures, religions and languages are controversial wherever in the world they take place. Indeed, in the Americas, while 12 October is marked as Columbus Day, acknowledging the day when Christopher Columbus “discovered” America — as if nothing of importance had existed there previously — it is also referred to by some as “Genocide Day”. Down under, Australia Day is marked by the Aboriginal peoples as Invasion Day, a day that marks the shameful theft of land, people and culture.

Likewise, the granting of some 40 town and city charters in 1613 by James I was not an honour to be conferred on the people here but was done to consolidate an attempt to legalise the seizure and confiscation of vast tracts of land in this part of Ireland. The areas were too large for the initial settlers to work on their own, so much so that the royal edict in the original charters contained a fundamental duty to remove all the native Irish. It went unfulfilled, but, nonetheless, it represented ethnic cleansing on an unparalleled scale that had never been seen previously. How, if at all, should it be celebrated?

The recent charter event in Derry went largely unnoticed, but there are implications to this day of the effects of the seizures of land and rights. Huge tracts of land and fishing, mineral extraction and access rights remain in the hands of organisations, families and individuals to whom they were granted by those royal charters. Some of them are little more than absentee landlords who still extract payment and enjoy the largesse from that period.

Any celebration or marking of these events and dates in history must be sensitive to all here. To an extent, we are all prisoners of history. The implication that 1613 somehow marks the beginning of the modern period of Irish history, thus ignoring what has gone before, is also a concern. We need to be as inclusive as possible in these matters and celebrate what is good and shared in our long and turbulent history.

12.15 pm

Mr P Ramsey: It would be remiss of the House not to examine the period involving the granting of the charters in 1613 without referring to some of the significant events that took place on this island, gearing up to the beginning of the work on the Derry city walls.

It should be remembered that Sir Cahir O'Doherty ransacked the city of Derry in 1608 and burnt it to the ground in revolt, joined by other Irish chieftains prior to the summer assizes of 1608, when the king was judged to have ownership of the seized north-eastern counties.

In Leap of the Dog or, as we know it today, Limavady, the O'Cahans ruled the roost. The name “Leap of the Dog” comes from a story in which a dog leapt over the Roe to warn the O'Cahans of an enemy ambush. The famous leap is now depicted on the city's coat of arms. The seat of the O'Cahans still sits proudly in Roe Valley Country Park. We must, of course, refer to the plantation of Ulster following the Flight of the Earls and the contention around the 1607 proclamation, which stripped the earls of Tyrone and Tyrconnell of their lands and titles.

I refer to those important events in Ireland's history because we should not forget that the fortifications

referred to in the motion are not stand-alone; they did not simply pop up. I also have to refer to the fact that the past 400 years have been historically significant for not just the North but the entire island of Ireland.

I turn to the significant year of 2013 and the benefits that we hope it will have not just for Derry as City of Culture but for the entire region. The motion refers to Limavady. I know that the Member who tabled the amendment is not in the Chamber, but the subject covers Coleraine, Donegal and Tyrone as well. We will soon have up to 300,000 people in Derry for the Fleadh Cheoil celebrating Irish culture, music, song and dance, as well as the Walled City Tattoo, incorporating bands from across the world.

The Return of Colmcille is set to be a massively successful event. That, coupled with the exhibition of Orange traditional arts, the Limavady jazz and blues festival and the Maiden City festival, provides a backdrop of inclusivity, respect and culture over politics. It is crucial that the celebrations, whether in Derry, Limavady or Coleraine, are not seen to be a manifestation of political differences. We have a real opportunity as never before not only to be a unifying force in respect of the people of Derry and beyond but to transform Derry city and the north-west region.

An employment legacy is an issue that I and many other Members want to see and be mindful of as we enter this year of culture for the city. If the only beneficiaries of the windfall for the city are those in senior positions in organisations that benefit from the events of the Culture Company, we run the risk of leaving no substantive legacy for our young people. Although the City of Culture was never about jobs but about showcasing and elevating the city, we need to ensure that every Minister on the Executive, especially those with economic portfolios, refer to Derry on trade missions, at business events and via investment opportunities. It is the responsibility of the Executive not just to help to finance the initiative, as they have to some extent so far, but to be the guarantors of that legacy as we move forward.

The physical transformation of the city through upgraded public realm works, instigated by my colleague the Minister of the Environment and the Department for Regional Development, has been much talked about in the city. That infrastructure will be well in place for the main events in the city. We cannot ignore the huge investment in the built heritage within the walled city. It is important to acknowledge and modernise that infrastructure so that visitors too can recognise its importance.

When we welcome tourists to Limavady, Derry, Carrdonagh, Coleraine or anywhere in the north-west, we know that they will get a strong, warm welcome from the people of Derry. However, we should encourage as many people as possible to come back to the city and region, and we have good marketing initiatives to do that. The infrastructure of the A5 would have added to that; it would have ensured accessibility and been important to the region. We should emphasise that. It is grand having the City of Culture, but, if you want to promote the culture of the people and the heritage of the city —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is almost gone.

Mr P Ramsey: — we need that infrastructure in place.

Mr Hussey: This is a welcome motion, given that it specifically highlights the important north-west region of

Northern Ireland. There have been many suggestions and, some would say, clear indications that the region has been subject to underinvestment, but perhaps today we can show that it has much to offer, certainly in terms of tourism potential. At this stage, I declare an interest: from 1996 to 1999, I was the manager of the Pearl Assurance company based in Coleraine, which covered the area from Londonderry to Larne. There is also a rumour that I might start singing during this speech. Just watch, in case I do. If I do, I hope you will all join in.

We are in the middle of the so-called decade of centenaries, as we commemorate events such as the signing of the covenant and the battle of the Somme. However, we can look back much further — as far as 400 years ago, as the motion sets out — to remember important events that took place in Londonderry and the surrounding areas, such as Limavady and Coleraine. We are on the verge of the 400th anniversary of the building of the city walls, which were built between 1614 and 1619. The original walls are almost perfectly preserved, making Londonderry one of the finest examples of a walled city in Europe. In fact, there is a song about that as well, but I might leave that for later. Despite sieges in 1641 and 1649 and the great siege of 1689, the city's walls were never breached — proof indeed of their careful planning and excellent construction and the reason for the title "Maiden City". The Northern Ireland visitor attraction survey compiled by DETI shows that 278,000 people visited the city walls in 2011. That was an increase of 12%. If we exclude parks, forests and gardens, it is currently the sixth most popular visitor attraction in Northern Ireland. We can build on that success.

This year marks the 400th anniversary of King James I granting a charter to Londonderry that declared that:

"the said city or town of Derry, for ever hereafter be and shall be named and called the city of Londonderry".

Some people seem to have forgotten that royal decree and have slipped back to the old name, but I am confident that, after today, they will accept that the correct name of our second city is Londonderry. It is also stipulated that the city should have a mayor, two sheriffs, a chamberlain, 12 aldermen and 24 burgesses who were to form a common council or corporation. Unfortunately, the DUP and Sinn Féin seem to be determined to change to a common council to extend into County Tyrone by engulfing Strabane. Again, I will leave that for another day.

The UK City of Culture programme does not make any mention of the vastly important event that is the granting of the charter. The Sinn Féin Culture Minister has also admitted that there are no specific plans to mark the anniversaries of the award of the charter to Londonderry or, indeed, to Limavady and Coleraine. Why is that, given the historical significance?

The motion is correct: this is a spectacular and momentous year for Londonderry. Of course, the main event is the UK City of Culture throughout the year, and, despite Sinn Féin's petty attempt to remove "UK" from the branding, which was voted down at council, the event is a United Kingdom event and will draw many attendees from throughout the kingdom and beyond, including our neighbours in the Republic of Ireland.

The UK City of Culture programme contains a vast array of culture, music, theatre etc. The usually highly successful North West 200 continues and will bring in an expected 100,000 visitors. Regeneration through the One Plan, the mission of which is to deliver economic, physical and social renewal by building a stronger and more vibrant economy, with increased prosperity for our city and region, in ways which ensure that opportunities and benefits from regeneration are targeted towards the most deprived groups in our communities, is also well under way.

I want to mention briefly Ebrington Barracks. Again, we can see clearly the work that has been undertaken there. However, one thing is still missing from Ebrington Barracks, and that is the memorial to those who served there in the past. We must remember all those who served through Ebrington Barracks. It was a base for the Royal Navy, the US Navy and the army. Those who lost their life are entitled to be remembered in the city of Londonderry.

Unfortunately, Mr Speaker, time is running out, so you will not get the song. I am sure that you, as someone who represents Londonderry, will appreciate it if I do it for you on another date.

Mr Lunn: I support the motion. I would also have supported the amendment. I hope that Mr McClarty is restored and back with us soon.

As far as the events of 1613 are concerned, if I am honest, I must admit that the fact that Limavady and Coleraine are celebrating the 400th anniversary of the granting of their charters or liberties by King James has, largely, passed me by. As I have some interest in our shared history, I suspect that that applies to most of the population and, therefore, the wider world. The hope expressed in the motion that there will be

"significantly increased tourism and additional employment opportunities resulting from a spectacular and momentous year"

may prove to be a wee bit optimistic. I hope not. There is no reason why the local population should not revel in their rediscovered history and enjoy the opportunities that 2013 offers.

I will deal with Limavady first. Mr Robinson mentioned the fact that Mr Massey was prime minister of New Zealand. In fairness, I would have to point out that the first prime minister of New Zealand was Mr Ballance, who came from Lisburn. He was also the first prime minister to give women the vote. He was a forward-thinking man; he should have been in the Alliance Party. I note the impressive series of events from January to June that have been organised by the Limavady 400 group. That amount of effort deserves success, and I hope that it is achieved. In particular, others have referred to one of the best-known tunes that has ever been written, 'The Londonderry Air', which appears to originate from the town. Last week, I was in Limavady for a celebration of shared education, which is an area where Limavady leads the way in Northern Ireland. A schools' choir drawn from across the community, almost inevitably, performed what it now known as 'Danny Boy'. It remains as fresh and beautiful as when Jane Ross put it on paper and preserved it for posterity.

Three things come to mind about it for me, however. One is why it is not called 'The Limavady Air'. Why is it not, thank goodness, called the 'Derry Air'? I will not pursue

that: anybody who speaks French will know where I am going. I wonder how many other exquisite melodies that were written by old Irish songwriters and poets have been lost because nobody ever wrote them down. I am sure that there are dozens into hundreds.

We are all talking about Coleraine as well, which also has a varied history. It is the oldest human settlement on the island. It has had a pivotal role in commerce and industry because of its strategic position on the Bann and the unchanged nature, to this day, of its town centre layout. The main focus, of course, has to be Londonderry, a city with a proud, interesting and, sometimes, divided history, as we all know. I call it "Londonderry" today because that is the name conferred on it by the king's charter of 1613. Others prefer to call it "Derry". That is fine with me, frankly, but I cannot stand it when people call it "Derry/Londonderry" or "Stroke City". I wish that nobody had ever invented those phrases. I wish that the media could remove them from their vocabulary.

This year, Londonderry has everything going for it. It is the City of Culture. This year is its 400th anniversary. Others, particularly Mr Ramsey, referred to the events that will take place, such as the fleadh and its 300,000 visitors. That is terrific. I hope that the great events that are planned for Londonderry and the international interest will produce what is referred to in the motion and a spectacular and momentous year.

I will close my remarks with a thought. There was an opportunity for Londonderry to participate and, perhaps, become more involved in "The Gathering" this year. We have discussed that in the House several times. There was not much enthusiasm from some quarters for cross-border exchange or co-operation on that event. It may prove to be a missed opportunity. I wish Londonderry, Limavady and Coleraine all the best for the rest of their year.

Mr McQuillan: I am pleased to support the motion brought to the House by my East Londonderry colleagues. It is a motion that all parties in the House should be able to give their support to. No one can deny the significance and importance of the building of the city walls and the granting of the charters to Londonderry and Limavady.

Indeed, the significance of those events was not limited to the north-west; the effect was felt across Ulster and, indeed, it can be argued, much further afield. It is right, therefore, that we recognise and celebrate this historical legacy.

12.30 pm

It would be remiss of me not to highlight the fact that this year also marks the 400th anniversary of the granting of Coleraine's charter. Coleraine has a rich history, of which many in our Province are not aware. I would, of course, encourage every Member to find out more about the history of the town and its significance in the local area. It was the first settlement in Ireland, as well as the location of another important event in 1642 when the town was under siege. I am pleased that Coleraine Borough Council opened a small grant programme for community groups to help them to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the town. That approach is to be welcomed as we seek to make people more aware of our history.

As we celebrate those important milestones, coupled with Londonderry being named UK City of Culture 2013, there

is great potential for the north-west looking ahead. This year has the potential to provide an enormous boost for tourism in the area, and I congratulate those who have worked so hard to ensure that that potential is explored. Although the north coast and the north-west do well to attract tourists, we still have more work to do. There is much untapped potential, but we hope that this year's events can be the catalyst for further growth.

Although tourism growth is important, there is also the potential for growth in inward investment as we showcase what we have to offer. I hope that this year can help to make that region of Northern Ireland better known and more attractive. Celebrating our history and the achievements of the past can help us as we move forward into the future.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. As a proud Derry person, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak on the motion. The motion rightly refers to the walls as a symbol of Derry's strategic importance and, in my view, its ongoing cultural significance. Whether it is known as Tearmann Dhoire, Doire Calgaich or Doire Cholm Cille, they all tell the story of a monastic site that was much fought for through long periods of colonisation, war and siege. The motion rightly refers to the significant historical legacy, but to do that without referring to the cost of colonisation and imperialism would be counterproductive.

It is interesting that the motion refers to the last 400 years in what is quoted as "Northern Ireland", as though it has always existed as a natural entity, as opposed to being an artificial gerrymander imposed on a country in 1920 in a very undemocratic way.

The focus on Derry was both political and profit-driven. The historical documents at the time of Henry Docwra in 1604 refer to the establishment of a colony of civil and loyal people. During the reign of James I, and after the burning of the city, a decision was taken by the city of London to plant and to provide safety and security for those who were sent to live there. Reference was made to creating lanterns of civility and English villages. This year of anniversaries can be viewed as a success if it facilitates discussion about the legacy of colonialism, which is still felt in Derry and the wider north-west through partition and the arbitrary drawing of a border that was based on a sectarian headcount by containing the least number of nationalists within the greatest amount of land possible.

The mover of the motion may be aware that those matters were discussed, but in a less celebratory way, at a recent conference in Derry on the issue of the walls. They celebrated the existence of the walls — that is for sure — but they took into account that it was a devastating period for the native population.

I note that the motion refers to the hopes that there will be significantly increased tourism and employment. I suggest that the Members who tabled the motion take that issue up directly with their Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

There is no doubt, then, of the historical and cultural significance, and we need to exploit this opportunity as a key economic driver. Given that Derry is a walled city, we need to ensure that it receives recognition and is given UNESCO world heritage status. The walls were built to exclude people, and that is part of our history and heritage,

but the symbolism of the walls has shifted from exclusion to a cultural resource for all the people of the city. This in itself is a major reason to reflect and celebrate.

Although Derry was once a symbol of unionist superiority, that is no longer the case. The walls are merely a significant historical relic that act as a shared social space and are a significant tourist attraction. This is also a reflection on improving relationships in the city, which have come about through dialogue and discussion between organisations such as the Apprentice Boys of Derry and local residents. People want to see that legacy: more focus on frank discussions and debates that are an honest reflection of the historical reality of the period.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The motion is to be welcomed, as are all motions, but it seems to be more aspirational than anything else. There is no real substance about the opportunities for employment and tourism. However, I will explore that later.

In some ways, I am disappointed that Mr Hussey did not get the opportunity to sing. Perhaps he would have sung 'Derry's Walls' and would realise that people are and always have been comfortable singing about Derry, despite the context.

Mr Hussey: Is that an invitation?

Mr McCartney: Maybe for another day.

The motion gives the impression that nothing existed before that time, which happens sometimes because people focus on particular periods of history. It is as though the history of Derry and Ireland, and, indeed, the history of the relationship between Ireland and Britain, started 400 years ago when people dropped out of the sky and decided that there was a part of Ireland that they wanted to come and live in. When Mr Robinson moved the motion, he accepted the fact that there has been a settlement at Derry since the sixth century BC, so when people came to Ulster or to Ireland at that time, it was for a particular reason.

It is interesting that the motion does not contain the word "plantation". It is like the scene from 'Fawlty Towers' in which John Cleese famously says, "Don't mention the war" because there are German visitors in his hotel. Here, it is a case of "Don't mention the plantation." *[Interruption.]* That is providing the tune for you to sing, Mr Hussey.

Perhaps that is the reason why people are uncomfortable now with the idea of what the plantation was, but it is our history. There are competing perspectives on history, but we should look at it and rationalise it. Members referred to King James of England. He said that he wanted to go to Ireland and civilise the native population: that was most likely presented to him by his counsellors at the time. There is a breathtaking arrogance in that.

Cathal Ó hOisín spoke of that same type of aspiration and notion, and he said that when we were growing up, we actually believed that Christopher Columbus discovered America. To suggest that Columbus discovered America, despite the fact that people had been living there for decades, centuries or perhaps longer, again demonstrates the breathtaking arrogance of the West.

It is the same with Australia: when people talk about one of the greatest natural landmarks in Australia, they refer to it as Ayers Rock. They forget that the Aboriginal people had

a name for it, a name that people are thankfully starting to feel comfortable in using. Perhaps that could be a lesson to us here.

The ideal of purposeful enquiry for the City of Culture is starting to be translated. Maeve McLaughlin is right: the walls are there and are of great importance to the city. We should not be frightened to have such a purposeful enquiry about the plantation and its past and continuing impact. Indeed, this year, in the City of Culture with its purposeful inquiry, there is a production of Brian Friel's 'Translations'. That play gives an excellent insight into the impact of people coming to a place in the belief that they are civilised and will civilise the uncivilised.

Mr Hussey: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCartney: I will, surely.

Mr Hussey: Of course, you refer to the plantation and people coming from England, but you will accept that the Vikings came before that, and they certainly did not bring civilisation; they forced their way through. They were a very violent people, and they sacked England. You also had the Normans, whose strong influence is still here. Those people came, and they are still here. It was part of history that people came and took what they wanted. It started with the Vikings and the Normans, and it continued.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an added minute.

Mr McCartney: Absolutely. I am in total agreement, but there is an acceptance that the Vikings were violent people. It is accepted that the plantation was not some benevolent charity handed out by the great and the good and that King James did not act to civilise the uncivilised in Ireland for its people's benefit. As I said, 'Translations' is an excellent exposé of that. The play shows how the Irish language was overturned and butchered by the translation of townlands. People continue to campaign not only for the return of the use of townlands but for them to be returned to their original state. There was a poetry to the language that described the town's land, and then a translator butchered some of the translations. Even people who do not want to create controversy accept that the poetry of the indigenous people was disrupted by somebody falsely translating one word into another. So, I think that is what we should be doing. We talk about job creation and opportunities in tourism. If that is the spirit of the motion, there is an opportunity because many in the city have campaigned for the city walls to belong —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time has almost gone.

Mr McCartney: — to the people of the city. Let us all unify and say to The Honourable The Irish Society that it should return Derry's walls to the people of Derry. Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle.

Mr Eastwood: I thought quite a bit about how to approach the motion and came down on the side of being positive, so I will take the motion in that vein. This is a positive opportunity for us to discuss the history of not only the 400 years that we have experienced in this country but beyond that. I was glad to hear Mr Robinson accept, from the DUP's point of view, that there has been a settlement in Derry going back centuries. That is a very positive move from the DUP.

History happened. I will try to avoid getting sucked into debating all the aspects of that. The MP for East Derry and I have debated many times different historical events in Derry over the years. I will try to avoid getting sucked into doing that now. As someone who was, along with others, involved in the bid process for the City of Culture, I will be straight: one of the key aspects of the City of Culture bid was recognising that we have differing but shared history and that we need to, once and for all, tackle and debate that history in a way that is respectful of one other and can provide a positive outcome for the people of our city. The people of Derry are very far ahead of us on that. Mr Speaker, you know of the great work done together by communities and organisations that would previously have been seen as enemies to grasp the nettle of our history and not be afraid of it but try to use it as a positive.

I am glad to hear people talking about tourism because it is the biggest opportunity that we have in Derry to create employment and have a growth industry, and we are only just scratching the surface. People come to Derry because of its history. They come to look at the walls; to visit the Museum of Free Derry to learn about the history of the civil rights movement and Bloody Sunday; to look at the murals; and to learn about Amelia Earhart. People go to the Tower Museum, where they can find out about events such as the Flight of the Earls. Of course, they come to look at how Derry was a very strategic place in World War II, including the fact that the German U-boat commander for the north Atlantic surrendered in Lisahally port.

We have a very rich history that goes right back to Colmcille and beyond. I think that we should all be proud of it. I may have a different view than some Members opposite on the significance of particular parts of that history, but it shaped us all — even the bits on which we disagree shaped us all. I think that we need to recognise that.

In Derry, we are leading the way in dealing with our history, and there are some great examples of that in this very momentous decade. The 400th anniversary of the walls being built in Derry was a key part of the bid process for the City of Culture. I was there when we made the arguments to the judges, and one of the things that we kept saying was that, although we have had a difficult history, we were there together to try to provide a positive future for each other and for generations to come. Mr McCartney talked about “purposeful enquiry”. That was a key part — the winning part — of the City of Culture bid. That needs to be remembered.

12.45 pm

It was unfortunate that, a couple of years ago, Derry was left off the UK list of sites for UNESCO world heritage status. I have called before for the Irish Government to take forward that case, and I think that we should renew that call now. I think that it will be another eight years before the UK can put its list together again. So, I ask the Irish Government to look seriously at the opportunity to take historic Derry on as a UNESCO world heritage site. It is a very historic part of the world, maybe much more historic than some other world heritage sites. I think that we could benefit immensely from that status and that that would be one of the legacy issues that we could create from the City of Culture.

I take the motion as a positive one, and we will respond to it positively. However, we will not be afraid to discuss all the difficult issues of our past as we go forward.

Mr Dallat: I thought carefully about taking part in this debate, and I decided that I had better not do any research. That is because books are written by people from different perspectives, and you have to read at least two to get any kind of sense of balance before you can begin to pontificate. Of course, propaganda was not invented in modern times; it existed way back in the 17th century. Indeed, I think that some people then were particularly good at it.

I am always disappointed that the history of this part of Ireland begins in 1613. We had a playwright in Limavady called Harry Barton. He was a wonderful person who, I think, encapsulated life before the plantation and the wonderful relationship between Donegal, Derry and the Scottish islands in particular. Of course, ‘The Gem of the Roe’ also came out of that relationship. It would be attractive if we could package that and sell it to an international audience. Hopefully, that is what we are talking about: packaging our history in a way that means that we can create tourism, build on it and create jobs.

It is natural that everyone wants to name-drop, and we have heard about Massey and others. However, we have two wonderful people from Kilrea who are part of very recent history: Martin O'Neill and Hannah Shields, who climbed Everest. So, every century has people who contribute to others' well-being.

I am always disappointed that Coleraine did not do more. We have been told that Mount Sandel has the earliest evidence of habitation. I have been there with schoolchildren on many occasions, and we found flints and discovered the factories that exported goods all over Europe. We also discovered that the people of Coleraine were given a great concession in that they had to eat salmon only three days a week. Can you imagine if you had that privilege today? I think that you would really want it.

Tourism Ireland is based in Coleraine, which was one of the benefits of the Good Friday Agreement. I am not a cheerleader for the motion by any means, but it at least creates an opportunity to bring the people of the city, the county and others together to debate the issue and hopefully come forward with suggestions that are beneficial in the interests of the wider community. I do not think that anyone wants a barney across the Chamber about who was right and who was wrong. We know that Lundy was portrayed as a traitor for many years, but in recent times he might well have been a hero and it might well have been Walker who was the problem. I get all confused about that history. Of course, every century since has been the same.

In Portrush, we have Dunluce Castle. Here is a plug for my Minister, Alex Attwood, who has encouraged the excavations there, which will throw up another period in history. I see Adrian McQuillan nodding in agreement, and I know why. My mother's name was MacSweeney, and, of course, the McQuillans were also very prominent people in the history of this part of Ireland before the plantation. The O'Cahans, of course, have already been mentioned. There were also the O'Donnells and the McDonnells. All of those people played a significant role in the history. This year, Derry city has the challenge not only to sell the city in

a positive way but to reach out to Limavady and Coleraine. I know that the DUP made a wee slip-up and forgot about Coleraine in the motion, but we will forgive them for that.

I will take the opportunity to remind my city dwellers, of all political persuasions, that there is life outside Derry city, and it is an important part of it, on both sides. My mother, who I mentioned earlier — God rest her — came from Donegal. She was part of the north-west and the whole history of the area.

Speaker, I hope you have enjoyed listening to the debate. I certainly enjoyed taking part in it, without the research or the prepared speech. I hope that something really positive and good comes out of today.

Mr Allister: There is no doubt that there was settlement in and about Londonderry before 1613, but it is utterly foolish to pretend that the granting of the charter on 29 March 1613 by James I was not the seminal moment that kick-started the growth of Londonderry, saw the building of the walls and the empowerment of the Irish Society, which then saw the agreements with the London companies, all of which activated the growth, prosperity and development of Londonderry. Indeed, from one perspective, you could say that the charter and all that it gave rise to in 1613 is an advert not just for the British connection but, indeed, for privatisation, which had such a positive effect on the growth of Londonderry in consequence of the agreements with the London companies.

Yet that seminal moment, which the granting of the charter was, is, by some, swept away as if it never existed. It is quite remarkable that something as significant as that is not being celebrated in the city of Londonderry. It is quite remarkable — remarkable in one sense but unremarkable in another — that the cultural Minister and Department of Culture should have no room, no opportunity and no plans to celebrate something as significant as that, and, that, indeed, the UK City of Culture and the Culture Company should also have ignored it and swept it away, to the point where, on 29 March this year, the only event in Londonderry was a comedy show. There was nothing to celebrate, recognise or acknowledge the significance of the granting of the charter.

As I said, it is remarkable that the Minister did not see to it that those things were celebrated, but it is unremarkable in the sense that the Sinn Féin Minister's bigotry got the better of her. That is the plain truth of it. What sticks in the throat of Sinn Féin in regard to the 1613 charter is that, as Mr Hussey reminded us, it decreed in those immutable words:

“that the said city or town of Derry, for ever hereafter be and shall be named and called the city of Londonderry”.

Of course, when the 1662 charter came along from Charles II it expressly reiterated that the city:

“shall be named and called the City of Londonderry”.

It is pretty clear that that is some people's problem with celebrating the charter.

Ms McLaughlin treated us to some reminiscences about things that have been said about the civil people of Londonderry, and I am sure that, in the main, they are. Recently, however, I think that some of the residents of the Fountain might have dearly liked it had some of their

neighbours treated them with a bit more civility. Likewise, when it came to the scurrilous, vindictive and hateful protests to celebrate the death of Margaret Thatcher, there was not much civility shown by some who today reside in Londonderry.

The charters are something to celebrate. I wish that they had been properly celebrated in the city and across the Province, because it is our second city. It was a missed opportunity, which was deliberately and consciously missed by some because they want to downplay the significance of the British connection and the empowerment and growth of Londonderry that came with the charters. That is something to celebrate, nonetheless.

Perhaps it passed me by, Mr Speaker, but, because you come from the city, I was watching out for and hoped that there would have been a celebration of the charter in this Assembly. Perhaps I missed it, but I am unaware of any such celebration.

The granting of the charter on 29 March 1613 was a most seminal moment upon which the future prosperity and growth —

Mr Dallat: Will the Member give way?

Mr Allister: Yes, indeed.

Mr Dallat: For the record, would Mr Allister agree that every elected politician of every hue condemned the disgraceful attacks on the Fountain and, equally, showed their disapproval of the so-called celebrations that took place following the death of Baroness Thatcher? It is important to have that on record.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Allister: I certainly accept that the honourable Member expressed his condemnation; I have his word for it that every public representative did so. I am well aware that some of the celebrations across Northern Ireland were orchestrated and promoted by Sinn Féin, so I question whether it was as effusive as the Member suggests in condemning those disgraceful scenes of celebration of the death of Margaret Thatcher. The people in the Fountain were shown no civility over that period by other residents in the city, and that is shameful.

The granting of the charter should be celebrated.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is almost gone.

Mr Allister: It is a matter of great regret that, for political reasons, it has not been celebrated.

Ms Ni Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I also send my best wishes to David McClarty for a speedy recovery.

I thank all Members who have spoken thus far. Until the last contributor, the broad thrust of the debate has centred on tourism, employment and community involvement opportunities, which I support. We need to make sure that, where possible, we enhance those opportunities, particularly for Derry and the north-west. I am assuming that that is at the core of this debate.

Opportunities will arise from the focus on the City of Culture 2013, but it is key, as has been evident in the debate, that our diverse historical and cultural legacy, as well as our history, should be remembered on the basis

of inclusivity and having a shared and accepting society today. Maeve McLaughlin led the way in looking to see how we can do that, based on historical fact. The events of the past are important because they provide a formative context for where we are today and make an important contribution to heritage tourism. All Members touched on that. That has to be evident in the city of Derry, the north-west and across the North.

The debate shows, as we have heard from different representation across these Benches, the experiences and journeys that have brought us all to this place, albeit in different ways. That highlights that our history is complex and contested. It is also difficult and painful at times. However, it is also intertwined, shared and connected in many different ways. We all need to capitalise on that, irrespective of who we are and what we are about. Understanding and acknowledging our past remains an important issue as regards how we, in the Chamber, deliver our mandate and achieve the vision of a peaceful and strong community.

1.00 pm

A diverse range of significant events from the distant and more recent past are important to many people, not just in the Chamber but in the constituencies that we represent. The key issue for us all is not about whether we remember these events but how we remember them. We must do so in the context of a shared and accepting society and with sensitivity and a non-triumphalist manner; that is very important. Significant anniversaries provide us all with an opportunity to gain greater understanding of our shared past and how it has shaped both our Irish and British identities and the relationships that we have today.

For the record, I have already approved funding for the Ulster-Scots Academy ministerial advisory group to undertake a partnership project with the Ulster Historical Foundation to research the impact and contribution of town charters granted to some 400 towns across the island of Ireland, 14 of which are in the North. This project will have a particular emphasis on the Ulster-Scots dimension of culture and heritage. The academy will use the research, which should be available early next month, to develop a charters award touring programme in conjunction with the Ulster-Scots Agency and Foras na Gaeilge. This will create additional opportunities to look at the authentic background and provide resources to help councils, and sector and community bodies, to organise local commemoration events.

As has been outlined, Derry's charter was first awarded in 1604, with another charter awarded in 1613. I am aware of comments, histories and feelings around that period. Derry City Council will open a new exhibition about the plantation, its legacy and all that period, particularly around the charters, in the Guildhall in June. Also, the town of Limavady is marking its 400th anniversary — some are — and this charter was granted on 31 March. As has been mentioned by most Members, the walls around Derry city have left us with a tremendous legacy, not just in the physical form of a walkway but also in terms of how we look on our shared history. They also left an enduring imprint on the cultural identities of the people in Ireland and Britain.

The events in 2013 have to be a really beneficial time for people in Derry and the surrounding areas. As has been

mentioned, the All-Ireland Fleadh will come to the North for the first time in its history. Although the 2013 World Police and Fire Games will be hosted by Belfast, events outside Belfast have been developed to support tourism and employment opportunities for the towns and villages. As Pat Ramsey mentioned — he is not here, but I will come to it at a later stage — we have to look seriously at how the legacy of these opportunities will impact on us all.

Throughout this year, there will be a range of cultural events in Derry that will showcase the city like never before, as far as I am concerned. The City of Culture programme has something for everyone and will take the city to a new level in the world-known events that it will bring to the city of Derry. Most people, regardless of who they are or where they come from, will agree that the first quarter of the City of Culture has seen a host of major events and provided a great opportunity.

The Executive are committed to the success of the City of Culture project and realise its long-term benefits when it comes to changing perceptions of the city and improving the quality of life for local people. We, as an Executive, invested over £30 million in the City of Culture project to provide considerable support for infrastructure to ensure the success of this year as a cultural year. It is, more importantly, about laying the foundations to secure important legacy outputs.

The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure's (DCAL) £12.6 million contribution to the City of Culture is about making sure that the city's historical and cultural offerings build new and prosperous opportunities for us all. The programme includes events designed to help bring people together, but, more importantly, to look at the challenges that face us all around equality, good relations and social cohesion.

Without passing remarks about what each Member said, there is a challenge for the Member who is going to wind-up the debate. He, if you listen to George Robinson, may have been there 400 years ago. This is, and should be seen as, an opportunity not only for the city of Derry but for the north-west. The legacy of the City of Culture project and the ongoing development work around the One Plan has to be embedded. So, the people of Derry have to know what it looks like and feels like. They have to have a clear connection and expression of what the cultural programme has to offer. That is the job of Derry City Council. The people on it are the ones who have the licence and the money to make sure that this is brought forward.

I will be looking with keen interest at how this is rolled out and developed. You cannot have significant tourist opportunities and cultural events without some cultural imprint being left to address inequality, look at regeneration and make sure that, by 1 January 2014, it is done and dusted.

I also hope that the Member who makes the winding-up speech takes on board the view of all Members, which is that it is an important opportunity. I would like to see how this debate will be taken forward, not just through the Executive's contribution but through what the councils in Derry, Coleraine, Limavady and other areas are doing to make sure that there is a structured investment programme brought into their cities, towns and villages. I am very keen to see how that happens and to be part of it. That is what the City of Culture project should be

about: addressing the legacy of the past; and supporting the programmes and the calls for further investment. The £30 million is a significant amount of money, but as far as I am concerned, it is only a start to addressing decades of inequalities for the north-west region.

We have a wonderful opportunity, through the City of Culture project and the events around it, to make sure that we leave a longer lasting and better legacy. It is really important that we use these opportunities. Indeed, I am assuming that the broad thrust of the motion is about trying to capitalise on those opportunities, to look at different events, to make sure that there are employment opportunities for local people and to make sure that the project is built into an ongoing tourist package. To that end, I am happy to support the motion. I thank everybody for their contributions thus far. I suppose the less said about Jim Allister the better.

Mr Campbell: Given the number of Members who have spoken and given the history of the city of Londonderry and the number of Apprentice Boys there were, I note that I am the thirteenth Member to speak in this debate. There you go. It could not have been planned better.

Mr Wilson: Close the doors.

Mr Campbell: We will shut the gate on the way out.

I will give a rundown on the origins of the debate. I was approached some considerable time ago and asked to table a motion on this subject. In the process of doing so, I was approached by a Limavady resident, who suggested that it might be an idea to add Limavady to the motion. Of course, Mr McClarty, who is unfortunately not with us — we wish him all the best — submitted an amendment. We are more than content to include that. If Strabane, Belfast or anywhere else had made a bid, we would have been happy to include them.

I will go through each contribution briefly. Mr Robinson, in proposing the motion, gave a very wide-ranging and comprehensive background to the historic origins of the north-west. He did that exceptionally well. I want to concentrate on the positives because the significant majority, by far, of contributions were positive. Unfortunately, that was not entirely the case. Some contributions seemed to indicate or infer that, for some reason, this motion inferred that the history of the city of Londonderry in the north-west began 400 years ago, when, in fact, there is no such reference, insinuation or inference at all. As Mr Allister pointed out, it is just that the significance of the event 400 years ago has to be marked in some way.

Mr Ó hOisín wondered why the motion had not been done earlier. As I said, I tabled it a considerable number of weeks ago, and it is just making its way to the Floor now. However, if anyone is complaining about motions such as this not being done early, we can all reassure them that they are quite at liberty to do likewise. There is nothing to prevent anyone tabling a motion in the context of the north-west or anywhere else. He and Mr Robinson referred to the Broughter hoard. That is a significant event, and, hopefully, the issue with that will be rectified in the coming months.

Pat Ramsey talked about the Flight of the Earls and the O'Cahans and gave a more comprehensive background. For the sake of time, I will not go into that. He also began

a process of talking about the UK City of Culture and the significance of the events there, and a number of other Members followed on from that. Indeed, the Minister mentioned that on a number of occasions.

On two or three occasions, Ross Hussey threatened to sing, but he did not carry out his threat. On some occasions, we have cause to be grateful. I say that not having heard him sing; maybe I will have cause to regret saying that. Significantly, he said that, in 2011, the city walls in Londonderry saw 278,000 visitors, which was a significant increase on the year before. My understanding is that there was a further increase again last year.

This is not just a parochial motion. It is to ensure that if visitors and tourists come to the Republic — they inevitably fly into Dublin — hopefully they make their way to this country. If they come to Belfast, hopefully they will get out beyond the confines of Belfast and to the likes of the Giant's Causeway, the city walls and all around the north-west.

Trevor Lunn said that the 400th anniversaries had passed him by to some extent. Hopefully, the debate will have addressed that and will ensure that they do not pass him by. Of course, we will welcome him up to some of the commemorations, if he chooses to come. He also referred to New Zealand's first Ulster-born Prime Minister, Mr Ballance. In the north-west, we celebrate the second Prime Minister, who was one of the longest-serving in New Zealand, Ferguson Massey.

Adrian McQuillan talked, as he would, about the many benefits of Coleraine and the Garvagh area and villages around the north-west.

As I said, the vast bulk of contributions were positive, and then Maeve McLaughlin spoke. Unfortunately, she talked about the cost of colonisation and sectarian headcounts. I will not go down the route of highlighting — Mr Allister did — sectarian headcounts in the past vis-à-vis sectarian headcounts in the present and the sectarian attacks that have gone on for many years, particularly to people in the Fountain and elsewhere. Those issues are better left to another debate. She also alluded to the fact that many of the city of London's livery companies were profit-driven. Whatever about the methodology and the modus operandi of the London companies, the facts are that, when they came, they made a significant beneficial difference to the people of the north-west.

1.15 pm

Raymond McCartney was another one who tried to infer from the motion that 1613 was the start of history in the north-west, and, of, course, there is no reference whatsoever to that in the motion. He also referred to the fact that the plantation is not mentioned, and neither were 146,000 other things mentioned. The motion is as it is worded.

Colum Eastwood went into some detail about the UK City of Culture bid. We can understand that, given that he was mayor at some time during the bid. He also talked about the world heritage site, which set a very positive tone for the rest of his contribution. How we take it forward is a matter for another time, and I am sure that we will come to that.

John Dallat used his speech to name-drop continually from a series of historical notes, some of which were beneficial

and others of which we will leave for another day. He referred to Mount Sandel as the first known habitation on the island. He also talked about the confusion between Lundy and Walker. Mr Dallat may have some confusion, but we have none.

Jim Allister talked about the origins of the development of Londonderry, and he referred, quite pointedly, to the fact that DCAL itself had not marked the 1613 significance. That is a very appropriate point.

The Minister, in responding, adopted a positive note, and I am hopeful that that will be the case not only for the remainder of the UK City of Culture year — mentions of the fact that it is a UK City of Culture year would be a start — but for the continuation of the development of the positive job creation that can flow from the tourism potential in the north-west. The tourism potential has taken off, to some degree, and I referred to the increase in tourist numbers at the city walls. We are scraping only the surface of tourism potential and of people coming to Northern Ireland and seeing the beauty of the north coast and the north-west. Hopefully, the mostly positive tone in the debate will be carried forward, and we will be able to see significant benefits flowing from the 400th anniversary of the region of the north-west and the city that hereinafter for ever shall be called Londonderry.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly recognises the significant historical legacy that the last 400 years have given to Northern Ireland and in particular to Londonderry and the north-west region, with the 400th anniversary of the building of the city walls and the granting of charters in 1613 for the city of Londonderry and the town of Limavady; and hopes that there will be significantly increased tourism and additional employment opportunities resulting from a spectacular and momentous year.

Constitutional Convention and Marriage Equality

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer will have 10 minutes 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 to propose the amendment and five minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

A valid petition of concern was presented on Friday 26 April in relation to the motion. Therefore, I remind Members that the vote on the motion will be on a cross-community basis, while the vote on the amendment will require only a simple majority.

Ms McGahan: I beg to move

That this Assembly recognises the importance of the constitutional convention; notes the participation of parties from the Assembly; welcomes the 79% majority vote at the constitutional convention in favour of marriage equality; and calls on the Executive to bring forward the necessary legislation to allow for same-sex marriage.

Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Sinn Féin is a party that is committed to the equality agenda, and we believe that all citizens, regardless of race, religion or sexuality, should be treated as equals in the eyes of the law. I recognise and respect that there are deeply held religious, cultural and personal views, and we respect and appreciate the views of each individual on this very important issue.

As a party, Sinn Féin advocates the right to social, economic, gender and cultural equality. That encompasses equality for all, irrespective of race, age, marital or family status, sexual orientation, physical or mental capacities, ethnicity, social origin, political or religious affiliations or membership of the Travelling community.

The rights of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community and human rights are not separate. They are one and the same. Barriers are breaking down step by step, but there is more to be done, that is for sure. You cannot support equality and be a racist. You cannot support equality and perpetuate sexual discrimination. You cannot support equality and be homophobic.

MLAs, regardless of religious belief, represent every section of our community, including our LGBT members. The motion is about ensuring marriage equality for everyone, regardless —

Mr Speaker: Order. I am sorry for interrupting the Member, but mobile phones are being operated in the Chamber. That is seriously affecting the audio feed in the Chamber. I ask Members please to check their mobile phones.

Ms McGahan: The motion is about ensuring marriage equality for everyone, regardless of their sexual orientation. In a House of Commons debate on marriage equality, Maria Miller, the British Equalities Minister said:

"I still believe in marriage. It's part of the bedrock of our society. The state should not stop two people from

making the commitment to be married unless there's a good reason. I don't believe being gay is one of them."

She went on to say, regarding the Olympics and Paralympics:

"One undeniable legacy of the Games, is that it made us think about disability differently. Thinking about what individuals can do, not what they can't. Treating each other with respect. As a society we have to make sure that gender, sexuality, ethnicity and disability are no barrier to full and equal participation."

Twelve countries, including Spain, Canada, the Netherlands, Argentina and, most recently, France, have extended marriage rights, as have nine US states. Britain, where the same-sex marriage Bill has passed, will follow suit.

The constitutional convention met in Dublin a couple of weeks ago and voted in favour of extending marriage rights to same-sex couples. Seventy-nine per cent of its members voted to recommend that the constitution be amended to allow for same-sex marriage, and the convention's recommendations will now be sent to the Government. The convention is a new venture in participative democracy in Ireland, tasked with considering certain aspects of the constitution to ensure that it is fully equipped for the 21st century and making recommendations to the Oireachtas on future amendments to be put to the people in referendums. The convention is a decision-making forum of 100 people, made up of 66 citizens, 33 politicians North and South, and an independent chair.

Every citizen should enjoy the same rights and entitlements under state law, and that includes those —

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Ms McGahan: Sorry, no. I am not giving way at all, thank you.

What Churches do is a matter for Churches, but the state needs to treat everyone with equality. All family forms should be given equal respect and value in law. The traditional family form based on marriage should not be given higher status in law or practice than any other family form. Law and social policy should recognise the diversity of family life in Ireland. All families, including unmarried families, have the same rights to respect, care, support, protection and recognition.

There are no official statistics on the gay, lesbian and bisexual population in the North. Britain estimated that 5% to 7% of the adult population identified as being gay, lesbian or bisexual. On the back of that information, the thematic report published by the Policing Board, 'Policing with and for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Individuals', suggested that, given that the North's population was 1.8 million in 2002, and while not making an assumption, there could be approximately between 90,000 and 125,000 lesbian, gay and bisexual people in the North.

The motion links to the report 'Policing a Shared Future Strategy', which outlines the need to ensure that everything that we do is underpinned by fairness and respect towards all members of our community. The PSNI has made a very clear commitment to ensuring equality in the delivery of its service to all lesbian, gay, bisexual

and transgender people. It is important that our legal infrastructure be consistent, and in the past several years, great strides have been made in securing equality for the LGBT community.

The Criminal Justice Order makes provision for sentences to be increased where offences for which a person is convicted were aggravated by hostility based on grounds of race, religion, sexual orientation or disability. The judicial system recognises that sexual orientation discrimination is incompatible with national and international human rights standards. The Equality Act's sex discrimination regulations state that it is unlawful for service providers to discriminate against a person because of his or her sexual orientation in the provision of services and public functions. From that evidence and given the failure to publish the sexual orientation strategy, could it be suggested that we are not complementing existing law and policy?

Surveys have shown that negative perceptions about lesbian, gay and bisexual people are getting progressively worse. A report on mental health has shown that one quarter of young gay or bisexual men in the North of Ireland have attempted suicide, and many people from the LGBT community have been forced to suppress who they are to protect themselves.

There is no doubt that lesbian, gay and bisexual people are valued in society and are seen as participating members of society. However, there remains prejudice and barriers to their accessing equality of opportunities. By supporting the motion, the Assembly can give a strong message that prejudice, discrimination and intolerance must be rejected. Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that:

"Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status."

Article 16 states that:

"Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution."

Finally, no matter who we are, what we look like or where we come from, we are entitled to equality and human rights. In a speech on the LGBT community, Hillary Clinton said that:

"progress comes from being willing to walk a mile in someone else's shoes."

She said:

"We need to ask ourselves, 'How would it feel if it were a crime to love the person I love? How would it feel to be discriminated against for something about myself that I cannot change?'"

Mr Ford: I beg to move the following amendment: Leave out all after "equality;" and insert

"states its support for the extension of civil marriage provisions in Northern Ireland to same-sex couples, provided that robust legislative measures permit faith

groups to define, articulate and practise religious marriage as they determine; and calls for respectful dialogue on this issue between all members of society."

I recognise that the Assembly needs to address equal marriage. It is a matter of great importance to many in our community and to the many citizens who have a legitimate expectation that they will be treated equally by the state. I acknowledge that it is an issue of huge sensitivity and huge significance for a number of religious denominations and other faith groups, while some faith groups are willing to solemnise same-sex marriages.

However, I am concerned at the manner in which the matter has been brought back to the Assembly. Although over the past six months there have been significant changes in a number of other places — for example, the changes to legislation in the US state of Rhode Island and, most recently, in France — little has essentially changed in our political system in Northern Ireland. We know that our leading Churches have expressed their concerns. I do not necessarily agree with them, but it is nonetheless a reality that we as legislators have to come to terms with. Furthermore, given the nature of our political system, the reality is that cross-community support will have to be found for any legislative progress to be made.

The DUP tabled a petition of concern for the motion today. The irony that those who were most scathing about the concept of a petition of concern when the Assembly recently discussed termination of pregnancy are those who have now put down a petition of concern on same-sex marriage should surely not be lost on any of us. However, even if a petition of concern had not been tabled, any legislation would still have to get through the Executive.

Therefore, there are two main reasons for the Alliance Party's amendment. The first is that we believe that the Sinn Féin motion is deficient and has not clearly balanced the support for same-sex civil marriage with an acknowledgement of religious freedom and the rights of faith groups. As far as we are concerned, that is an essential prerequisite for the Alliance Party's endorsement of same-sex marriage. I believe that many others across society share that view.

1.30 pm

The second reason is that blindly and blandly calling for immediate legislation is futile and is grandstanding. It guarantees some heat, very little light, and absolutely no meeting of minds around the issue. There is an urgent need for constructive dialogue between elected representatives and all aspects of civic society in order to deal with the issue. The Alliance Party's amendment is the only one that is, potentially, capable of obtaining majority support in the Assembly and, indeed, in the wider community of Northern Ireland. By adopting the amendment, we would send a powerful message of our support for same-sex marriage, alongside a vital acknowledgement of the need for engagement and mutual respect.

I very much regret that what we have had from Sinn Féin members is a very simple aspect of what I have described as grandstanding. Their motion fails to restate the guarantees for Churches and faith groups which was part of the motion that they supported in October last. It

does nothing to promote dialogue on this issue or any other difficult social issue. That is why our amendment is necessary. It is very easy to engage in grandstanding in the Convention on the Constitution and in this place, but what we need is not point-scoring but measures to address the serious issues of discrimination and some of the practical issues around that.

It seems to me that what we have had today is an attempt by Sinn Féin to create the impression that it is concerned about lesbian and gay equality, but I fear that, even in some of what Ms McGahan said, it addresses that party's failure to deliver on things such as a sexual orientation strategy, a single equality Bill, or the issue of homophobic bullying, which has not been properly addressed by the Department of Education.

In contrast, last week, wearing my ministerial hat, I launched the report of a project on hate crime, which noted that homophobic hate crime is just as much an issue for this society as the more obvious sectarianism or racism that tends to make the headlines more often. That is positive work, done by my Prison Service and the Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NIACRO). I will shortly be able to announce the outcome of work being done by one of the staff diversity groups in the Department of Justice which deals with LGBT issues. My colleague, the Minister for Employment and Learning, has awarded a contract to the Rainbow Project to raise awareness of LGBT issues in the workplace generally. These are practical issues addressing the concerns of those who come from that particular section of our society. That is rather more profitable than simply grandstanding.

There are so many issues that need to be addressed as we look at the different attitudes to the question of same-sex marriages in this community. Indeed, in the context of this community, our two nation states are undergoing significant social change at this time. For many in this society, the majority view — the currently dominant Christian view that marriage is only between one man and one woman — is the only acceptable one for civil as well as for religious marriages. Some accept that view with modification, for example, around the remarriage in church of those who have had a civil divorce. Others in society take a diametrically opposed view and see no significance whatsoever in the position of the Churches.

As one who believes in the separation of Church and state, I draw a clear distinction between their roles. On the one hand, there are those services which are provided by the state to all citizens on an equal basis, regardless of the citizens' background, beliefs and values: on the other, I believe that Churches should have an absolute right to define, articulate and practice their own beliefs on religious marriage as they determine, without interference from the state.

There is clearly a difference between my position and that of many, including many in the House who share my personal values and faith. For them, a Christian should use his influence in the public sphere to put forward Christian values, not only by example but also in legislation. That is not my position. I have never felt that it is my duty to impose my values on other members of society. If I lived in a majority Islamic state, I would oppose the introduction of sharia law on non-Muslims whether Christian or secular.

By the same token, we need to recognise that we live in a diverse society that is becoming increasingly diverse. The majority of our citizens no longer live as Christians in any meaningful sense. There may be a loose cultural affinity with Christian tradition, but there are a few who live their lives as though bound by the Westminster confession of faith, the thirty-nine articles of religion or Catholic canon law. The law of the state, which is influenced by but not beholden to our Christian heritage, is what governs all of us, regardless of background, belief, gender, race, nationality, religion or sexual orientation. There are clear issues around the rights of Churches and faith groups which are not addressed by the motion.

There is clear evidence that the European Court will uphold the rights of Churches to define, articulate and practice their beliefs, and it does a disservice to the views of many in this society for a motion to be brought forward that does not acknowledge that, especially when protection for those rights was included in the motion before us last October.

We all know that today's motion is pointless, whether or not there was a petition of concern. The Executive are not going to legislate in this term for equal marriage, even if the House passed the motion. That is why our amendment specifically calls for respectful debate and dialogue on the issue, which is a view echoed in the letter that we have all received from Dr Norman Hamilton on behalf of the Presbyterian Church. Within the Alliance Party, we have had that respectful dialogue over recent months. It has not been easy, for there are significant differences even between those who agree on much else on the needs of this society. However, it is absolutely clear that, on issues such as this that touch people very deeply, there is a vital need for such dialogue — for listening as well as speaking — if we are to resolve our current differences.

I urge Members to pass the amendment and engage in respectful and serious dialogue about this difficult issue to recognise the rights of a minority in our society and to recognise the rights of those who differ with them to see what we can do to establish a way forward. However, even if the amendment is not passed, the Alliance Party will certainly seek to continue that engagement, because only through respectful dialogue can we increase the understanding and tolerance that this society so badly needs.

Mr Hamilton: I speak on behalf of my party, perhaps unsurprisingly, to oppose the motion. I do that not because we oppose anybody and not because we oppose how anyone chooses to live their life, but because we support something. We support the institution of marriage and the traditional, long-standing, centuries-old definition of marriage.

The premise of the motion that the activities of or a vote in the Irish constitutional convention should have any bearing on us in the Assembly is, quite frankly, ludicrous. It is as ludicrous as it is to hear a Sinn Féin Member use the words of a British Minister to try to make her case. Why should those of us in Northern Ireland who oppose the redefinition of marriage care what the Irish constitutional convention says on the matter? What is agreed in the Irish Republic is of no concern to us here in Northern Ireland, any more than what we agree here in the Northern Ireland Assembly should be of any concern to them. What the Irish decide to do on this issue is a matter for them. We

decide what happens in Northern Ireland. Members of this House can join and take seats in the Irish constitutional convention if they want, and they can vote on this, that and the other, but they cannot expect those votes to have any bearing on what happens in this place.

We also oppose the Alliance amendment, which proposes to redefine marriage and does nothing to offer protection to Churches. The amendment is more about patching over the well-publicised internal differences in the Alliance Party than uniting this House. Perhaps this time, unlike the previous occasion when this issue was debated in October last year, Members from the Alliance Party who are physically present in the Building will, this time, be able to make it to the Lobbies and vote. Perhaps they did not hear the Division Bells last time; perhaps they thought that the journey from their offices to the Lobbies was just a little too taxing for them that day. We wait with interest to see how they vote today.

Supporters of redefining marriage often argue that it is an issue of equality. Indeed, we heard the proposer of the motion use that very argument. However, let me lay out the facts, which are pesky things that do not tend to change. Article 16 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as upheld by the UN Human Rights Committee, defends the traditional view of marriage. In European law, article 12 of the European Convention on Human Rights also upholds that definition, and the European Court of Human Rights has deemed the definition of marriage not a matter of equality but for individual state law.

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission — not an organisation that those of us on this side of the House are prone to quote and agree with — has highlighted the international treaties that protect the right to marry, but concedes that:

"The restriction of marriage to opposite-sex couples does not violate the international standards and this is clear from both the International treaties and the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights and the United Nations Human Rights Committee."

So therefore it is clear — people may not like it, but it is clear —

Mr McDevitt: Will the Member give way?

Mr Hamilton: No. It is clear that the UN, Europe and our own Human Rights Commission all agree that it is not an issue of equality. I am in no doubt that there will be some — and, no doubt, there will be some in this House — who will seek to distort the views of my party and the opposition of ordinary folk in Northern Ireland to the redefinition of marriage. I was always taught that tolerance was when you disagreed with somebody, but you respected their right to have a different position to you. Today, unfortunately, it would seem that, for some, when you fail to fall in line with their thinking, you are the intolerant one.

I have heard opponents of redefining marriage being portrayed as bigots, I have heard them being painted as narrow-minded, and I have heard them being pigeonholed as not part of the mainstream. They are nothing of the sort: they are good, ordinary people who care deeply about the society in which they live. They are from every walk of life. They are members of the Presbyterian Church, they are members of the Catholic Church, and they are members of no Church at all.

Mr Givan: Will the Member give way?

Mr Hamilton: Yes, I will.

Mr Givan: Will the Member agree that previously this place debated the Civic Forum, and it would be incumbent on those members to listen to the civic voices coming from our Churches on this issue?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an added minute.

Mr Hamilton: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I thank the Member for his intervention. He is right. These are people who are not some tiny minority. On this issue, they are the mainstream. I applaud the likes of the Catholic Church, the Presbyterian Church and others for coming out in defence, clearly and unequivocally, of the traditional definition of marriage. I commend the bravery of Father Owen Gorman for articulating his observation that his parishioners are starting to look elsewhere when it comes to politics and people who represent their views.

The Members opposite can choose to ignore the deeply held views of people who have voted for their parties for ever. They can even snub their noses and defy the leadership of the Churches that, in many cases, they have been lifelong members of and, indeed, senior members of, but we in the DUP will continue to oppose any redefinition of marriage, and unashamedly so. We oppose the motion.

Mr Eastwood: I am glad to have the opportunity to speak in this debate. I implore Members to realise that there is not one view on this. There are a number of views held right across the Chamber. In fact, I am not too big to recognise that there are a number of views held even within my own party, and I think that is because we are reflective of society. Even though I am clearly very much in support of equal marriage, I have never once run down anyone's opposing view to my own. I think that it is important that people are allowed to hold a view, whatever that view is, and that everybody else can treat those people with respect and can have a discussion and not a shouting match across the Chamber.

I praise Mr Ford for his speech, which was a very good speech, and for the stand that he has taken. It is not easy when there is quite a bit of pressure coming from different sections of our society, including our Churches, and they are absolutely entitled to hold that view. After much discussion and debate, the SDLP came to an overwhelming view at our party conference in November. The motion that was passed at our conference was that we applaud the party's values and rights-based tradition, reaffirm its 1992 conference motion, which calls for, in the context of gay rights, equal civil and legal rights for all citizens and calls for that to be extended to civil marriage, acknowledges the principle of separation of church and state and respects the rights of any faith or religious organisation and its membership to determine their definition of marriage.

I am not used to doing this, but I want to applaud again the Alliance Party's amendment. It recognises that churches should of course be protected in terms of their own beliefs. No Church should be forced to do anything against its beliefs. As we stand in support of gay people and their right to be married, we also stand in support of Churches and their right to carry out or not carry out gay marriages if they so wish.

I am a great believer in marriage. In fact, I am getting married in December if things go the way that I hope they are going to go and I do not get thrown out of the house before that.

My view is that marriage is an institution that we can all value. When two people love each other and are prepared to commit and share their lives, that should be supported, and, when two people of the same sex love each other and want to commit their lives together, that should be supported as well. My view on gay marriage is not that it threatens the institution of marriage. In fact, it strengthens and extends it to those who want to be married. That is not a position that we should be afraid of but one that we should support. I am very glad that the constitutional convention has again come to that position.

1.45 pm

Mr Hamilton said that it does not matter what the constitutional convention says. As Irish nationalists, we represent almost half the population of Northern Ireland, and we do care what the constitutional convention says. Our view on the constitutional convention is that it is an opportunity for the Irish nation to discuss the future of our country. It is important that people respect that. I do not disrespect any unionist's idea of how their country should be governed, but people need to respect that that is our viewpoint, and we are concerned —

Mr Agnew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Eastwood: No, thank you. I want to get through this. We are concerned about what the constitutional convention says, and I am glad that the constitutional convention has come to a view on this. It is a difficult view to come to. Ireland has moved very far in the past number of years. That is a brave decision for people to come to, and the overwhelming support at the constitutional convention was telling. That says to me that Ireland has moved significantly from where it was. I give way to the Member now.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Member for giving way. As somebody who took part in the Irish constitutional convention, I think the important thing is the importance of what the citizens said. As was pointed out, 66 of the 100 members are citizens. Even though the Catholic Church said that it was against same-sex marriage and Ireland is deemed to be a Catholic country, the citizens said that they wanted to move forward on the issue. Does the Member have any reason to believe that the citizens of Northern Ireland would take a different approach in response to some of the declarations from the Churches?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an added minute.

Mr Eastwood: Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I thank the Member for the intervention. I do not pretend to know what the citizens of Northern Ireland believe, but I do know that a significant number of people support this. There is also a significant number of people who are against it and will take advice from their Church. That is their prerogative; that is a matter for them.

We need to be careful in our language, because we need to send out a message to the gay people in our community, to those who may be struggling and may not have admitted to their friends and relatives that they are gay and those who have been bullied over the years. Many people have

committed suicide as a result of not being able to come out —

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

Mr Eastwood: Thank you, Mr Speaker. We just need to ensure that we treat each other respectfully in this debate and those out there closely watching the debate. I am happy, on behalf of the SDLP, to support the motion and the amendment.

Mr Kennedy: I oppose the motion and the amendment. It is, I understand, just six months and a couple of days since the House rejected a very similar motion on the issue. I believe that those who tabled the motion are guilty of engaging in a cynical political exercise that has no benefit for any section of our community, not least the LGBT community, from which, presumably, Sinn Féin is seeking to garner support.

I choose to speak not as a Minister nor, indeed, on behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party. The House will know that my party believes that issues of this nature are matters of personal conscience. Therefore, although I was called as an Ulster Unionist, I will speak in a personal capacity.

It is a matter of regret that Members of all political parties are not allowed the liberty to speak freely to their conscience on this issue. It seems to me that the refusal by Sinn Féin in particular to allow its Members to express their individual views strikes at the very heart of its desire to effectively control its political representatives and party members in a way that is wholly distasteful and, frankly, undemocratic. There is clearly no room for individualism in Sinn Féin.

In the previous debate on the issue, I made clear my opposition to any change in the current legislation to allow same-sex marriage. That remains my position. It is a position based on my religious beliefs; it is a position that, I believe, is consistent with the teaching of my church — the Presbyterian Church — and, indeed, with the publicly expressed views of other churches, including the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of Ireland; and, finally, it is a position that is fundamentally consistent with the teaching of Holy Scripture. The last reason is, clearly, the most important, given that the teaching of any Church can be subject to error, but the faithful teaching of scripture cannot.

I ask the Members who support the motion to consider this point: the law of the land is something that it is necessary for all of us to obey; indeed, as public representatives, we have an obligation to do so. I know, of course, that some in the House are recent converts to that notion. Nevertheless, it is an important principle for all of us to adhere to. I contrast that with obeying the teaching of the Church — not a Church, the Church — which is an entirely voluntary decision based on individual free will. The historic separation, therefore, of Church and state becomes of extreme importance. The Church should never be the slave of the state, and, consequently, the state has no right to dictate the terms of religious marriage to the Church. The state has created the mechanisms under which same-sex civil partnerships can be enacted with protections under the law, in most cases, equivalent to the rights enjoyed by married heterosexual couples. In my view, however, it is neither sensible nor desirable to allow the state to interfere in the religious institution of marriage simply for political convenience. Redefining marriage

would have far-reaching consequences for our entire society.

Mr McDevitt: I thank Mr Kennedy for giving way. He made an observation about the state interfering in religious affairs. The heart of this debate is that no one has ever suggested that. In fact, to be fair to the Alliance amendment, it reminds us that the very purpose of this is to deal with the question of civil marriage and to continue to secure and guarantee Churches their independence and freedom to define marriage as they see fit.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an added minute.

Mr Kennedy: As a Presbyterian, I am obliged to accept light from any quarter, but, having listened carefully to the points raised by the Member, I am not sure whether I feel any more enlightened.

In holding my view, I do not believe that I should be regarded as homophobic. Indeed, any such suggestion would offend and abhor me. I do not believe that any Member has any grounds to make any such allegation against me. My public record shows and my personal behaviour confirms my tolerance to those who differ from me politically, culturally, religiously and on gender issues. However, while I remain tolerant of the views and lifestyles of others, the same cannot always be said of those who want to promote change of this nature to Christians whose personal convictions put them at odds on an issue such as same-sex marriage.

I listened carefully to Mr Ford. This is where I differ. The role of a public representative is a challenging one. All of us face compromises that, perhaps, we would never naturally seek, and there is, of course, the reconciliation of obnoxious opposites, which we all have to contemplate on a regular basis. As a Christian involved in politics, I often recall the words of Cardinal Wolsey — confidant of Henry VIII — who, just before his death, hastened by his ungrateful royal friend said, "I would that I had served my God as I have served my king."

For the reasons that I have set out — personal and deeply held convictions that I cannot and will not set aside — I remain opposed to the proposal. In the words of Martin Luther, the great Protestant reformer, I say this to the House:

"Here I stand. I can do no other."

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thought that Danny Kennedy was going to quote Martin Luther King, but it turned out to be Martin Luther.

I disagree with David Ford on one point. He said that little had changed by way of our political system since the last debate. I think that the context has changed and there is a rationale for tabling the motion at this time. I disagree with Simon Hamilton's comment that the constitutional convention has no relevance. In his contribution —

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr McElduff: No. I will just carry on until the very end — uninterrupted, if I can manage it.

I disagree with Simon on that point because he appears to be in denial about important North/South elements not only of the Good Friday Agreement but of the St Andrews Agreement. It has been asked, "Who is the mainstream in all of this?". I have lobbying letters here from trade unions

and the Irish Council for Civil Liberties. We can all argue about who the mainstream is in the debate.

I want to affirm the importance of the constitutional convention and note the participation of parties from the Assembly. Our party voted in favour of establishing the convention in a Dáil vote in July 2012, even though we had submitted amendments aimed at widening the scope of the convention. We were, however, successful in ensuring that the constitutional reform process demonstrated appropriate regard to both the Good Friday Agreement and the St Andrews Agreement. They were important changes.

As Steven Agnew said, the convention is predominantly a citizen-based assembly with an overall membership of 100, 66 of whom are citizens or residents. Thirty-three are elected representatives, including one from each of the parties elected to this Northern Assembly who are willing to participate, and there is an independent chair, Tom Arnold, who has the casting vote. I commend those parties for participating and encourage unionist parties to participate as well. Of course, we are dealing with the outdated constitution from 1937, which was written for a very different time. We seek an all-Ireland constitution, but, in the meantime, we engage constructively with the constitutional convention.

The constitutional convention sat earlier in April to deal with marriage equality. Preceding sittings dealt with the representation of women, the status of women, the presidential term and the voting age. Future sittings will look at electoral reform, presidential voting rights and religious beliefs.

I now turn to the specifics of the topic of marriage equality, which was debated at the April sitting and is under discussion here today. I welcome the 79% majority vote at the convention in favour of marriage equality and of removing any possibility of constitutional discrimination against LGBT citizens by recognising explicitly the right of those citizens to marriage equality. I attended and participated in the Saturday session of the two-day sitting and listened to an evidence-based debate. I listened to experts from all sides in a respectful way, free from recrimination or rancour. I welcome the fact that there has been an absence of recrimination and rancour in the Assembly debate today, which has not always been the case. That is very welcome.

It is worth noting that there was overwhelming support for change and ending this discrimination in law. Among those who gave evidence that day were Clare O'Connell and Conor Prendergast. They both talked about how they had been reared by same-sex couples. Those two young people were very rounded and articulate individuals. One of them said, "We are a family like any other. We love and support one another. Unlike other families, we do not have the legal protection of being a fully recognised family". He made the point that he has a legal relationship with one of his parents and not with the other, who, in the eyes of the law, is a stranger to him.

2.00 pm

Mr Kinahan: The motion, its timing, its content and all that accompanies it in the lobbying and petty politics encapsulate so much that is wrong with the Assembly, which often stops this gem of a country of ours being as great as it should be in the world. However, I am pleased

about the mood that the debate has been played out in so far. That is the way in which it should continue.

I do not believe that the motion is really about achieving marriage rights for the gay community. I suspect that it is more about the two major parties playing a little bit of politics purely to gain votes. Mr Speaker, I hope that you will ensure that the Business Committee does not bring such repeat motions to the Assembly and that, in future, we will concentrate on business that help us on other subjects such as jobs, education and health. Those who tabled the motion have unashamedly based it on an Irish constitutional matter so that it creates conflict. This does not achieve anything for Northern Ireland, and it therefore fails before we even reach a discussion about the gay community.

The motion fails to deal with the issue of faith, which is so essential to so many. It is treated here almost as though it does not matter. In many ways, that is typical of Sinn Féin as a quasi-communist party. The last motion promised to legislate to protect and respect an individual's faith, and, in so doing, it was possible for me to vote for it. I believe that this motion was allowed to reach the Floor because some saw it as a chance to continue their pursuit of votes rather than to govern Northern Ireland more effectively. They saw a possible vote-winning campaign.

I received some dozen letters and 40 e-mails on this, and my office has received 10 or so phone calls. All except one opposed the motion. What amused me was that one of the people who was so keen to make me vote the other way and who said that they would never vote for me again turned out to be a leading member of the DUP.

The Ulster Unionist Party has not put a Whip on the motion. We vote on such motions in line with our conscience, as everyone here should. We are able to think for ourselves. We are not Lobby fodder, and we do not hide behind a Whip. This is a chance for me to speak from the heart, and that is what a free vote provides. This subject raises a very serious conflict that will not go away, but today's motion ignores how we in the Assembly can find a solution. The old "Ulster says no" or "Never, never, never" attitude will not help to resolve this conflict, and it certainly did not in the past. The conflict of faith versus freedom is upon us now. Instead of opposition and more conflict, we need leadership to find a resolution to this matter.

Lord Morrow: Will the Member give way?

Mr Kinahan: No, I will carry on. Thank you.

We have to recognise and protect everyone's right to a faith and respect all faiths. Many people see today's motion as an attack on their beliefs. For many, the enforcement or threat of enforcement under section 75 is one step too far, just as frequent repetitions of this debate are unnecessary and of no help. In the previous debate, there was a chance to recognise that, but too many in the Chamber and in the press missed it.

If you read the census, you will see that we have 60 forms of Christianity in Northern Ireland. No one should see their faith as more important than that of another or think that it allows them to abuse or place limits on the freedom of others. After the previous debate, the first person to congratulate me was a senior member of the Church.

Northern Ireland needs leadership. Everyone here is elected to represent everyone, and, if you are not willing to

do that, you should not be here. Leadership is also needed from the Churches and the gay community. Legislation is coming from Europe and possibly the UK, but all that we are doing in here is bickering. Legislation often makes things worse and lawyers richer.

The Ulster Unionist Party supports the rights of all in society to equality of opportunity and freedom from fear and discrimination.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is almost gone.

Mr Kinahan: Thank you very much.

When people seek to promote their beliefs above those of anyone else, we have conflict. As someone said to me the other day, Christianity is about practising the goodness within us.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is gone.

Mr Kinahan: I oppose the motion and the amendment.

Mr Beggs: I declare an interest as a committee member of Raloo Presbyterian Church and an officer of the Boys' Brigade. So, my personal beliefs influence my views on the subject.

I question the purpose of the motion today. Why is it in the Order Paper? Is it directed at changing people's viewpoints and perhaps having a different outcome, or is the party grandstanding? Who expects a different outcome today? If no one does, why are false expectations and emotions being raised?

I believe that Sinn Féin is grandstanding on the issue. If it were really serious, rather than grandstand continually, it should first have lots of discussions and have some sense that change has occurred. I heard indications that the motion may even come back in another six months. Guess what? If that is the case, I suspect that you will get the same result.

Ms Ruane: Will the Member give way?

Mr Beggs: I will give way in a moment.

The precise wording of the motion asks that the Assembly:

"recognises the importance of the constitutional convention".

I am sorry, but I thought to myself, "What constitutional convention?". I did not know that there was a constitutional convention occurring. I am a British citizen. Even if I happened to agree with everything else that was said, I would have voted against the motion because of the mere inclusion of that phrase. So, you are being deliberately provocative, because you know that you are not going to change anyone's mind. In fact, you might even lose a few votes from those that you may have garnered before. That is irresponsible politics in the extreme.

I notice that civil partners have the same rights and responsibilities as married couples in many areas, including tax, social security, inheritance and workplace benefits. However, there are differences. There are some 3,000 references to marriage in UK legislation, so I would ask anyone wishing to change that interpretation to do so with great care because of the significant changes that will result. The United Kingdom has respected differences and has allowed civil partnerships for those who choose that as a lifestyle, but it is also important in any situation

to understand the inequalities that could be created should this motion go through and should the definition of marriage be changed in Northern Ireland.

I noticed in particular a briefing from Aidan O'Neill QC, who has advised the Coalition for Marriage. He highlighted one instance where a Church of England minister, who is also the chaplain at his National Health Service hospital, was conducting a wedding service in his parish church —

Lord Morrow: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he agree that there is only one party in the House today that had this redefinition of marriage in its manifesto? Not one other party had that in its manifesto. I am sure that he therefore agrees that the Assembly should debate the things that people are concerned about and not trivial things, such as trying to redefine marriage, which the vast majority of the citizens of Northern Ireland are totally opposed to.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Beggs: I could do with two minutes after that intervention. I will be careful in future. If you are making such a fundamental change to our rules and laws in Northern Ireland, it should be in party manifestos before they adopt such a fundamental change. I ask that those who wish for this to happen put it in their manifesto and see what the people think about it.

I was saying that a Church of England minister who is also a chaplain at his local health service hospital preached while conducting a wedding service in his parish church that marriage is only for one man and one woman. His local health service boss found out, and he was later disciplined for breaching the National Health Service diversity policy.

This is not too far away; it could easily have similar results. What may be perceived as one person's inequality could very easily come back as another person's inequality. I am very strong in my beliefs about civil and religious rights for everybody — not just me and my community, but for everybody. That ought to be respected by everyone. I would not wish to bring in any changes that would inhibit many members of our society from freely expressing their viewpoint because of the subsequent implications in their workplace. That would be a fundamental change that would cause great inequality in this society. There are potential implications for our schools and schoolteachers. The changes are so great and carry —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time has almost gone.

Mr Beggs: — such a great risk that we should not go there. I support the existing definition of marriage. I ask everyone to continue to back marriage as being between a man and a woman.

Mr Copeland: Mr Speaker, you took me somewhat by surprise. I was trying to work out what I was going to say. I have been struggling with this, because I became aware of a statement by Thomas Jefferson that I will paraphrase: whenever someone casts his eye on public office, a rottenness begins in his conduct.

Much as it will come as a surprise to the Alliance Party, I support its amendment. I have listened carefully to what my Democratic Unionist colleagues, my own party and others have said. I did some research some weeks ago. In a part of my constituency that is not noted for reasonable

views, I asked a gentleman in a football shirt for his view on equal marriage. He confided to me that, many years ago, he had married a woman and that he would not recommend it to anybody.

The truth is that a generation of young people — I see them every day in my office — find themselves feeling on the margins, excluded and prejudiced against because of their treatment by society. I have a cousin in Canada whose father was a lance sergeant in the Irish Guards at the age of 17 who was not given to readily accepting the fact that his son was gay. My cousin is a fine individual and a successful citizen, but the relationship between him and his father was broken because of his sexuality.

I stand here with sets of voices in my ears. In one ear are those of the honest, good, convinced, Christian people who believe that their position and interpretation is fundamentally right. In the other is my knowledge of what being gay means in this society. As Roy Beggs said, the debate in here will amount to nothing, because no legislation will come forward. If that reflects the views of the majority of the people in this place, so be it. However, sometimes we need to be careful that what we say does not drive some individuals to feel further worthlessness or to be more inclined to take their own life.

Every time I use my telephone, I am reminded of a chap called Alan Turing, without whom practically everybody in the Chamber would be speaking German. Alan Turing, in conjunction with a guy called Tommy Flowers — there is an involvement with parts of the Castlereagh area in this — was an Oxford or Cambridge university don who, to be quite frank, was barking mad. He rode everywhere on a bicycle with a gas mask on it and chained his water cup to the radiator. However, in conjunction with Tommy Flowers, he broke the Shark algorithms. This led to the breaking of the Enigma code, which led to tens of millions, if not hundreds of millions, of people remaining alive who would not otherwise have done so.

Turing was outed — if that is the right word — as a homosexual after the war. His reward for his service at Bletchley Park was to be chemically castrated, in the days when such things were seen to be normal. He put on weight, and, more importantly to him, he began to lose his powers of thought and analysis. In a last, lonely act of defiance, he killed himself alone in his bedroom by biting a poisoned apple.

On the back of my phone is an apple with a bite out of it. Some people think that it signifies Adam and Eve and the tree of wisdom.

2.15 pm

No legislation will come from this debate, but that does not mean that legislation should not be examined. If legislation is brought forward, we must ensure that it affords protections to those who, by conviction, do not wish to be involved in, recognise or play a part in such ceremonies.

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr Copeland: I am not sure that I should, but I will.

Mr Beggs: Does the Member accept that there has been a European ruling that the current status of marriage is within the law, but that any change would endanger it to a subsequent ruling? If the current definition of marriage is

changed, the current protection that exists for many may no longer be there.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an added minute.

Mr Copeland: I am not sure that I will need it, Mr Speaker. I certainly accept that. I also ask the Member to accept that, when Alan Turing was chemically castrated, it was done within the law. However, that was then and this is now. I do not feel that the views of my cousin or the young man who works for me in this Building and who is a member of another party, and who is gay, are any less valid than my own.

Truth be told, I would rather not be debating this issue today because, as has been said, it will raise expectations that will not be realised. I think of the other things that we could be looking at, such as the 3,555 children who are living in poverty in east Belfast and the 40-3% of the working-age population who are on benefits. We still await the arrival of legislation to deal with that. If you ask me, I would say live and let live, let no one's will prevail over anyone else's, and, certainly, treat all people with respect.

Mr Speaker: I call the Minister of Finance. I encourage the Minister to finish before 2.30 pm, when Question Time starts.

Mr Allister: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. With regard to the Standing Order that expects a balance of Members to speak on a particular subject, why is it that, by the time this debate will finish, 12 Members will have spoken and only four will have been opponents of same-sex marriage?

Mr Speaker: The Member will know that the Business Committee sets the timings for debates in the House. We have heard views from Members who are for the motion and Members who are against it. There has been a balance. Let us move on.

Mr B McCrea: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: No. I am not taking any further points of order. We are running out of time. I am happy to talk to the Member outside the Chamber. I call the Minister.

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): Thank you, Mr Speaker. It is a great disappointment that the balance of the debate has not reflected what I believe to be the balance in the Assembly and, even more importantly, the balance in the general community. I am absolutely certain that the speeches that we have heard do not reflect the views of the general public in Northern Ireland on this issue.

At the outset, I want to make a couple of points very clear. First, the reason why the debate is on the Floor of the House, despite what Mr Kinahan alleged, is not because the two big parties are looking for ways of garnering votes. We did not support this motion coming to the Floor of the House. I say to Mr Kinahan that I would not care if there was not one vote in this issue. As far as I am concerned, this issue transcends vote-seeking and goes right to the heart of how we order society. My views and the views of those in my party are predicated on that basis and not on the basis of looking for votes.

Secondly, as far as the constitutional convention is concerned, we do not believe that what happens in the Irish Republic has any jurisdiction here. Therefore, the views of the constitutional convention in the Republic do not count as far as we are concerned.

Ms Ruane: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Wilson: No; I will not give way. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Minister must be heard.

Mr Wilson: Normally, I would give way in a debate like this. However, due to the fact that we have to finish at 2.30 pm for Question Time, the time that I have to sum up has been curtailed, and I will not be giving way. That is not because I am afraid to have my views tested, but simply because my time has been curtailed by four minutes by the Speaker to get us to Question Time.

I want to address two things. First, this has been put forward as an issue of equality. It is not an issue of equality. It is an issue of redefining marriage — not marriage as defined by the state, but marriage as has always been understood. In fact, the state did not define marriage. All that the state has done is enshrine the view that always pertained, even in ancient societies, long before there were religious views on it — that marriage was between a man and a woman for security, comfort, support and the procreation of children. That was enshrined in law, but it is not a definition. Therefore, I do not believe that the state has any right to redefine marriage in that way.

The second thing is this: it is not an equality issue. Indeed, the Human Rights Commission sought to present it as an equality issue, but the Minister who introduced the legislation in England has written back to the Human Rights Commission and made it quite clear that it is not a rights issue. It is something that the Government in Westminster decided that they wanted to do, but not because they believed that there were any rights. They simply took a political view that they wanted to do it. Indeed, for the various components of the United Kingdom, she has made it quite clear that it is up to devolved Administrations to reflect their own wishes as far as that is concerned. She goes further and indicates that, as far as article 12 of the human rights convention is concerned:

"Men and women of marriageable age have the right to marry and to found a family, according to the national laws governing the exercise of this right."

So, as far as the Minister who introduced it at Westminster is concerned, and as far as the Human Rights Commission is concerned, it is up to national Parliaments to decide. It is not a right or an issue of equality. Therefore, I believe that we are perfectly right in making the decision that we have as a party, that that change should not be extended.

Let us look at the logic of the arguments that have been put forward on the basis of equality. Where does equality stop, then? Just because a minority say that they want the right to be married and that they demand equality with the rest of the heterosexual community who have the right to marriage, what happens when somebody says that they want to be married to two people — I do not know why they would want to be — or to three people? There is a minority view that believes that. If we go down that rights and equality route, do those people then have the same rights, or would the proposers of the motion say that that is where equality and rights stop? What about people who have other, more bizarre, views about who they should be allowed to get married to? They might be a minority. They might even be regarded as a perverse minority, but are their rights not meant to be recognised?

The argument that the equality issue or the rights issue trumps every argument is false and shallow. I will tell you what will happen though, and this is where people's rights will get trampled on. Once there is a change in the legal definition of marriage, those who take a contrary view will find themselves up against the law. Their rights will be infringed. They will be on the back foot. They will be the people who courts will be making decisions against.

I want to come to Mr Ford's amendment in a moment or two. What if a clergyman decides that he does not want to marry someone? An expert in discrimination law, Neil Addison, stated in the research paper to the House of Commons that:

"Once same-sex marriage has been legalised then the partners to such a marriage are entitled to exactly the same rights as partners in a heterosexual marriage. This means that if same-sex marriage is legalised in the UK it will be illegal for the Government to prevent such marriages happening in religious premises."

What does that do for those who refuse to do it? They find that their rights are infringed. That is where it does become a rights issue. It is not a rights issue at present, but it will become a rights issue. What of those teachers who refuse to teach the new definition of marriage or those registrars who refuse to implement it? What of those social workers who refuse to recognise the rights that will be associated with the new definition of marriage? They are the people who will find that their views are discriminated against.

That brings me to the second issue, which is Mr Ford's amendment. I know that Mr Ford is embarrassed about this, as is his party, but he knows full well that his amendment is absolutely meaningless. He makes his call:

"provided that robust legislative measures permit faith groups to define, articulate and practise religious marriage as they determine; and calls for respectful dialogue on this issue".

Mr Ford is in charge of the Department of Justice. He knows that, once a law is passed, it is up to the courts to interpret that law. Let us look at what has happened even before the law has been passed. Already, a Strathclyde police chaplain who, because he expressed a view that was contrary to the definition of marriage that is in the Bill that is only going through the House of Commons and the House of Lords, has been dismissed from his post on the basis that the police could not possibly have a chaplain who took a view that was contrary to the law — a law that has not even been passed.

That should be a warning for those who think that you can put in place robust protections. First, institutions will interpret what they believe to be appropriate views and behaviour. Secondly, the courts will interpret how the law should be applied. Time and time again, we have seen that, once the state decides that it wishes to implement something, the courts will be far less cautious in their rulings on how exactly those rules are implemented.

To say, "We will support this, even though we know that it is difficult for many people in Northern Ireland who are opposed to it, but we will put in place robust protections" is a fig leaf. I do not believe that it is possible to do that. I do not believe that it is right to redefine marriage or that there is an equality or a rights issue at play in the first place.

When I hear Sinn Féin talking about rights and equality, I think that people become even more cynical. There is not a party in this House that has trampled over the rights of people in Northern Ireland as it has done. Let us not run away with the idea that there are shining beacons of equality on the opposite Benches who wish to see people treated decently in this society.

We tabled a petition of concern. I believe that we have every right to do that, because our position on this matter has been publicly stated. We believe that, because this is such an important issue, it is appropriate to use the mechanism that allows us to stop reckless legislation in this Assembly. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Wilson: Therefore, we will continue to apply that blocking mechanism if Sinn Féin or others persist in their obsession with this particular issue. I ask the House to support our view that the motion and the amendment are wrong-headed and will not promote equality or provide safeguards. If Members really do value freedom — the freedom for those who wish to express their views freely — they will support our opposition to the motion.

Mr Speaker: Order. Question Time is at 2.30 pm. This debate will continue after Question Time, when the next Member to speak will be Chris Lyttle, who will make the winding-up speech on the amendment.

The debate stood suspended.

2.30 pm

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

Oral Answers to Questions

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Mr Deputy Speaker: As Mr Sean Rogers and Mr Alban Maginness are not in their places, I call Mr George Robinson.

Cardiovascular Disease

3. **Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking to raise awareness of cardiovascular disease. (AQO 3881/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Awareness of cardiovascular disease is being raised through a variety of means including health improvement programmes that highlight the relationship with known risk factors such as smoking and obesity; primary care initiatives that identify high-risk groups such as those diagnosed with hypertension or diabetes; and more major public information campaigns such as FAST, the stroke campaign that provides information on signs and symptoms of strokes.

In addition, I recently launched a revised service framework for cardiovascular health and well-being for public consultation. It will build on earlier success and set new priorities for cardiovascular health in Northern Ireland. The consultation closes on 19 June 2013.

Mr G Robinson: Will the Minister provide an update on the establishment of primary percutaneous coronary intervention (PCI) provision?

Mr Poots: The planned introduction of a new primary PCI service will mean that patients who have a heart attack will be taken to a cath lab that is capable of undertaking the procedure 24/7. The patients will bypass the emergency department and be taken directly to the cath lab, where they should have the procedure within 120 minutes of the first call for medical help, before transferring back to their local hospital for subsequent care. There are nine permanent cath labs at four hospitals in Northern Ireland: Altnagelvin, Belfast City, Craigavon and Royal Victoria.

Demand for the service is projected to increase. The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) has approved proposals for the expansion of cath lab facilities at the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust and the Western Health and Social Care Trust to include the provision of a primary PCI service. That is planned to take place by September 2013. The board is providing an investment of £8 million in this over the next three years. It will be taken forward through the establishment of a regional implementation plan. Every hour that is lost in not getting the stents applied can take a year off your life. It is much better to get to a facility that can provide that service than to languish in a facility that cannot.

Mr McDevitt: I endorse the Minister's assertion that time is of the essence when it comes to cardiac care. Another

aspect of cardiac care that the Minister will need to make a decision on very soon is paediatric cardiac services. Will the Minister tell the House whether he is in a position to promote a two-site solution between Dublin and Belfast so that children in this part of Ireland and the border counties continue to be able to avail themselves of a surgical service in Belfast?

Mr Poots: I planned to deal with that issue in answer to question 9, which I was very hopeful of getting to. However, I can give a response on it now.

Last week, the HSCB and the Public Health Agency (PHA) made a recommendation on the basis of clinical observation. It is not about saving money or reducing service. It is about having the qualified people available 24/7 to provide the standard of care that people expect.

There is an inability to do that in Northern Ireland, because we do not have the numbers and, consequently, do not get the surgeons. I am interested in continuing a discussion with my counterpart in the Republic of Ireland to identify whether, if the network is based in Dublin, there will be any ability to provide key surgical services in Belfast while enhancing provision on the cardiological side of the service. So, there is more work to be done on that. I am aware of the campaign and of the deep concerns and reservations of those behind it.

Antrim Area Hospital: Accident and Emergency

4. **Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of accident and emergency care at Antrim Area Hospital. (AQO 3882/11-15)

Mr Poots: I had intended to answer questions 2 and 4 together, but Mr Maginness was missing for some reason. Maybe it was something to do with the previous debate.

I visited Antrim Area Hospital on Monday 22 April to hear at first hand the consultants' concerns. I am advised by the Northern Health and Social Care Trust that it is working with the emergency department consultants to mitigate the potential risks to patients in the hospital's emergency department.

The Northern Trust has put in place a range of measures to improve performance and ensure patient safety at the emergency department. Those include expanding the medical assessment unit, which allows GPs direct access to specialist assessment beds, meaning that patients can be seen directly by in-house specialty teams without having to be admitted through the emergency department. The trust is also increasing support for triage, reviewing and strengthening the escalation process and making further investment in nursing staff and increasing paediatric support. My Department has invested £9 million in a new emergency department, which will cater for up to 90,000 attendances a year. The new unit is expected to be operational from 26 June 2013.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for his answer, in which he outlined some of the changes being made to make things better. However, the figures are getting worse in that hospital. Staff are not getting breaks during 12-hour shifts, and people are being brought in from midwifery, gynae and anywhere they can to help when eight to 10 ambulances are waiting outside. Will the Minister put in more resources

to get more nurses per bed so that we have a hospital that can function? If not, it is time that we had someone else running the Department. At the moment, it is going horribly wrong.

Mr Poots: Having inherited a mess from the Member's colleague, I think that we are doing the work that needs to be done. There are more permanent nurses in Antrim Area Hospital than there were when his party was in control of the hospital.

Since 2010-11, which might be the date when things started to change, bed capacity in Antrim Area Hospital has increased by 25% from 319 to 400 people. Medical staffing levels in medicine and surgery have increased, the number of emergency consultants has increased from four to eight, and the nursing staff complement has increased from 54.89 WTE nurses to 60.89 WTE nurses. There has also been an investment in bank, agency and overtime nursing to support the emergency department in dealing with significant pressures. I understand that the hospital has huge problems. Those are inherited problems, and we will get on top of them.

Ms Brown: I thank the Minister for his answers so far and congratulate him on his efforts to ease the pressures at Antrim Area Hospital. What efforts has the Department made to maximise safety across the health and social care sector?

Mr Poots: With safety, it is absolutely critical that we have quality throughout. We developed Quality 2020, which is a 10-year strategy to protect and improve quality in health and social care. That defines quality against three components: safety; effectiveness; and patient and client focus. Among other things, it aims to protect and improve quality in health and social care to minimise risk and harm to service users and staff.

Over the years, we carried out substantial work to improve patient safety, including Best Practice, Best Care, which puts in place a framework to raise the quality of services and tackle issues of poor performance, implement clinical and social care governance arrangements, introduce a statutory duty of quality and the serious adverse incident reporting system established in the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) and develop 'Safety First: A Framework for Sustainable Improvement in the HPSS', which has a particular focus on patient and client safety.

An awful lot of good work going is on in Antrim Area Hospital. I often get letters from the public saying that, in spite of all the headlines, they have received excellent care. I commend all the staff who are working in that facility under huge pressure.

We have a particular problem in the emergency department, and we are looking at that in a very clear and coherent way. Our turnaround team has been looking at that, and I hope to be able to report to the Assembly in the very near future, through a written or oral statement, on its advice and how we plan to move forward.

Mr Allister: The Minister refers to the new extension to the accident and emergency department, which is good. Specifically, however, will that open up and entail the provision of any new beds? Will there be any new beds for patients coming through A&E or will we simply provide more space for people to continue to lie on trolleys?

Mr Poots: I am somewhat surprised that the Member should ask such a question because he represents the north Antrim area, and, of course, people from there use this facility. A brand new 24-bed unit opened last week, and everybody knew that it was in the pipeline. It has not been officially opened, but most people with local knowledge knew that it was open.

Ms Lo: Has the Minister's Department made any effort to link up with some of the newer immigrant communities to help them to access GP services? Some have difficulties registering with GPs and turn up at A&E when they become ill. Are there any plans to help them?

Mr Poots: The Public Health Agency works very closely with community groups in general to get messages out. One of the key messages that need to be applied is that, when you come to this country, you need to register with a general practitioner, and when you are unwell, that is generally the first port of call, not an emergency department. There is an abuse of the system, and people need to recognise that abusing the system is wrong and causes delays for others. Many from indigenous and ethnic minority communities are abusing the system and impacting on others as a consequence.

Mental Health

5. **Mr Douglas** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action his Department is taking to raise awareness of mental health issues. (AQO 3883/11-15)

Mr Poots: Action taken by the Public Health Agency to improve awareness of mental health issues, reduce stigma associated with mental illness and encourage help-seeking behaviours includes the delivery of a public information campaign; local seminars and educational workshops; mental health awareness training; the hosting of websites providing advice and information; and work with the media to encourage more positive reporting on the issue. The agency has also been working with Business in the Community to promote the benefits of mental health awareness in the workplace. My Department has been working with the Health and Social Care Board on the development of a user-friendly web portal to improve mental health service users' access to mental health service information at regional and local level.

Mr Douglas: I thank the Minister for a very comprehensive response and for the work that he has been supporting in east Belfast. He outlined a number of initiatives, and those are very welcome. Will he outline the cost of those, please?

Mr Poots: We spend £227.5 million on mental health services, which represents 7% of the total HSC spend, and planned expenditure for 2012-13 is approximately £240 million. So the spend is increasing, and I welcome that because I have always said that I feel that mental health is the poor relation. We must consider that one in five adults in Northern Ireland has a mental health condition at any one time; half of all women and a quarter of all men will have been affected by depression at some time in their lives; 10% of new mothers suffer from postnatal depression; one in four people over 65 have symptoms of depression; around one in 10 15- to 16-year-olds have self-harmed; 30% of consultations with a GP are related to mental health; and we have increased prescription of

antidepressant drugs, up from nine million in 1991 to 34 million across the UK by 2007. That is a demonstration of the vast problem with mental health and shows the sort of support that we require to help people through very difficult times.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will any additional money be made available for mental health strategies? How many of the Bamford recommendations have still not been implemented?

Mr Poots: In line with Bamford, expenditure on mental health community services increased by more than £25 million since 2007, and we want that to continue. That has allowed us to facilitate early intervention, promote recovery in the community and reduce demand for the acute psychiatric beds. The 2011-12 expenditure on community and mental health services was £125.6 million, which represents over half the total mental health budget. So, there is still work to do on Bamford, and we will continue to do it. We are taking positive steps and are moving in the right direction. As I indicated, an increase in funding has been identified this year, and I hope that we will continue to be able to carry that out in future years.

2.45 pm

Mrs Overend: Considering the current crisis in our hospitals, can the Minister outline how he is looking after the mental health of the doctors, nurses and other staff who work in Antrim Area Hospital and who deal with the daily pressures there?

Mr Poots: In all our facilities, we will have support mechanisms, and counselling services will be available to people who require them. Obviously, many of the people who work in the health and social care system are under great pressure in the work that they are carrying out, and I think that it is very important that people who feel under that kind of pressure go to see their GP. If they need counselling services, they should get them and act upon it quickly, as opposed to allowing things to fester.

Accident and Emergency Departments

6. **Ms S Ramsey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in view of the pressure that accident and emergency departments are under and the lengthy waiting times within them, what plans are in place to address these and support staff to provide the best care. (AQO 3884/11-15)

8. **Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of current waiting times in accident and emergency departments. (AQO 3886/11-15)

Mr Poots: Mr Speaker, with your permission, I will answers questions 6 and 8 together, as they are both about emergency department waiting times.

The emergency care waiting time figures for the first quarter of 2013 indicate that performance against the four-hour target declined from 76.1% to 71.1% between January and March. During that period, 2,360 patients waited more than 12 hours, with the month of March seeing particularly high numbers of 12-hour breaches. Although that is an improvement on the number of people waiting more than 12 hours during the same quarter last year, it is unacceptable that anyone has to wait such a

length of time. These figures are particularly disappointing, given the intensive efforts to reduce waiting times and the allocation of an additional £7 million in-year, non-recurrent funding from the January 2013 monitoring for winter pressures and unscheduled care.

Staff in emergency departments work in what is often a difficult and pressurised environment, and we owe it to them to try to reduce those pressures as far as possible. The Health and Social Care Board and the improvement action group are continuing to work with the trusts to improve hospital processes. They are developing services to reduce pressures on hospitals and emergency departments in particular. That process includes a review of the workforce across emergency departments to ensure that medical, nursing and other health and social care professionals are available at the times when emergency departments are busiest. A review of capacity and demand for unscheduled services across all hospital sites is also being undertaken. That review will help to inform commissioning decisions and manage demand.

Against that background of additional funding and intensive efforts to reduce waiting times, I look to the board and the trusts to take further action to improve our emergency departments' performance.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I agree with the Minister that it is disappointing that we have an increase the number of in 12-hour breaches.

Minister, whistle-blowers still find it a bit difficult to go to their line manager, and I know that you put out a statement and guidance on that. I am also aware that you have visited some A&Es unannounced, and I appreciate that and commend you for it. Do you have any plans to talk with staff in our A&Es without management involvement so that they can get to you face to face and raise their concerns?

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for her question; she asked something that is practical. We did exactly that last week in Antrim, where we spoke with the consultants and senior nursing staff. No management was there. The turnaround team in that facility has been giving us very clear guidance, and we will be acting on the recommendations that come from that team.

So, where there is fragility in the service, we need to know about it. If management is falling down, we need to be made aware that that is the case. When people make us aware that that is the case, if management does not respond to the needs of the clinical staff when there are safety issues in particular to consider or where patients are not receiving the care that they should expect, we have to call into question how managers are performing and then take actions.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Minister for his answers and for acknowledging that current waiting times are unacceptable. Around one third of waiting times across the major A&Es are beyond the Minister's own target of being seen within four hours. Indeed, it was mentioned that significant numbers are waiting over 12 hours.

The Minister talked earlier about inherited problems, but does he accept that all those who campaigned against the closure of the City Hospital's A&E department have had their fears realised and that we have seen increased

pressures at other A&Es, such as the Ulster Hospital, since?

Mr Poots: Certainly, the Ulster Hospital has been having a lot of problems, although the Royal picked up a lot of the work — probably most of it — from Belfast City Hospital, and its figures have improved dramatically this year.

There are issues in and around the populace in the Ulster Hospital. We do know that we have an older population, and the consequence of that appears to be that there have been a lot of winter pressures among our older community this year, more than anticipated. There has been a substantial increase in demand for emergency care at the Ulster Hospital, with attendances going up by 13% to some 83,000. There has also been an 18% increase in ambulance arrivals, and, more importantly, admissions have gone up by 21.7%.

Therefore, it is not just the numbers of people coming to the emergency department — a 13% increase — but an increase of almost 22% in those being admitted, and that is where the problem lies. That is where the 12-hour breaches kick in in the Ulster Hospital. It is actually bed space that becomes the problem, not so much the emergency department. However, the problems further on in the hospital then tail back into the emergency department, and that is where the public see them.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for his answers today. I understand that there is an ongoing consultation on the Belfast emergency departments. Can he give us a progress update, please?

Mr Poots: The consultation on the future configuration of emergency services in Belfast was launched on 5 February. It is a 13-week consultation being undertaken by the Health and Social Care Board. The preferred option is that there should be two emergency departments in the Belfast Trust — that is, at the Royal Victoria and the Mater hospitals — supported by direct access via GPs to a range of specialist services at the Belfast City Hospital.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a chuid freagraí. I thank the Minister for his answers.

I do not expect him to have this level of detail with him today, but it would be helpful if he could subsequently provide it to us. I ask him to detail the number of patients across all health trusts in the North not seen inside the 15-minute triage waiting times in A&E. That is per trust in the past year.

Mr Poots: I can tell Members how many have to wait for more than 12 hours, but I cannot tell you how many got triage within 15 minutes, so that is perhaps something that we can look at. Some 98.6% of people are either admitted, seen or discharged within 12 hours, but we will take a look at that and see whether we can come back to the Member on his question.

Newtownstewart and Fintona Fire Stations

7. **Mr McAleer** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given that the business cases for Newtownstewart and Fintona fire stations have been completed, when these projects will receive final approval. (AQO 3885/11-15)

Mr Poots: Although Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service has developed draft business cases for Newtownstewart and Fintona fire stations, those have not been submitted to my Department for appraisal as yet.

Owing to competing demands on my capital budget, business cases are progressed to appraisal and approval only when the projects are of sufficiently high priority for funding to be available within the overall programme. Although the rebuilding of Newtownstewart and Fintona fire stations remains a need, the two projects are not profiled within the current Budget period.

Mr McAleer: Does the Minister agree that the current dilapidated state of those stations prohibits their ability to reach out to the local community, particularly the primary schools? Moreover, the fact that there is only one toilet and one shower in those buildings inhibits the possibility of recruiting females, who are currently under-represented, into the Fire Service.

Mr Poots: In the first instance, what we need to ensure is that the Fire Service can respond to emergencies. In all the past number of years, that has been the case, and the Fire Service has not failed us. It has not failed us in the west of the Province, either in Fintona or in Newtownstewart.

The Member makes a case, and it is not unreasonable, for new fire stations, but there are lots of good cases out there that we have to categorise and put into some sort of order of preference, given the capital funding available to us. Of course, our colleagues at Westminster in the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties, which are the sister parties of the Ulster Unionists and the Alliance Party, massively cut the capital budgets and left us in a very difficult situation.

Dr McDonnell: Pursuant to an response some weeks ago to the Member for East Antrim Mr McMullan, in which the Minister stated that he believed a business case would be made for the Cushendall fire station by April this year, can he confirm whether that has happened and whether he will prioritise that, given the well-documented need and the fact that the case has been delayed through no fault of the people there, but because of the Department and the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service?

Mr Poots: We always knew that the leader of the SDLP was a glen man. He has gone back to his roots on this one, and there is no harm in that.

Obviously, the case for the facility has been made for some time. Again, it is about the same financial pressures: are we going to be able to build a new fire station? It is competing with all the other stuff in the Health Department. That is not to say that it cannot or will not happen. I have not received the business case yet; April is not quite over. Certainly, draft business cases were being developed for Fintona, Newtownstewart and Cushendall. Work on all seven proposed new fire stations had been parked so that attention could be focused on the Fire Service's must-do capital priorities. That is the situation as it stands.

Mr Clarke: In the first supplementary question, there was focus on the toilets at Fintona fire station. Maybe the Minister could outline what the Fire Service itself is indicating as the capital projects that are most essential in Northern Ireland at the moment.

Mr Poots: The Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) has identified Dunmurry as a priority location for a new fire station. In case someone tries to say that that is me looking after my own constituency, most of Dunmurry has actually moved out of Lagan Valley and into West Belfast, so I can be accused of looking after West Belfast in this instance. It must be that the Committee Chair's work has been very effective.

Completion of an effective appraisal for Dunmurry will require extensive risk analysis and Fire Service emergency cover modelling. All the relevant software data sets and technical capability will become available in 2013. Consequently, the Fire Service anticipates a business case being sent to the Department in the first quarter of 2014-15. The other must-do priority for NIFRS is its logistic support centre, which is the one-stop shop. The strategic outline case for that is currently going through an internal approval process in NIFRS. The Department expects to receive the business case 2013-14.

Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children: Paediatric Cardiac Surgery

9. **Mr McDevitt** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether paediatric cardiac surgery will continue at the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children. (AQO 3887/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am answering this question for the second time. This is the official answer, by the way.

Members will be aware that I received the paediatric congenital cardiac services (PCCS) working group's recommendation, endorsed by the Health and Social Care Board, on the future commissioning of the service. The recommended option involves building on the existing service provided by the Dublin paediatric cardiac surgery centre for the Belfast Trust. I have said that, before I make my decision, I want to take the opportunity to hold further discussions with our counterparts in the Republic of Ireland and explore the scope for flexibility in the location for the future delivery of this service without compromising any aspect of patient safety.

My key priority in all this is to ensure the delivery of a safe and sustainable service for those vulnerable children. In so doing, I want to ensure that we have fully explored every possibility for addressing the concerns that have been raised with me by parents and cardiology consultants. I will now take time to consider the report and its recommendations in full. I will make my decision shortly.

Mr McDevitt: For the second time, too, thank you very much, Minister. Will the Minister just place on the record of the House again his determination to ensure that there will be some sort of surgical framework remaining in Belfast as part of a new all-island network?

Mr Poots: I have been working closely with people, including the cardiologists, to identify what best we can achieve out of this. We have a recommendation, and I will continue to work to see what best we can achieve. There is more work to be done and more discussions to be had. However, I really welcome the fact that we have moved away from any suggestion that all the care should be provided somewhere in England. I was wholly opposed to that idea from the outset. Getting it to an all-Ireland network in the first instance is a success. If we can

achieve having some surgery in Belfast — and I do not know whether we can — that will certainly be something that I will view positively.

3.00 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Robin Swann. We are running out of time, so you will have to be quick.

Mr Swann: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. I declare an interest, as I have a three-month-old son currently awaiting cardiac surgery. When the recommendation was made on Thursday, Dr Reilly, the Minister for Health in the Irish Republic, seemed very well briefed. How far on are the negotiations between his Department and the Minister's about the potential of moving all the surgery to Dublin?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Minister, please be brief.

Mr Poots: There will be a discussion in the next two to three weeks which will assist us in furthering the outcome.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Thank you for being brief.

Justice

Mr Deputy Speaker: Questions 7 and 11 have been withdrawn, and written answers are required for them.

PSNI: Efficiency Savings

1. **Mr Cree** asked the Minister of Justice what discussions he has had with the PSNI regarding efficiency savings during this budgetary period. (AQO 3894/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): I have not had any meetings with the PSNI to discuss efficiency savings. Any discussions that have taken place have focused on specific pressures which the PSNI faces. It is very important, for me as Minister and for the Department of Justice as a whole, that the PSNI is adequately resourced to deliver an effective, efficient, impartial and accountable police service to the people of Northern Ireland. Updates on progress against all of my Department's efficiency targets are regularly published on the Department's website, usually twice a year.

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for that. Can he outline the amount of money that has been spent on training during this comprehensive spending review (CSR) budgetary period, and any recruitment costs which may be imminent?

Mr Ford: Without notice, I cannot give a total figure for what has been spent on training. As Members know, a business case for recruitment is being worked through at the moment, and, clearly, the detail of that will inform the costs of that particular point.

Mr McDevitt: I declare an interest as a member of the Policing Board. Without prejudice to any conversations which the Minister may have with the PSNI or others about potential efficiencies, will he assure the House that, irrespective of the outcome of those conversations, the future funding of the Historical Enquiries Team (HET) will be protected and guaranteed, so that its work can be completed without impact on other aspects of operational policing?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr McDevitt for that slightly off-beam supplementary question. The Department has approved

the PSNI business case for the continuation of funding for the HET. That is being looked at in a way consistent with the previous funding arrangements, which do not impinge on the independence of the HET. I am satisfied, therefore, that I can answer in the affirmative.

Community Relations: Interfaces

2. **Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on initiatives to address interface structures. (AQO 3895/11-15)

Mr Ford: I am encouraged by the level of activity currently under way, with excellent engagement in a number of communities. In addition to work led by the Department of Justice, the investment made through the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) peace walls programme has led to engagement in seven projects across a wide range of areas in Belfast and Derry city. Belfast City Council is also taking forward work through its own initiative, supported by Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) funding. In addition, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) is reviewing the interface structures that it has across Belfast. Those bodies are working together in exactly the sort of collaborative approach needed to support communities in addressing issues at interface structures.

I want to stress that, whether it is through Department of Justice-led work or the programmes put in place by the IFI and Belfast City Council, the community remains at the centre of considerations concerning the future of interface structures. Successes to date, which include the recent alterations at North Howard Street in Belfast and work to remove gates around the walls in Derry, have been based on working with communities to identify an agreed way forward. That will continue to be the case. The objective is the eventual removal of all interface structures. We know that that will take time, but we must all work to bring about the conditions that will give people the confidence to support change.

A key priority for my Department is addressing the safety and security of residents living close to interfaces. My officials, in conjunction with the police, are constantly assessing how to design out crime and reduce the fear of crime at interfaces. There is more to do, but there are many positives and I thank those communities and our partners for their work.

Mr Lyttle: I welcome the work that the Minister of Justice is doing with local communities to address interface structures. Does he agree with the analysis of the DUP Finance Minister that the interface structures may just disappear if we give everyone a job?

Mr Ford: I thank my colleague for that question. I think that he knows my view, which is that, although we certainly need to address economic issues — there are, undoubtedly, some people who, because of a lack of jobs, engage in antisocial behaviour and crime — there is absolutely no doubt that, even when the economy is booming, there have been problems around interfaces. That is why there has been a concentration in my Department, as part of the Programme for Government, on reducing tensions around interfaces, working with local communities and seeing the kind of successes that we have been able to report in recent years. There may now be more so-called peace walls than there were at the time of the Good Friday Agreement, but, at the moment, they are coming down and opening up, not being added to.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for his answer and for the outline and, in particular, the fact that he acknowledges that there should be a collaborative approach and community input. Does he agree that any sense of trying to impose a solution on local communities would be counterproductive?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr McCartney for that point, which I entirely agree with. There is no sense in which the Department of Justice is seeking to impose on local communities. However, it is also the case that we do not intend to proceed at the pace of the slowest. Where there is movement or engagement, we will facilitate and encourage and do all that we can to assist in building conditions that enable those interface structures to be removed.

Mr Campbell: The Minister alluded to the fact that the community is at the centre of the discussions. Does he agree that central to the very substance of ensuring that peace breaks out and communities start to relate to each other more directly in interface areas, there has to be community confidence that they will not come under attack when the fences and walls come down and that they must get that confidence in both communities before we can even begin that process?

Mr Ford: I do not know that I agree entirely with Mr Campbell's last point. We certainly need to work to build confidence. However, to suggest that we have to have total confidence before we can do anything is at variance with what we have been doing where, for example, we have seen work on the temporary opening of gates and barriers and where we have seen work done to address with CCTV and white lights the opportunities to enable movement. We cannot get everything right before we do things. We need to ensure that we provide the confidence that justifies small incremental steps that lead eventually to complete removal.

Mr Swann: The Minister outlined what needs to be done with the residents in all these constituencies. Has he met residents living in the immediate vicinity of interfaces? Can he give an indication of their views on the retention or removal of physical structures and interface structures?

Mr Ford: I have met representatives of a number of the relevant local communities. It will not surprise Mr Swann or anybody else to know that they have a variety of views about the pace at which progress can be made and the conditions that need to be put in place. That is why the Department is engaging so consistently and solidly with those communities.

Human Trafficking

3. **Ms Ruane** asked the Minister of Justice whether there is sufficient legislation in place to deal with all aspects of human trafficking. (AQO 3896/11-15)

Mr Ford: I believe that we have sufficient legislation in place to equip law enforcement agencies with robust powers to tackle traffickers. The Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2013, which received Royal Assent on 25 April, has further strengthened the legislative framework by creating new human trafficking offences that will ensure that traffickers operating across international borders are not immune from prosecution in Northern Ireland. The new provisions will allow for prosecution where an individual

has been trafficked for any type of exploitation anywhere outside the United Kingdom by a UK national, by a habitual resident of Northern Ireland or by a body incorporated under UK law. They will also make it an offence for an individual who has not previously been trafficked into the United Kingdom to be trafficked internally within it for the purposes of non-sexual exploitation, as is already the case in respect of sexual exploitation. Significantly and uniquely across the UK, the Act also ensures that human trafficking offences in Northern Ireland are triable on indictment only.

The provisions made under the Act also ensure that criminal law in this jurisdiction complies with the requirements under the EU directive on preventing and combating human trafficking. I consider that, with these additions, the appropriate legislation is now in place. Law enforcement partners on the Organised Crime Task Force have also indicated that they are content with the powers at their disposal. However, as I have previously made clear, I will consider any changes that will assist in the fight against human trafficking.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for that answer. Does the Minister believe that changing the laws on prostitution may help in the fight against human trafficking? If so, I would appreciate a view on that.

Mr Ford: I have already made it clear to the House more than once that I am not minded to amend the existing law on prostitution. There are issues, but, in the Republic of Ireland and here, the consideration that has been given to trafficking has not identified benefits from changing the law on prostitution. There are issues around prostitution such as enforcement, whether it is an appropriate deterrent and whether action would drive it underground that need to be taken into account, but, at this stage, I am not minded to look in that direction. I am concerned that the fight against trafficking deals with all the offences of trafficking, all the purposes for which people are trafficked and all the victims, whether male or female.

Mr Beggs: If I have understood the Minister, he has said that, because our legislation meets the minimum requirement at a European directive level in this area, he is satisfied. Will he acknowledge that there has been a very low number of prosecutions and convictions and we may need to do more? Can he advise how he is working with the Policing Board and the PSNI to ensure that those involved in this heinous crime are brought to account?

Mr Ford: I do not think that I have ever said that compliance with the European directive is all that we need to do as the minimum; indeed, I highlighted the fact that we have gone further than other local jurisdictions, for example, in ensuring that cases of trafficking are triable on indictment only. I am determined to ensure that we have the appropriate package of law in place, but, if the Member is talking about the issues of enforcing the law, there are issues of resourcing and co-operation, and those matters are discussed by a number of agencies frequently through the Organised Crime Task Force stakeholder group, which I chair, to ensure that we get the necessary co-operation between agencies.

The fact that trafficking is a crime and the fact that it continues is something that needs to be addressed, but I am not convinced that there is a change in legislation, as opposed to ensuring that the public report, the police

get the evidence and we assist the victims to give the evidence that gets prosecution. That is where we will really fight trafficking.

Criminal Assets

4. Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the distribution of criminal assets that have been recovered. (AQO 3897/11-15)

Mr Ford: The assets recovery community scheme was first launched towards the end of 2011, following the passage of the Justice Act 2011. So, 2012-13 has been the first full financial year that the scheme has been up and running. I recently announced that almost £564,000 was allocated to projects aimed at tackling crime and the fear of crime. Not only is it important to remove those assets from the organised crime gangs who prey on our community, but it is positive that they are reinvested in seeking to make Northern Ireland a safer place for everyone. In the recent scheme, the recovered money was allocated to almost 60 projects. These engage a wide range of people and include making older people feel safe in their home, parenting programmes and providing diversionary activities for young people.

I am aware that a successful Youth for Christ cage soccer initiative took place in the Member's constituency. It was funded by £10,000 of recovered assets. I attended a cage soccer initiative at Stormont last year and have seen that grow, thanks to recovered assets, into a cage soccer tournament held at Benone beach earlier this year.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister for his response, and I welcome the distribution of the money to useful and deserving causes. Can the Minister confirm that the figure of £564,000 is on top of money paid out in the first year of the scheme? Will the scheme continue in the years ahead?

Mr Ford: I can confirm to Mr McCarthy the intention that the scheme will continue. Overall, in the first two years, somewhere in the region of £1.3 million has been allocated to initiatives under the scheme, which is very substantial, and it followed through from being able to obtain that money reallocated to Northern Ireland for our use. Unfortunately, at times, money only becomes available too late in the year to be allocated. We are looking at end-of-year flexibility to ensure that we can get the best use of that money and ensure that that money, when recovered from criminals, is used in the best way to fight crime and the fear of crime in Northern Ireland.

3.15 pm

Mr Givan: I am sure that the Minister recognises that, although that money is helpful, it is a drop in the ocean compared with the hundreds of millions of pounds accrued by organised crime in the Province. To that end, what efforts are being made to get the National Crime Agency brought into Northern Ireland and those who are caught, particularly leading republicans in south Armagh, convicted and sent to prison for their crimes against the people of Northern Ireland?

Mr Ford: Although I would certainly like to agree with the sentiments of the Committee Chair, I fear that Mr Givan has gone slightly over the top in confusing wishing to send people to prison for criminal activity with the issue of assets recovery. We should also be careful when we talk

about organised crime and suggesting that it is confined to one area of Northern Ireland.

I am determined to ensure that we do all that we can to obtain those assets. As Members are well aware, I am also firm in my belief that there would be benefits from the National Crime Agency being able to operate in Northern Ireland in the devolved sphere to deal with issues such as child exploitation and human trafficking. Otherwise, that will fall to the PSNI, which does not have the resources that would be available through the NCA.

The issue about whether it is possible to make progress on assets recovery has, at this stage, to be discussed between different agencies, and those discussions continue.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. What criteria does the Minister use to allocate the moneys?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Lynch for the question, although I fear that I will not be able to answer it in the detail that he may wish. I am happy to say that I do not discuss the projects; they are discussed by an impartial board. Otherwise, there may be a tendency for too much money to go to South Antrim projects.

The important issue is to find projects that will make a real and tangible difference to the lives of people in different areas; to ensure, because of the difficulties just highlighted, that money, when allocated, is able to be spent within the financial year; and to ensure that it spent by and through organisations that have robust governance mechanisms to ensure that they can make progress. That is why a significant amount of money has been distributed through policing and community safety partnerships (PCSPs) and other bodies that have a local connection. It has been positive to see good ideas such as the cage soccer initiative that started in Strabane now being extended across a number of areas as PCSPs learn from each other about the best way to fight crime.

I have no doubt that my officials could supply a full list of criteria to the Member, if that would be helpful. However, that is as far as I can go at this point.

Mr Rogers: Are all the proceeds of recovered assets reinvested in measures to prevent crime here?

Mr Ford: I am afraid that we are not able to reallocate all recovered assets. That is partly because it is unpredictable and random. There may be very large sums in one year and small sums in another, so it is difficult to take on, for example, projects that have a continuing cost. The easiest project to fund is one that has a small capital expenditure. There is also a difficulty in that, if assets are recovered towards the end of the financial year with no EYF, we are simply not able to carry those over. There were losses in the financial year that has just ended because a significant amount of money was recovered in February and March. Those issues are under discussion with other Departments to see how we can best improve the operation of the scheme.

Domestic Abuse: Convictions

5. Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Justice, given the high number of recorded incidences, to outline the number of convictions for domestic abuse over the past three years. (AQO 3898/11-15)

Mr Ford: High incidences of domestic violence continue to be recorded in Northern Ireland, and my Department aims to ensure that those perpetrating this heinous crime are brought to justice. On average, a crime is detected in 41% of such incidents, meaning that those cases may be submitted by the PSNI to the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) for a decision on prosecution.

In Northern Ireland, as in other jurisdictions, there is no specific offence of domestic violence under criminal law. The conviction data recorded by the Courts and Tribunals Service are for generic offences such as assault, actual bodily harm or grievous bodily harm. There is no detail in the data set about the circumstances of the offence, so it is not possible to identify whether a conviction relates to domestic abuse.

For a number of years, the PPS has recorded cases with a domestic violence motivation on its system. From April 2012, the PPS has implemented a system that captures the outcome of such cases as are prosecuted at court. The outcomes are obtained from the Courts and Tribunals Service results data, which are shared through the Causeway system. Statistics on domestic violence convictions are, therefore, available for only the past nine months. Those statistics indicate that, during the period April 2012 to December 2012, 53.9% of defendants were convicted at a Magistrates' or Crown Court. Broken down further into the two separate courts, 52.3% of defendants were convicted when the case was disposed of at a Magistrates' Court, and 76.6% of defendants were convicted where the case was disposed of at a Crown Court.

Mr Moutray: I thank the Minister for his answer. Does the Minister consider the imminent opening of the sexual assault referral centre (SARC) in Antrim as a possible way forward in securing more convictions in future in relation to sexual and domestic violence?

Mr Ford: Mr Moutray highlights a very important point. It is my belief that the operation of the sexual offences centre will ensure that people have the care and treatment and perhaps the psychological counselling that they require at the same time as a criminal investigation is under way by the Police Service. That should improve the availability of the evidence on which the police can act, and we hope that it will increase the number of offences that will be successfully prosecuted.

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. What cross-departmental work is going on to address the issue, given the cross-cutting nature of domestic violence?

Mr Ford: There is significant work going on, led principally by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and my Department through a ministerial group, to ensure that we join up the working arrangements between the Departments involved, principally our two Departments. Domestic violence cannot be dealt with solely as a health and social care matter or solely as a justice matter; that is why the SARC in Antrim has such benefits. It is also something that we are determined to see operating generally across a range of Departments.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for his answers. Can the Minister outline whether consideration has been given to further proposals to help the victims of domestic violence to report more easily and to make the assessment of their situation more friendly?

Mr Ford: I appreciate Mr Byrne's question. I certainly hope that at the more serious end we will see the SARC making the changes that will make it easier for reporting. Significant training and joint working have also been done by social workers and police officers, for example. I attended a conference last year that brought groups of professionals together. It is important that we get joining up at departmental and operational level to ensure that we provide the care, counselling, treatment and criminal investigation in a joined-up way. I think that we are seeing that better now than we used to, but, undoubtedly, much is still to be done.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister. Will the Minister update the House on the work and effectiveness of the independent domestic violence advisers (IDVAs)?

Mr Ford: The appointment of independent domestic violence advisers was recommended by Criminal Justice Inspection following its examination of how domestic violence was handled. The business case was recently approved, and work is ongoing to source a provider, with the hope that the full IDVA service will be available in the autumn of this year. Unfortunately, it is taking longer than perhaps we might have wished, but I think that we now have the system right. The important thing will be to get the right people in post carrying out the services.

Crumlin Road Jail Project

6. **Mr Humphrey** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the programme and timescale for the development of the Prison Service site at Crumlin Road, Belfast. (AQO 3899/11-15)

Mr Ford: As I informed the Assembly on 19 March, it is my intention to redevelop the prisoner assessment unit on the Crumlin Road as a working-out unit for prisoners approaching the end of their sentence. A business case for an interim solution has been prepared and is undergoing internal scrutiny. Much detailed work is being taken forward in parallel to business consideration. That work includes developing the optimum staffing and operational model, as well as comprehensive standards as a framework for ensuring that the unit has appropriate governance and management processes in place. Subject to approval, the work required will commence later this year, with a planned completion prior to the end of this year. The Prison Service will engage with public representatives in the area to inform them of proposals in the near future.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Minister for his answer. I welcome the Minister's further information today, and I welcome the placement of the working-out centre in north Belfast, as I did on the day he made the statement. Will the Minister outline to the House exactly what the programme will be for prisoners in the working-out centre, how it will help them to become better members of society and how, when they leave prison and become members of society, that will play out for the benefit of wider society in Northern Ireland?

Mr Ford: Mr Humphrey raises a fair point about exactly how things will operate. Clearly, as we are developing the plans, it is not possible to give details. What is absolutely clear, however, is that providing prisoners with opportunities for constructive activities, particularly around work, whether it be voluntary work or in a direct workplace,

is the kind of way in which we will help to prevent reoffending. There is absolutely no doubt that a prisoner who leaves prison with something secure and practical to do, some kind of human relationships and somewhere to live will not reoffend in the way that so many others will. That will be the key element of what the working-out unit will aim to do.

A number of organisations already provide working-out opportunities in different ways, principally in the voluntary and community sector. Subject to risk assessment — clearly, people will be risk-assessed before they ever go to the working-out unit — there will also be the opportunity for people to apply for jobs through the open job market. Prison Service and probation service staff will be available to assist prisoners going through that process. It will be very similar to what already happens at the Foyleview resettlement unit at Magilligan prison. Obviously, on the Crumlin Road, it would give people the opportunity to have much greater access to a range of jobs than is currently the case.

Mr A Maginness: Mr Deputy Speaker, I apologise for my non-appearance for question 2 in the previous session.

Given the importance of the working-out unit, will the Minister explain what alternative methods were used to deal with prisoners while it was closed?

Mr Ford: Mr Maginness highlights the key point that, in fact, it was difficult to provide facilities on the same basis. Even for those nearing the end of their sentence at Maghaberry, it was difficult to provide opportunities to go out and engage in any kind of constructive activity. Although we have developed the work done in the learning and skills centre in Maghaberry, it is, clearly, not in the same league as that which is done with someone who has been risk-assessed as suitable to live in the working-out unit and engage with the wider community. I hope that the unit will be a significant step forward in enabling a number of prisoners to benefit from that.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a chuid freagraí go dtí seo. Is the Minister content that the correct procedures and protocols are in place to ensure that the issues that led to the unit being closed will not reoccur?

Mr Ford: I assure Ms McCorley that significant work has been done by the Prison Service to ensure that the problems that arose previously will not recur and that the staffing ratios, arrangements and protocols under which prisoners will live have been addressed properly to ensure that they are there to benefit from the new arrangements and not to exploit them.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 7 has been withdrawn.

Illegal Drugs: North Down

8. **Mr Dunne** asked the Minister of Justice what plans his Department has to control the use of illegal drugs including cannabis within North Down. (AQO 3901/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 is reserved legislation, and, therefore, the Home Secretary is responsible for any amendments. Under that legislation, changes can be taken forward only following advice from the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs. If there were any future amendments to the supporting regulations, the

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety would take the lead. Although that Department would lead on the delivery of the New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs 2011-16, the Department of Justice and its agencies are also key stakeholders. The application of the law is an operational matter for the Chief Constable and his district commanders. Statistics indicate a consistent level of illicit drug seizures over the past two years in north Down.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for his answer. Following on from that information, does the Minister recognise that cannabis is very much a starter drug and, therefore, poses a risk to young people of getting involved in and taking harder drugs?

Mr Ford: I fear that, if I answered that question directly, I would stray into the role of the Minister of Health. Clearly, it is the case that, although not huge, there is, nonetheless, a significant problem with a number of drugs in Northern Ireland. Action is being taken through education and enforcement to seek to deal with that problem.

3.30 pm

Prisoners: Non-payment of Fines

9. **Mr McDevitt** asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the impact on the Prison Service, PSNI and Courts and Tribunals Service of the recent judicial review decision that the automatic imprisonment of people for non-payment of fines was unlawful. (AQO 3902/11-15)

Mr Ford: On 22 March 2013, the divisional court found that the long-established practice for dealing with the non-payment of fines and other monetary penalties failed to comply fully with the legislative provisions. In particular, the court held that there should be a further court hearing at which a defendant can attend and make representations before a decision is made on how any outstanding fine should be enforced.

There are more than 36,000 warrants outstanding, with a value of £7.5 million, for 20,000 defendants. Although the validity of the fines themselves is not in question, it is clear from the judgement that no further enforcement action can be taken on those fines until the defects in the process have been remedied.

The Magistrates' Court rules committee is considering how to give effect to the recommended procedures set out in the judgement. Once rules are in place, my officials in the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service will work with the judiciary to ensure that all outstanding fines are brought back before the court for review. It is clear that that will be a resource-intensive and time-consuming exercise.

Where, following a hearing, the court issues a warrant of commitment, enforcement will remain the PSNI's responsibility. However, Members will be aware that I recently consulted on a range of measures to reform the way in which fines are collected and enforced, and I am working to establish a new civilian fine enforcement service in this Assembly mandate. The new service will have an enhanced range of powers to collect and enforce fines and other monetary penalties.

Following the judgement, further instructions are being provided to the Prison Service to recalculate the release dates for any current prisoners whose sentences include a

period of time for a fine default. At present, defendants are not being arrested for fine warrant default.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am afraid that there is not time for a supplementary question.

Mr Rogers: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I apologise to you, the Minister and the House for my non-appearance for question 1.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Your apology will be passed to the Speaker.

Private Members' Business

Constitutional Convention and Marriage Equality

Debate resumed on amendment to motion:

That this Assembly recognises the importance of the constitutional convention; notes the participation of parties from the Assembly; welcomes the 79% majority vote at the constitutional convention in favour of marriage equality; and calls on the Executive to bring forward the necessary legislation to allow for same-sex marriage. — [Ms McGahan.]

Which amendment was:

Leave out all after "equality;" and insert

"states its support for the extension of civil marriage provisions in Northern Ireland to same-sex couples, provided that robust legislative measures permit faith groups to define, articulate and practise religious marriage as they determine; and calls for respectful dialogue on this issue between all members of society." — [Mr Ford.]

Mr Lyttle: I welcome the opportunity to consider this important issue and to speak in support of the Alliance amendment.

The amendment reflects the Alliance Party's support for the extension of civil marriage to same-sex couples, provided that legislative protection upholds the religious freedom of faith groups to define and practise marriage as they determine. I am willing to rely on the abilities of people with more intellectual rigour than a Finance Minister who refuses to believe that global warming could be man-made to explore the viability of such a law. The amendment also reflects the Alliance Party's longstanding commitment to build a shared society for everyone that is based on religious and civil liberty and equality for all citizens, regardless of age, gender, disability, race, ethnicity or sexual orientation.

I thank the Members who will support our amendment. Indeed, I am baffled that Danny Kinahan will vote against it, given that, in many respects, he made a positive contribution today. This position also reflects the Alliance Party's commitment to stand against discrimination or stigmatisation of any kind.

Mr B McCrea: I am genuinely grateful to the Member for giving way. That is not a platitude, because were it not for his generosity, neither I nor Mr McCallister would have had a chance to speak on this issue. We speak as unionists, and we will vote for the amendment and the motion. I really would have liked the opportunity to confront those in the House who have homophobic tendencies and to challenge them over whether they consider these law-abiding citizens of our country —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

Mr B McCrea: — to be individuals who deserve to be recognised.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member knows fine well that an intervention should be short and to the point.

Mr Lyttle: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I have carefully considered a wide range of sincerely and strongly held views on the issue. People oppose the proposal, because

they believe that equality is afforded to same-sex couples via civil partnerships. Others oppose it because they believe that it contravenes their Christian faith. However, other people support it because of their Christian faith or because they believe that it is the state's duty to treat all citizens equally.

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lyttle: I want to make some progress. I might let you in later.

I believe that the principles of freedom of religion, freedom from religion and equality for all citizens that democracy affords us provides us with the best framework in which to build the most safe, fair, shared and prosperous society possible under government by the people.

As a Christian, I cherish the freedom of religion that I have in a democracy to communicate and practise my faith and belief that marriage is the voluntary lifelong union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others under God. I give my assurances that I am in no way embarrassed or ashamed to say that that is who I am. I therefore believe that the religious freedom of people and groups of faith to define and observe their understanding of marriage should be upheld absolutely.

However, I also take very seriously my responsibility as a democratically elected representative to uphold not only the democratic principle of freedom of religion but freedom from religion and equality before the law for all citizens. Those principles exist for some very good historical reasons, not least to protect society against the abuse of religion and majoritarian rule.

How, then, should those principles apply to the law on marriage in Northern Ireland? I must admit that, despite being happily married for five years — hopefully, my wife agrees with that view — I had never closely examined the legislation relating to marriage in Northern Ireland. Despite the strongly held views on the issue, I wonder how many other people have yet to closely examine the law as well.

On examining the law on marriage in Northern Ireland, which is the Marriage (Northern Ireland) Order 2003, I discovered that a distinction is made between religious marriage and civil marriage. Indeed, an explicit requirement of civil marriage is that it is conducted in a secular manner, with no religious or spiritual basis. The proposal is that civil or secular marriage be extended to all citizens, regardless of sexual orientation; not the redefinition of religious marriage.

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lyttle: I want to make progress.

I find it reasonable that a person of same-sex orientation, which is a legal sexual orientation in Northern Ireland, expects, under the principles of democracy, to have equal access to state-provided civil marriage. I also believe that, if the ability of people in groups of faith to define and observe religious marriage as they determine is upheld, aspects of the marriage that they hold dear will survive and thrive. I am acutely aware of the need for respectful, accurate and fair dialogue about this issue. I hope that my contribution today has reflected that aim.

The Alliance Party is wholly committed to delivering a shared society for everyone in Northern Ireland. I support the amendment.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Sinn Féin supports the Alliance amendment. Molann Sinn Féin an ceart um comhionannas sóisialta, gnéis agus cultúrtha. Sinn Féin advocates the right to social, economic, gender and cultural equality. That encompasses equality for all, irrespective of race, age, marital or family status, sexual orientation, physical or mental capacities, ethnicity, social origin, political or religious affiliations, or membership of the Travelling community.

Creating the conditions for establishing an equal society means recognising that many diverse groups and sections of Irish society need enhanced protection. We must tackle the trend of blaming a person or group for their exclusion from society. Republicans are only too well aware of what it means to be treated as second-class citizens. Our policies are the result of decades of resistance to marginalisation and discrimination.

There appears to be confusion among some Members as to how Sinn Féin arrives at policy. We have full discussion. We then go to our ard fheis, which happened two and a half weeks ago. At that ard fheis, in the glare of the media, we have discussion and debate. People speak for and against, and we arrive at our decisions. We did that. Marriage equality received overwhelming support at our ard fheis two and a half weeks ago in my beautiful hometown of Castlebar.

The constitutional convention was established by resolution of both Houses of the Oireachtas. It is a decision-making forum of 100 people, made up of 66 citizens, 33 parliamentarians and an independent chairperson. It is unfortunate that some Members in the debate tried to denigrate that process. I am a member of the Sinn Féin team. Three weeks ago — the same week as our ard fheis — the topic of equal marriage was discussed.

At noon on the Sunday, 79% of the constitutional convention voted that the constitution should be changed to allow for same-sex marriage. The convention was then asked to vote on the following statement:

“having regard to the changed arrangements in relation to marriage, the State shall enact laws incorporating changed arrangements in regard to the parentage, guardianship and the upbringing of children”.

The vote for that was 81% in favour.

Sinn Féin had a full team there that weekend, even though our ard fheis was on. Members of our team left Castlebar in the early hours of the morning to ensure that our votes in favour of change were counted. Despite the fact that his party conference was on, Steven Agnew was there because he also believes in equality. The SDLP was not there for that topic. Its representative, Alban Maginness, was there every other weekend, so you can read into that what you like. In the past, the SDLP has used different excuses for some of its people not voting in Stormont or Westminster. On the days when the vote was in Westminster, the excuse was that they had pressing business in Stormont, and vice versa when the vote was here.

Mr McDevitt: Will the Member give way?

Ms Ruane: No; I will not. *[Interruption.]* No. You have had plenty of opportunities. It was unfortunate for the SDLP that the convention was on a Sunday — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms Ruane: — in Dublin. It will have to think up —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member should resume her seat. I must remind Members that, while other Members are speaking, they must be given the Floor.

Ms Ruane: It is unfortunate for the SDLP that the constitutional convention was on a Sunday in Dublin. It will have to think up another excuse. While it is at it, it should stop double-jobbing.

Mr McDavitt: Will the Member give way?

Ms Ruane: You had your opportunity. Attitudes in Ireland are changing, because people do not want citizens discriminated against and because our lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities have said, "Enough is enough." They are standing up for themselves and their communities. They understand that, if they do not, the hateful words of the "never, never, never" brigade will continue to fan the flames of homophobic behaviour. They understand that, if they do not stand up and become visible, more young people will die by suicide, because if they do not hear a counter voice to the vitriolic gay-bashing, they will internalise it and their self-esteem will be affected. Maith sibh GLYNI, GLEN, the Rainbow Project, Cara-Friend, ICCL and Marriage Equality.

During the debate, Sinn Féin has been accused of lots of things. We have been accused of grandstanding and wasting the Assembly's time. It is not a waste of time to talk about rights. It is not a waste of time to talk about protecting our children. If we were having a debate on suicide, we would all be up. You have to look at the root causes of suicide and the high percentage of people in the gay and lesbian community who take their own lives because of the way that our society treats them. We have also been accused of raising expectations. Wow. Yes; we are raising expectations. We are raising the expectation that they, like all of us, are entitled to equality, equality, equality. Fundamentally, that is what this is about. It is unfortunate that our Minister of Justice thinks that we are wasting time. I am on the Policing Board and I have seen the figures for homophobic attacks.

We have been told that Sinn Féin is doing this for votes and that, if we do it, we will lose votes. Which is it? We are doing this because it is the right thing to do. I want to pay tribute to those wonderful, brave people who have come out. They are the modern equivalent of the suffragettes and they will not be silenced. Their families, friends and the political parties that support change will also not be silenced. There is no room for sitting on the fence on this issue. All our children are affected and it is about fighting for all our children's rights.

I welcome John McCallister's and Basil McCrea's votes for the motion today, and I want to put that on record. The UUP is all over the place. Mike Nesbitt needs to show leadership. A free vote is not leadership; it is ducking the issue. Parties are supposed to have policies; tell us what the UUP policy is. There is nothing more insulting to people whose rights are being denied than to see the wringing of hands and to hear the hollow words:

"I, as leader, have to respect consciences."

Religious groups are free to define and practice marriages as they wish, but the state has a duty to treat all citizens

equally. The DUP has a little-known slogan: "Save Ulster from Sodomy." Do you remember that campaign? It was begun by Rev Ian Paisley to prevent the decriminalisation of homosexuality. Ultimately, and thankfully, that campaign was unsuccessful. Then we had the "never, never, never" to civil partnerships. Now we have the Civil Partnership Act 2004, so that was another unsuccessful campaign. Now, their latest is "never, never, never" to equal marriage. Well, watch this space. *[Interruption.]* The DUP Members might block it today, but they know that they are standing in the ocean trying to hold back —

3.45 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I ask the Member to resume her seat. Moderation and good temper are required at all times in the House, as the Speaker has repeatedly reminded Members. The Member is concluding her remarks, and she should have the opportunity to do that.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat. Today I heard an interview with Peter Weir, and he could not answer the question on whether he supports civil partnerships. He could not answer it, and he was asked it five or six times. What is happening now is that the DUP is twisting and turning on a hook on that issue. It has moved away, thankfully, from the language of sodomy, perversion and deviance to the new language. They now talk about protecting the traditional institution of marriage between a man and a woman and protecting society. That is the same argument used by the apartheid regime when its laws banned black and white people from getting married.

The DUP now attempts to claim the space of defending children's rights, but do you know what, it fails to define which children it is talking about. Is it the children of gay parents who are currently discriminated against? Is it the children who will define themselves in later years as gay? If there are five children in a family, four are straight and one is gay, which rights do they protect? Which children's rights are they protecting here? What about the young people now who are in torment because they are internalising a mistaken message that there is something wrong with them, and who are full of self-hate? What about those poor children and young people? The DUP argument is also insulting to single parents. I have no doubt that, if we were arguing 100 years ago about votes for women, we would hear the exact same claptrap about that.

The DUP might block the motion today, but equal marriage is coming. Sinn Féin is proud to stand shoulder to shoulder with the LGBT community. We will play our part in ensuring that change happens, because Sinn Féin is a party of equality.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Before we proceed to the question on the amendment, I remind Members that it requires only a simple majority.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 46; Noes 51.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Copeland, Mr Dickson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon,

Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr McCallister, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr B McCrea, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Dickson and Mr Lyttle

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr Lunn, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Clarke and Mr McQuillan.

The following Members voted in both Lobbies and are therefore not counted in the result: Mrs Cochrane, Mr McCarthy

Question accordingly negated.

Main Question put.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 42; Noes 53.

AYES

Nationalist:

Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Unionist:

Mr Copeland, Mr McCallister, Mr B McCrea.

Other:

Mr Agnew, Ms Lo.

Tellers for the Ayes: Ms McGahan and Ms Ruane.

NOES

Unionist:

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy,

Mr Kinahan, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Other:

Mrs Cochrane, Mr Lunn, Mr McCarthy.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Clarke and Mr McQuillan.

<i>Total Votes</i>	<i>95</i>	<i>Total Ayes</i>	<i>42</i>	<i>[44.2%]</i>
<i>Nationalist Votes</i>	<i>37</i>	<i>Nationalist Ayes</i>	<i>37</i>	<i>[100.0%]</i>
<i>Unionist Votes</i>	<i>53</i>	<i>Unionist Ayes</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>[5.7%]</i>
<i>Other Votes</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>Other Ayes</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>[40.0%]</i>

The following Members voted in both Lobbies and are therefore not counted in the result: Mr Dickson, Mr Ford, Mr Lyttle.

Main Question accordingly negated (cross-community vote).

Adjourned at 4.14 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 30 April 2013

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Ministerial Statements

North/South Ministerial Council: Institutional Format

Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister): In compliance with section 52C(2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, we wish to make the following statement on the eighth North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) institutional meeting, which was held in Stormont Castle on Monday 29 April 2013. The Northern Ireland Executive were represented by the First Minister and me, and the Irish Government were represented by Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Eamon Gilmore. The First Minister and I chaired the meeting.

We had a broad discussion on the economy, particularly on the economic challenges that are faced in each jurisdiction and the budgetary actions being taken to address them. There were discussions on corporation tax and the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA). We noted the importance of building confidence in the economy and the tourism industry and recognised the benefit of mutual co-operation in both. There was also a discussion on the upcoming G8 summit to be held in Enniskillen and on developments during the Irish EU presidency.

We discussed the Irish presidency of the EU in 2013 and welcomed the co-operation that had taken place between Irish Government and Executive Ministers. We noted progress on the various EU-related matters, and we noted that, while both the multiannual financial framework and a reform of the common agricultural policy (CAP) have been agreed at European Government level, negotiations are ongoing between the EU Council of Ministers and the EU Parliament.

We also discussed the current situation with EU funds, particularly from Peace III, INTERREG IV and FP7 research and development programmes. The potential for future programmes was also discussed, in particular a new Peace programme.

We welcomed progress under the north-west gateway initiative and noted that there would be further engagement with key stakeholders to seek their views on the future development of the initiative. The Council agreed to review progress on that engagement at a future meeting.

We discussed matters relating to the North/South bodies, noting progress in their corporate and business plans and the implementation of cumulative efficiency savings in the bodies. We also discussed governance issues, including the review of the financial memoranda and changes to the

North/South pension scheme. A further report on progress will be provided to the next NSMC institutional meeting.

We noted changes to the boards of the North/South bodies and that an event for board chairs, vice chairs and chief executives had been hosted by the joint secretaries in February 2013. We thanked the outgoing chief executive of Waterways Ireland, John Martin, and the outgoing chief executive of the Loughs Agency, Derick Anderson, for their contributions to the work of the North/South bodies and wished them well in their retirement. We noted that work is under way to identify their successors.

We discussed the St Andrews Agreement review and looked forward to further discussion at the next NSMC plenary meeting.

The next plenary meeting will take place in July 2013, and we agreed to meet again in institutional format in October 2013.

Mr Moutray: I thank the deputy First Minister for bringing his statement to the House this morning. Did he receive any assurance from the Irish Government that they will get agreement on CAP reform over the line before their presidency ends in June?

Mr M McGuinness: I certainly think that that is their ambition. At yesterday's meeting, we all noted that progress had been made on CAP reform during the EU negotiations. We noted that CAP reform negotiations had progressed in recent months and the ongoing trilateral discussions between the Parliament, the Commission and the presidency aim to reach a final agreement by June this year. Of course, the support provided by the CAP remains crucial for farmers and rural communities, hence the agreement by EU leaders to reduce the CAP budget by 13% in real terms for the 2014-2020 period, compared with the 2007-2013 period. Obviously, that is disappointing, but work continues to ensure that the final agreement delivers a flexible CAP, particularly in relation to the move to flat-rate payments and greening, which can be tailored to address local concerns. I know that our Agriculture Minister and Simon Coveney have been involved in meetings on that issue. Given the fact that the Irish Government have the presidency of the EU at this time, his voice is particularly influential.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an LeasChéad-Aire as an ráiteas sin. I thank the deputy Prime Minister — gabh mo leithschéal — the deputy First Minister, for his statement. Were the A5 and the Narrow Water bridge, both very important cross-border projects, discussed at your meeting?

Mr M McGuinness: Yes, both issues were discussed. Everybody knows that those projects are vital for cross-border infrastructure, and it was very important that we discussed them yesterday. It is also important to stress that our Executive and the Irish Government are fully committed to implementing the A5 project. Everybody is conscious of the recent judicial review where a judgement was made on one of the 12 objections; in the other 11, the court found for the Department. The issue of habitats and the environmental impact assessment went against the Department. The Minister decided not to appeal but to go for a remedy. It appears that that remedy will probably require one year to 18 months to resolve. However, there is still total commitment from the Executive and the Irish Government to the scheme.

During the discussions with Eamon Gilmore, we also took the opportunity to remind him that the First Minister and I, in previous conversations with Enda Kenny, had pressed the Irish Government to ensure that the decision that they took to withdraw from their part of the scheme — with the exception of £50 million — needed to be reviewed on an ongoing basis. The Taoiseach gave us a commitment that it would be reviewed in 2013. We hope that that will take place this year. If the Irish Government are in a position to come up with their end of it, it could all coincide neatly with what will, hopefully, be a positive development with regard to the A5 when the Department goes through the procedures that will have to be undertaken.

In relation to the Narrow Water bridge, the Department of Finance and Personnel is undertaking a rigorous critical review, as per the assessment process outlined by the INTERREG IVa programme. That process involves DFP reviewing the costs, benefits, value for money, deliverability and risk associated with the project and the verification of all relevant planning preconditions to ensure that they are adhered to and statutory approval is sought and obtained. I hope that there is an early and positive decision, given the importance of the project.

I recently met representatives from the area who are all very exercised about the prospect that the bridge could be built. From my experience and as the Speaker knows well, there is the impact that a very small bridge in our city has had not just on the architecture of the city but on the psychology of the citizens of the city, bringing people together in a very powerful way during the City of Culture celebrations. There is no doubt whatsoever that we will see the situation expedited in the next short while, and, hopefully, we will see a positive outcome.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the deputy First Minister for his full report. He said that Ministers:

“discussed the St Andrews Agreement review and looked forward to further discussion at the next NSMC plenary meeting.”

Could I ask the deputy First Minister about that aspect of the meeting? At the last North/South meeting, which, I think, was in November or slightly earlier than that, there was a report that proposals relating to the review would be made by Christmas. There is no mention of those proposals in this report.

Mr Speaker: I encourage the Member to get to his point.

Mr A Maginness: I just want to ask the deputy First Minister if those proposals were put to the meeting, and,

if they were not, why not? When will there be progress on that issue?

Mr M McGuinness: We had a very useful discussion on the St Andrews Agreement review at yesterday's meeting, and the part of the review relating to the recommendations specific to the North/South bodies is now effectively complete, subject to any further discussions at NSMC sectoral meetings. The respective Finance Departments have concluded that the provision of Enterprise-scale shared services within the bodies is not feasible due to a lack of scale. However, they have recommended that the bodies should continue to share knowledge and expertise where it is beneficial to do so. Work by the Finance Departments on the review of the financial memoranda is at an advanced stage, and we hope to have that work completed by December 2013.

At the June 2012 plenary, we advised the Council that there was still some work to do in terms of reference two and three, and we agreed that further reflection on those elements of the review would be needed. At the November 2012 plenary, we agreed that senior officials would meet to bring forward proposals so that we could move to deal with this at the next plenary in July, at which point, we hope, there will be a decisive step forward on the matter.

Mr Nesbitt: What is the Minister's assessment of Peace III and his thinking on the shape and focus of the proposed Peace IV funding?

Mr M McGuinness: Peace III has brought enormous benefits to our community. There is no doubt whatsoever that it has contributed greatly to harmony and cohesion in the community and increased working together, not just in the North but between North and South.

Everybody here is very conscious of the discussions that have been ongoing in relation to Peace IV. The First Minister and I were recently in Brussels and were involved in serious discussions around that. That happened against the backdrop of the discussions at European level on the European budget, over which there was much disagreement. We were pleased to see that €150 million has now been committed. That is a great relief, and that money needs to be used wisely. There is also a huge challenge for both Governments to recognise that maybe they could contribute further to that financially. We have recently had discussions on that with the British and Irish Governments.

We cannot pre-empt the outcome of what will be an important vote in the European Parliament. It has already voted down the budget, which is par for the course at European level. However, there is increased optimism that the budget will be endorsed by the Parliament in the next couple of months. If that is the case, the €150 million will be secured. We will then agree how we direct that money in a way that brings maximum benefit to our community.

10.45 am

Mr Lyttle: I thank the deputy First Minister for his statement. I am sure that he will join me in recognising the work of organisations such as the IFA, Groundwork and the Playhouse Theatre and their presentations to the EU on the work of the Peace programme. What regional framework does the deputy First Minister think needs to be in place to continue to support the work of such

organisations if and when Peace programmes from the European Union are no longer available?

Mr M McGuinness: I certainly would endorse the comments of the Member about the contribution made at the exhibition that took place in Brussels, which we were honoured and privileged to attend. The work that is happening within the IRA — sorry, within the IFA — *[Laughter.]* Just to — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr M McGuinness: Just to reiterate the point that they have gone away, you know. *[Laughter.]* The anti-sectarianism work that has taken place in the IFA has to be commended. Other events have taken place since the visit to Brussels that I have been very pleased to attend in my own city. I pay tribute to all those who are involved in that important work.

In the context of Peace IV, we will have to consider how we can ensure the continuation of that good work. There is a huge responsibility on everybody to recognise that sectarianism is very damaging to our society and economy. Given that we will see an IFA cup final shortly between Cliftonville and Glentoran, I appeal to everybody associated with both clubs, including the supporters of both clubs, to engage in that game in a way that will bring maximum enjoyment to themselves. There is always a danger in the context of such occasions that a tiny minority who are not representative of the overall fan base will try to exploit them for their own end. We need to see increased exhortations on behalf of people within clubs and communities to impress on people how negative that is and how damaging it is for community relations.

Mr G Robinson: Will the deputy First Minister outline the topics included under “Future Development”?

Mr M McGuinness: One of the most important discussions that we had with the Tánaiste yesterday centred on youth unemployment and the prospect that a fund that exists at European level can be used in a way that will bring benefits to ourselves and the South. Whether we can exploit that fund remains to be seen. However, we have emphasised to all our Departments the importance of continuing to draw down funding from Europe and to meet our Programme for Government commitment of increasing that by something like 20%. Those discussions are continuing. It is important that we continue to emphasise to people that the programmes that are in place, which are very wide-ranging — far too wide-ranging for me to go into in detail this morning — are crucial.

We have to go forward with an Executive approach, but Departments, some of which could, maybe, do a wee bit more, need to consistently examine how they can put in a better performance on financial drawdown for the sort of programmes that, I know, the Member would like to see take place, not least for his own area.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Is the Irish presidency of the EU proving to be beneficial and successful for our own agriculture sector and the ongoing talks centring around the reform of the common agricultural policy?

A Member: You cannot hear a word he is saying.

Mr M McGuinness: He was basically asking whether the Irish Government’s presidency of the European Union

was beneficial to the farming community, North and South, in the context of the CAP negotiations. I think that I gave a clear indicator earlier that those discussions are ongoing and that Minister Coveney and Minister O’Neill are collaborating to ensure that we get maximum benefit for farmers, North and South.

When the Irish Government’s EU presidency began, there was a lot of concern that the issue of budgets would not be resolved, but it appears that it is on its way to resolution. There will, hopefully, be a final vote in the European Parliament prior to the end of the Irish Government’s presidency of the EU. If that and the CAP negotiations were settled, I think that the Irish Government would regard their presidency as a huge success, albeit low-key.

Mr Speaker: Members who turn the amplifying system away from themselves will not be heard in the House.

Mr Byrne: I thank the deputy First Minister for the statement and the answer he gave about the A5. However, can he confirm that any obstacle that is in the way will be removed as quickly as possible so that the project can progress without any diversion of moneys to other projects? Secondly, in relation to CAP reform, will the deputy First Minister acknowledge that, under the current budget proposals, there will be a severe, drastic cut to the rural development programme relating to Northern Ireland, because of the Cameron approach to the budget?

Mr M McGuinness: On the Member’s first point, I know that there is huge concern in the west amongst all the councils and, indeed, the elected representatives that the A5 project could be jeopardised. Indeed, some in the media — mostly commentators, I suppose; I am not blaming media organisations — went as far as to say, more or less, that the project was dead in the water. Nothing could be further from the truth. This is a very important item for the North/South Ministerial Council. It is of an international dimension, and I think that the commitment reasserted at the meeting yesterday between ourselves and the Tánaiste that we are still committed to the project is clearly there for everybody to see.

I think that the Department is moving with all haste to deal with the one area of difficulty — the habitats — and the need for an environmental impact assessment. Obviously, that might lead to all sorts of new processes being put in place, which will cause a delay of, maybe, something between a year and 18 months, but, in the context of that being resolved, we are absolutely committed to providing the funds to ensure that this road will be constructed.

As I said, I hope that any financial review that takes place in Dublin with regard to their budgets will recognise the importance of coming back on board on this vital scheme. It is not just important for us here in the North. Sometimes, when people talk about the A5, they talk about it being a road to Dublin.

Clearly it is a road to Dublin, but it is also a very important internal road for the North of Ireland. It is important for people living in the area that the Member comes from and people living in Omagh to get to Belfast and to link with the new road at the Ballygawley roundabout. It is a road that ticks all sorts of boxes internally within the North and between North and South, so we are absolutely dedicated and committed to ensuring that the project goes ahead with funding being made available.

The Member is absolutely right about the CAP: there are difficulties. The European Union has taken its own decision and has imposed cuts. It is now a matter of seeing what the final outcome will be when the deliberations end in a vote at the European Parliament. Our Minister and Minister Coveney are working closely together to minimise whatever difficulties will be presented to the farming community, North and South.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an LeasChéad-Aire. Will the deputy First Minister provide an update on any discussions relating to EU matters?

Mr M McGuinness: We had a wide-ranging discussion on the EU. Yesterday, the Tánaiste made it clear, not only during the meeting but in the press conference afterwards, that he regarded the ongoing discussions between the EU and the Governments of the United States and Canada as vital in the context of the island of Ireland and, specifically, the North. Any increased trade agreements with those English-speaking countries would clearly suggest that, when they consider foreign direct investment or further trade agreements, they are more inclined to focus their attention on English-speaking parts of Europe. That gives the island of Ireland a big advantage.

We had a useful update from the Tánaiste on the Irish presidency of the EU, which, as we all know, runs to the end of June. The Irish Government are focusing on securing stability and driving recovery in Europe, leading to job creation and growth, which all of us want. The Tánaiste was keen to acknowledge the attendance of our Ministers and officials at a range of presidency-linked events and the assistance that we have provided through secondees from a number of Departments that are working on the presidency. Of course, the most significant issue is the agreement on the provision of funding of €150 million for a further Peace programme. The discussion was wide-ranging and dealt with all those matters.

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for his statement. It is good that things are progressing. What will the legacy be at the end of the presidency? What can people look back on and say, "We have moved forward. This was our main achievement during the six-month period"?

Mr M McGuinness: Obviously, the presidency is being held by the Irish Government. We had our own discussions with them prior to their taking over the presidency. From their perspective, the big concern was whether there would be agreement on budgets at European level. The last time that the First Minister and I were in Brussels, the British Government, in particular, were getting a very bad press from European leaders because people thought that their approach would slow down the prospect of an agreement and, as a result, be damaging when future budgets were being decided. That has now been resolved, and there is agreement at governmental and European level. The European Parliament will now be the only body to adjudicate on this. I think that a vote will probably come in June. If that and the CAP negotiations go through in the way in which they have designed them, I think that the Irish Government will consider that to be a major success for them.

We have renewed our efforts with Brussels and are trying to get the drawdown of extra funds to the target of the increased 20% that we sought when we outlined our

Programme for Government. That is why it is critical that all Departments are energised about trying to capitalise on that. As a result of our discussions yesterday, the First Minister and I intend to pursue one or two new angles that were suggested by Eamon Gilmore.

Mr Spratt: I thank the deputy First Minister for his answers so far. In reply to a question on the A5, he mentioned getting the Southern Government back on track with the financial programme. Can he confirm whether there was any discussion on the £50 million due from the Irish Government in 2015-16?

11.00 am

Mr M McGuinness: The Irish Government are still committed to that; they have not withdrawn that commitment. During yesterday's meeting, the First Minister and I emphasised to the Tánaiste the importance of the review promised by Enda Kenny when the Irish Government announced that they were withdrawing their commitment because of economic circumstances and their negotiations with the IMF and the European Bank. I think that that will be a very welcome review during this year.

It is hard to say at this stage whether we can be optimistic that the review will mean that the Irish Government come back on track to the full extent that they initially committed to, but we certainly intend to pursue that. We do not intend to give up because this will be, I think, a very important economic driver for us in getting proper infrastructure in the west that will benefit everybody, not least by putting three major companies to work, which is a very important aspect, and, of course, their employing local people, which is also critical. As we go forward, we are very committed to this project and to seeing it through to completion, which will require the Irish Government coming back on board.

Mr Allister: I want to ask about the pension scheme for the North/South executive bodies set up under the Belfast Agreement, not the North/South body that the Minister knows best and to which he inadvertently referred some time ago. The pension scheme for those bodies entails lavish employer contributions. In one case, over 31% of salary is contributed by the employer and a mere 1.5% is contributed by the employee. When will that lavish squander be addressed by bringing the scheme into line with what exists in the Civil Service scheme? Is it good enough for it simply to be pushed back for another six months? Why not address it now instead of looking at it further down the road?

Mr M McGuinness: At the NSMC meeting on 28 March 2013, we noted that the NSMC approved an amendment to the North/South pension scheme, which means that increases to the scheme for benefits paid in the northern currency will be in line with the consumer price index. Prior to that, they were increased in line with the retail price index. The amendment ensures that the North/South pension scheme follows public sector pension policy, as agreed by the Executive.

We also noted that the two Finance Departments are in discussion about how to further amend the scheme. These amendments will ensure that northern members are not immune from pension reform. The first amendment will increase employee contributions on average from 1.5% by 3.2 percentage points. That will align with the employee rates payable from April 2014 in the principal Civil

Service pension scheme here in the North. The second amendment will introduce, by April 2015, the wider Hutton reforms, such as the introduction of a career average revalued earnings scheme and a linkage between the North/South pension scheme age and the state pension age.

Mr B McCrea: In an earlier answer to Mr Maginness about the St Andrews Agreement review, the deputy First Minister said that the group had discussed North/South issues. However, it seems that a wider discussion is needed here. Will the deputy First Minister outline whether there are ongoing discussions on the matter and whether he thinks that those should be treated as a matter of urgency?

Mr M McGuinness: Obviously, these situations are kept under constant review. I outlined our approach to the matter in my earlier answer. With respect, I think that there is a vagueness in the question. I am not trying to score a point. If the Member would like to communicate his concerns to me more directly, I could give him a much fuller answer.

North/South Ministerial Council: Road Safety

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): In compliance with section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I wish to make the following statement on the fourteenth meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) in transport sectoral format, which was held in Armagh on Wednesday 17 April 2013.

Before doing so, it is fitting that I record that a further death, of someone aged 25, occurred on our roads in the past 24 hours. Given that the statement touches on road safety issues, I think it only appropriate that the House notes and expresses condolences to the family of the young person who died so tragically.

The meeting was attended by me, by the Regional Development Minister, Danny Kennedy, and by Minister Varadkar TD, Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport. I chaired the meeting. I will address those agenda items for which my Department has responsibility: mutual recognition of penalty points; road user safety; and vehicle safety policy and enforcement. I would also like to report that there was a transport sectoral meeting in Dublin on 28 March for a very short number of minutes to facilitate the approval, in advance of the end of the financial year, of an amendment to the North/South pension scheme.

I think that this has been touched on elsewhere this morning, but the Council meeting in April discussed the importance of the Narrow Water bridge and noted the timeline for the drawdown of European funding. The Council also noted that the project had obtained planning permission and a marine licence and that that involved extensive engagement with stakeholders. It looks forward to the assessment process being completed as soon as possible.

I emphasise that the planning consent and marine consent have been issued and that the standard pre-commencement conditions in advance of construction are all proceeding satisfactorily. I wrote to the First Minister and deputy First Minister in advance of the institutional meeting yesterday about the Narrow Water bridge matter to try to accelerate a conclusion to it.

The Council also discussed the negative impacts of the use of illegal fuel on the transport industry, on revenues to the exchequers and to the environment. There will be a further statement to the House about last week's North/South environmental sectoral meeting, where the impact of the use of illegal fuel was discussed. All of us who were present viewed the situation as acute.

I met representatives of the haulage industry yesterday; I have now met them twice over the past four or five months. They confirmed to me the severity of the situation and the impact on legitimate business of those who use completely or partially laundered fuel. That is something that I believe that the NSMC and the respective Governments need to further interrogate and address.

The Council noted that the steering and working groups on the mutual recognition of penalty points are continuing to take forward their work and that a further update will be provided to the next NSMC transport meeting, which is scheduled for November. The Council agreed that that is an important road safety initiative, and it is aware that it is a complex and groundbreaking matter.

The public consultation on the proposals, which was launched in Northern Ireland on 12 March 2013 and which is closing on 14 May 2013, was also noted. The Council further noted the commitment from both sides, North and South, to have the necessary primary and secondary legislation in place by 31 December 2014. This will be a first for Europe: the mutual recognition of penalty points between two jurisdictions that are members of the European Union.

Where road user safety is concerned, the Council welcomed the continued sharing of knowledge and experience between officials from both jurisdictions on the delivery of our respective road safety strategies and on measures to further reduce road casualties. I particularly welcomed the recent launch of Ireland's road safety strategy, which took place at an EU road transport safety conference on serious injuries that was held in Dublin on 20 March. That event was attended by Minister Kennedy and me. It was a very important event, because, although a lot of attention has been focused legitimately on road deaths, less attention has historically been paid to serious injuries. That is a matter that Leo Varadkar and the Irish Government are quite clearly attending to and taking forward as part of the EU presidency.

On that occasion, I also met the chair of the Road Safety Authority (RSA) in Dublin, Gay Byrne. I have written to him, subsequently, to suggest some further North/South activities between the RSA and the Department of the Environment (DOE) on road safety. I also shared progress on the drafting of our road traffic amendment Bill, which will include provisions to tackle drink-driving, reform the learner and restricted driver regime with the introduction of graduated driver licensing, and make the wearing of helmets mandatory when riding a quad bike on public roads. I hope that that Bill will come before the House, subject to Executive approval, for First and Second Reading in advance of the summer recess.

We also welcomed progress on Ireland's road traffic Bill 2013, which will include provisions to further reform Ireland's driver licensing regime, adjust the penalty points regime and make a number of amendments to legislation regarding commercial vehicle roadworthiness testing. We shared information on new road safety campaigns in each jurisdiction, including Vision Zero, which I launched last week and which has already been the subject of positive public comment even though it is a very challenging campaign; a new 60-second TV campaign launched by the RSA in March 2013 to educate drivers on sharing the roads safely with cyclists; and a seat belt wearing campaign that is planned for launch by the Department this autumn.

We welcomed the continuing proactive co-operation to target a wide range of illegal activity in the goods haulage and passenger transport industries. I accept, especially having met the haulage industry yesterday, that further tension is needed in the escalation of enforcement, especially in respect of goods haulage. When I met the hauliers yesterday, I adjourned the meeting to reconvene on 29 May to see what more can be done in the interim period. Nonetheless, there will be an increasingly targeted approach towards enforcement and continuing liaison on cross-border enforcement operations in both jurisdictions.

We welcomed the signing of the memorandum of understanding between Ireland and the UK on mutual

recognition of vehicle-type approval, which should help trade. The Council also noted the continuing co-operation on enforcement of EU tachograph and drivers hours rules and proposed a training exchange for enforcement officers, which will take place in 2013.

Ms Lo (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment): I, too, express my sympathies to the family and friends of the victim of that latest tragic road accident.

I thank the Minister for his statement. I welcome the ongoing co-operation between the two jurisdictions to improve road safety across Ireland. Given that the mutual recognition of penalty points between North and South would require a multi-agency approach in Northern Ireland, and given that the Minister has given the commitment that the necessary legislation will be in place by December 2014, will he confirm that he has Executive agreement to bring forward a Bill on this important issue? If so, when does he expect it to be introduced?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for her question. To date, the number of deaths this year on our roads in Northern Ireland is 18, which is around twice the figure for this time last year. It is difficult to extrapolate from that what the figures will be over the next four and eight months. Nonetheless, it is a very timely and stark message to all of us and all road users. It is a message that is also understood in the Republic, where there has been an even more disproportionate increase in the number of road deaths in the four months of this calendar year than there was in the same period last year. That is something that Leo Varadkar, when Mr Kennedy and I attended the EU serious injuries conference, raised and spoke about to the media.

11.15 am

That is why we have this campaign, Vision Zero, and why I will be writing to all MLAs, all civil servants and all Ministers to ask them to go online and make the personal commitment to do what they should be doing with respect to road safety. These issues are very personal when it comes to serious injuries, road deaths and their impact on families. If we make that personal commitment, we may be able to make some contribution to ensuring that the figures at the end of the next four months are not of the same pattern as the last four months.

The approach being adopted by Minister Varadkar and me on the mutual recognition of penalty points has been discussed and agreed through the NSMC structures. Policy proposals are currently being developed and, on the far side, those proposals will go to the Executive for approval in advance of legislation being tabled. The principle has been approved. As is normal with new law, we are now going through the relevant processes to bring about the right outcome.

It is not straightforward work. This will be the first time that there will be mutual recognition of penalty points in the European Union; nobody has gone down this road before. Consequently, given the complexity of the regimes North and South, there is a need to create the right administration on the far side of the law being introduced to ensure that there is mutuality in the recognition of penalty points for the categories that will be captured. It is not going to be all categories; it is going to be those areas of greatest threat, namely drink-driving, the wearing

of seat belts, excess speed, careless driving and the use of telephones in cars. The administrative, legal and management issues are very challenging. Nonetheless, the two Governments and the respective Ministers have made the commitment that we will have the law in place by 2014 and the practice in place by 2015.

Mr Hamilton: I want to touch on one of the latter points in the Minister's statement, about:

"co-operation to target a wide range of illegal activity in the goods haulage and passenger transport industries."

What amount of illegality has been detected as a result of that co-operation? What kind of illegality has been taking place? Is there evidence that the co-operation that is taking place between both jurisdictions, on each side of the border, is actually lowering the level of illegality?

Mr Attwood: The question is very timely, given the conversation that I had with the hauliers yesterday. It is their view, for example, that, even in the past number of months, because of challenging economic circumstances and the benefit — I use that word in a very neutral way — to hauliers that use illegal fuel in savings per gallon and benefit per mile, its use is having a hugely disproportionate impact on legitimate businesses.

It is the view of the legitimate businesses that up to and maybe in excess of 50% of hauliers are now using illegal fuel. It is also their view that those multiple small family businesses in the North, in particular, that have served this part of the world very well over many years, face the most immediate threat, given the scale of illegal use. I am only using that as one example of vehicles and hauliers that are not in compliance. There are many examples of the failure of compliance; it is not just that people are using illegitimate fuel.

So, what are we doing in that regard? In my previous remarks, I indicated that I think that the situation is acute and that there is going to be a need to escalate all our enforcement actions, be it through the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA), the Organised Crime Task Force, the various policing and criminal asset agencies North and South or the respective tax authorities. Mindful of that, I think that there is a need for a gear change. A lot of work is going on, but a lot of further work is required. For example, I have a map in my Department on which we have identified those parts of the North, particularly in south Armagh, where fuel sludge has been abandoned on multiple occasions — in essentially the same place — to be collected by the relevant authorities.

There is a road in Northern Ireland where sludge has been dumped following fuel laundering on 10 separate occasions at around the same location. Given that scale of problem, that works itself through with the impact on the hauliers and so on.

So, what are we doing? First, there will be a roll-out of operations that will try to create cohesion between the Southern authorities and the Northern authorities in targeting hauliers who are suspected of failing to comply. The failure of compliance is significant. The figures from the last compliance survey indicated that compliance was at only about 70%. Therefore, at any one time, up to 30% of heavy goods vehicles were not in compliance. That is an improving situation; nonetheless, it is not good enough.

Secondly, we believe that there are hauliers who are using Dublin port in order to move their goods into Britain. Although there appears to be a lot of rigour in the enforcement in Britain at the Scottish ports, in our view, there is not similar enforcement at the Welsh ports. Consequently, I will be writing to the relevant authorities in Britain and the South asking whether the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA), which is the relevant compliance agency in Britain, given that it seems to have a rigorous approach for vehicles from Northern Ireland going into Scotland — there is some evidence and some would claim that that is disproportionate compared with vehicles from other jurisdictions — is applying the same rigour in its other operations, especially at the Holyhead port. Arising from yesterday's meeting, I will write to the relevant authorities to ensure that compliance enforcement is robust at all points of entry and is targeted against hauliers who we suspect are not complying, be that around tachographs, the quality of their vehicle or the illegal fuel that they might be using.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a ráiteas. I welcome the Minister's statement. I welcome the very last point you brought up, Minister, because it seems that a number of small operators who leave here through Belfast heading to Stranraer are unduly stopped by VOSA in England compared with anyone who is going to Holyhead. When do you think you will hear anything back about that? Will you consider meeting hauliers who are having such problems?

Mr Attwood: As I said in my previous remarks, I met hauliers yesterday. I also met them in December when I asked them to come in following the closure of the haulage firm Target. There had been some suggestion — this may not be the full answer, by any means — that part of the reason for the closure of that business was that it was getting squeezed by other hauliers whose cost basis was less because they were using illegal fuel to give them a competitive advantage.

I adjourned yesterday's meeting in the late afternoon with the words that we would reconvene on 29 May, because, in my view, the situation is so acute — there is no other conclusion to draw from that — that it needs immediate intervention. I think that DOE and DVA, through the roll-out of new law on goods vehicles, are escalating their response to the threats that they face across the range of compliance issues, be it around illegal fuel, the conduct of drivers or the quality of vehicles.

So, there is a new regime in place. I will give you one example. New law was rolled out late last June. The consequence of it was that, in January this year, a new enforcement regime was introduced, arising from which there have been 19 so-called public inquiries into the conduct of hauliers. Two of those hauliers are now on the verge of having their haulage licence not just suspended but withdrawn. That was welcomed by the hauliers yesterday. The new regime, created by law through this Assembly in a previous mandate, has now moved to the point where enforcement is interrogating 19 hauliers about which we have concerns. Two of those hauliers are on the verge of losing their licence.

That is the sort of approach that we need to adopt and escalate going forward. I will meet hauliers; I have no difficulty with that. I will meet the representative

organisation again on 29 May in order to take these matters forward.

Mr P Ramsey: Like other Members, I offer sympathy and send thoughts and prayers to all those victims this year. There were 18 deaths, which was most worrying going into a new year.

On the matter of the Narrow Water bridge, will the Minister acknowledge to the House the importance of that project infrastructure for south Down right through to Carlingford lough? Is there any likelihood of seeing progress on this most important matter?

Mr Attwood: Let us be frank about this. We are at the eleventh hour or one minute to midnight, or whatever way you want to convey it. We have run out of road, or run out of bridge, when it comes to this matter being concluded. If that does not bring people to their senses, I do not know what will.

Yesterday, at the North/South institutional meeting, a paper was delivered on how to maximise the drawdown of EU funds. At that meeting, we were trying to scope out how to draw down and maximise EU funds, and on the same agenda there was the issue of the North/South review, part of which, in my view, is to do with Narrow Water. So, on one hand, we are asking to draw down more funds, and on the other hand, there is a risk, which I trust is diminishing, that we are not going to draw down the EU funds for Narrow Water.

Can someone in politics or in government reconcile that to me? President Barroso has opened up the European funding door for us, but in my view we have a lot more to do in order to get through that door. That is as much a comment on my Department as it is on government. How do we reconcile the fact that while Barroso opens the door for European funding, we close it when it comes to Narrow Water? That does not add up politically, and it is disrespectful to the European authorities. More than anything else, it cuts off our nose to spite our face. Whose noses will be cut off? It will be the many people in south Down and County Louth and in the Mourne and the Cooleys; people who need more economic opportunities.

Imagine the situation — I am not prejudging this — in which a planning application is made for a new ferry between Greencastle and Carlingford. I am not saying that that application is going to come in soon —

Mr Kennedy: It will.

Mr Attwood: Someone is saying in the background that it is. I am not prejudging in any shape or form what the outcome of that might be. However, that would be an infrastructure project between two parts of Ireland, between the people of Louth and the people of Down, along with a bridge at the same time. What message would that send out for economic and tourist opportunities and the building of North/South relationships between those two parts of this island?

If this matter is not concluded in the next couple of weeks, we may be past one minute to midnight in getting it over the line. Therefore, there is only one way forward, which is to make the decision now.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for that. I share his condolences with all those who have been bereaved

through traffic accidents this year and in previous years, and also yesterday in County Fermanagh.

The Minister may be aware of significant delays in obtaining operator licences. I wonder whether there is any tie-up between the Republic of Ireland operator licence and the UK operator licence, and whether any lessons can be learned from either jurisdiction in deliberating on those applications.

11.30 am

Mr Attwood: I note what the Member says. It has not been brought to my attention heretofore that there is a delay in issuing operator licences. There should not be delays in issuing consents, whatever their character, be they environmental, planning or road licences. That is part of good government and making sure that our economy works in the interests of all our citizens. If the Member has examples of delays in operator licences being issued, I ask that he bring those to my attention. It has not been brought to my attention thus far by other political representatives or representative organisations for the haulage business. However, if it is brought to my attention, I am more than willing to look at it.

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

Mr Weir: I thank the Minister for his statement. The Minister had discussions with the Southern Government about changes that they are making to the road traffic Bill 2013 and specifically, as referenced in his statement, the amendments on commercial vehicle roadworthiness testing. Will that, in effect, bring standards in the Republic of Ireland up to and in line with standards in Northern Ireland, or are there implications for hauliers and commercial vehicle users in Northern Ireland?

Mr Attwood: I will have to get back to the Member on the specific details. Although I said 2013 in my statement, I think that the Bill is proposed for 2014. However, I will come back to the Member about whether the roadworthiness regime is to be advanced in the image of what we have in the North.

We agree with the Republic that some previous European proposals about roadworthiness were overreaching. My Department, through London, and Minister Varadkar, directly with the European Commission, raised serious concerns, as did the Committee, about the scale and ambition of some European roadworthiness proposals. As I understand it, in the latter months of last year, the scale of those proposals was mitigated in a way that will not disadvantage people here.

We had another conversation on the proposal in London, which has now received Royal Assent, to charge foreign operators to use roads in Britain and Northern Ireland. That will go live next year. I am in sympathy with the Irish Government's view that there should be exemptions for some roads. Those exemptions should not be restricted to a small number of what were previously called unapproved roads, which weave in and out of the border area, criss-crossing at places that people are not aware of, but be broader than that. Given the need for spatial planning on the island of Ireland and the fact that the Irish Government have contributed so substantially to the roads infrastructure in the North and have further ambitions for future years, London should be more flexible about

exemptions to the proposed charging of foreign operators using roads in Northern Ireland and Britain.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a ghabháil leis an Aire as ucht an ráitis atá romhainn ar maidin.

The Minister has written to Gay Byrne and Noel Brett of the Road Safety Authority about elements of its strategy that the DOE might adopt in the North. Will the Minister give us details about those additional elements? Has the NSMC considered the merits of speed limit signs in the North changing to kilometres per hour, as is the case in the rest of Europe?

Mr Attwood: I did write to Gay Byrne. We had a conversation in Dublin Castle about the increasing number of deaths in the three months to date in the North and in Britain. We had years of reducing the number of deaths on the roads in Ireland, with only 48 deaths in the North last year. However, given the serious situation and the risks, could further work be done to profile road safety issues? Given the profile of Mr Byrne, in particular, could he come to the North to get the road safety message out more clearly, both here and on the island generally?

I outlined some possibilities: for example, in the event that the Executive endorse the Bill, which is now all but drafted and contains the road traffic proposals that I referred to earlier — graduated driver-licensing, a reduction in alcohol limits and helmets for quad-bike riders on public roads — there may be an opportunity to demonstrate the Government's authority over road safety issues and encourage more and more people to apply their minds and attention to better driving. There are other examples of that nature.

The more that we co-ordinate on an all-Ireland basis, the better we will be. That is why I am writing to Ministers who are responsible for road safety in all Governments in these islands to suggest that, in the margins of the forthcoming British-Irish Council meeting, which is scheduled for June, we all sit down and try to identify how we can have more integration and coherence when it comes to road safety law and practice. There is the new Bill in the South, the forthcoming Bill in the North and the Green Paper in London, which will look at some of the proposals in our road traffic Bill over the next number of weeks. Is there not an opportunity to create coherence around all that legislation so that, on these islands, there is mutual legislation and a greater scale of common approach that ensures a greater opportunity for people to improve road safety?

The issue of speed limits and signage has not been discussed. You may have a point; it may be worth looking at. I will take further advice on that.

Lord Morrow: The Minister's statement referred to a seat belt wearing campaign to be launched in the autumn. That surprised me somewhat because I thought that most people were already compliant. Does he have any evidence that cross-border traffic impacts considerably on that problem?

Mr Attwood: The main reasons for death or serious injury in road traffic collisions and crashes — they are not accidents because 95% of road crashes come down to human error, and only 5% are viewed as being due to circumstances beyond an individual driver or pedestrian's

control — are using a phone, excess speed, drink-driving and carelessness. I will have to come back to the Member on seat belts. There are figures on the scale of that problem, but I cannot recall them now. Obviously, the problem is more acute in respect of the desirability of wearing seat belts in rear seats. The Irish Government have identified the wearing of seat belts as a road safety issue, and any campaign that addresses any of the threats or risk areas is welcome.

Mr Dallat: I share other Members' regret that road deaths are again on the increase. The Minister will recall that, in the distant past, many road deaths, particularly of young people, took place in border areas.

Can the Minister assure us that the co-operation between the RSA, the DOE, the gardaí and the PSNI is alive and well today? I believe that that co-operation made a very positive contribution to reducing deaths on both sides of the border.

Mr Attwood: I can certainly make a definitive comment about the co-operation between the RSA in the South and the DOE and its agencies in the North. That co-operation is very intense. In March, for example, the relevant authorities North and South met at a conference in Enniskillen to deal further with road safety issues. The fact that, from a standing start a year and a half ago, we have made such progress on the mutual recognition of penalty points is only representative of the fact that Mr Kennedy and I were at the EU conference on serious injuries. More and more on this issue, and on many transport and environment matters, there is better and greater communication and familiarity.

Mr Kennedy and I concur that, at the meetings that we attend in the sectoral formats, substantive, serious and ongoing relevant work is being undertaken and expanded. All the indications are that cross-border co-operation between the police agencies North and South — the Garda Síochána and the PSNI — has never been better than at the moment. I think that that also extends to these issues.

Mr Ross: In answer to a previous question, the Minister mentioned the five main reasons for road collisions, one of which is drink-driving. Were drink-driving strategies discussed at the meeting? Can he confirm that he has changed his mind and is now supporting the Committee's position, which is that repeat offenders for drink-driving offences should face an automatic three-year ban?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his question. Yes, drink-driving was touched on in the overall conversation about road safety and the new legislation that is coming before the Assembly soon, subject to Executive agreement. So, drink-driving is always an issue that is discussed in and around the North/South Ministerial level conversations.

More than that, if the new law is adopted in Northern Ireland, we will be adopting a practice on drink-driving limits that has been in force since October 2011 in the South. As of the bank holiday at the end of October 2011, the Irish Government created a new regime for drink-driving levels. That regime means that there is essentially a de facto zero level for novice drivers and professional drivers and a reduced level of 50 mg in each 100 ml of blood for all others involved in driving offences.

I have no doubt that, when the Bill comes before the Assembly, there will be a lot of conversations on what the right penalty should be for drink-driving offences. The Member touched on that when he said that the Committee's position is that there should be a three-year ban for a repeat offender. My recollection tells me that that is the direction, if not already the practice, in the South. So, I look forward to the debate on that in the Chamber, and I have no doubt that amendments will be tabled on that matter.

You will not get any argument from me about the need to upgrade our law so that we have more deterrents for and greater enforcement in drink-driving. That is why I made the proposals that I did for alcohol limits in people's blood. Clearly, where the line is between where we should be now and where we might be, which was indicated in the Member's question, is the subject of some dispute.

I am in a settled place in what I think is the right approach at this stage, but I understand the argument that we should go further. For example, I have had representations that, if there is to be a zero limit for novice and professional drivers, there should be a zero level for all classes of drivers. I have no doubt that that matter will be further raised and discussed, perhaps by amendment, when we come to the Consideration Stage of the Bill. You will not get resistance from me to the idea that we should push on, even though, in my view, we should not push that far at this stage. However, that is an argument that we are going to have, and the will of the Assembly will prevail.

11.45 am

Mr Campbell: On the issue of the mutual recognition of penalty points, does the Minister share the concern of many Northern Ireland drivers that, despite the complexity that he alluded to, it will be another 18 months before we see, hopefully, the issue resolved? In resolving it, has the Minister examined any possibility, given the complex nature of its resolution, that, post December 2014, there might be a role — I know that he is working at this — for the Driver and Vehicle Agency in County Hall in Coleraine?

Mr Attwood: I will not deny that the timeline is challenging and the complexity is great. Consequently, the risk cannot be diminished. Our ambition to have new law through the Dáil and the Assembly by that stage will certainly push us. On the other hand, the legal advice that I received on the matter when I became Minister is that, if this was to be done, it needed to be done as was done with mutual recognition of disqualification; namely, on an island-to-island basis between Britain and Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. That was the orthodox position. When we interrogated the legal options, we learned that, contrary to what we had previously understood, Northern Ireland could enter into that relationship with the Republic of Ireland even if the devolved Administrations and the London Government were not inclined to do so. I encouraged the London Government to do so, but they indicated that they were not minded to do it at this stage, although they would watch progress. So, although this was not even a goer legally 18 months ago, we now have the real potential of legislation by the end of 2014. There are risks in that challenging time frame, but we have made a lot of progress in the past 18 months and can do so over the next 18.

The Member makes a very good point, and it is a point that I made to Stephen Hammond and, before him, the junior Minister in DFT, Mike Penning: if there is to be a new regime of charging for heavy goods vehicles for foreign drivers in Britain and Northern Ireland, given that we are the only part of Britain and Northern Ireland that has a land border with another jurisdiction, the issue of enforcement will be much more complex than it would be for those who enter the ports in Britain. Given the multiple roads that criss-cross the border and given that the levy or charging regime will have to apply, is it not desirable to retain staff in DVA to assist with the management and enforcement of all that? It is a good argument, and it is one of a number of arguments that I made to DFT not only to retain the DVA jobs but to see how we can work through the problem in order to sustain the jobs and workforce in Coleraine. It is one of a number of options. The issue is this: is London listening?

Mr Spratt: In relation to the increase in road deaths, has the Minister had any discussions with the PSNI road policing unit about the changes that it has made, which seem simply not to be working?

The Minister also mentioned the Organised Crime Task Force when he was discussing illegal fuel issues. Is it not somewhat concerning that he and his party are not backing the National Crime Agency, which would also deal with similar matters?

Mr Attwood: I have not had any conversations with the PSNI about the changes that Mr Spratt referred to and that he claims are not working. There is a meeting next month, which is a regular meeting between Minister Ford, myself and the PSNI in a ministerial subgroup that looks at issues that are mutual to all of us and relate to all the Departments and the agencies. If something is not working, as Mr Spratt indicates, I would like to hear what that might be. If I then think that there is some weight in it, I will either discuss it with the PSNI directly or raise it at the ministerial meeting.

Mr Spratt makes an interesting point about the National Crime Agency. In my view, the Assets Recovery Agency should never have been closed down. The consequence is that the profile around going after the illegal gangs and individuals — for example those involved in fuel laundering — has collapsed. When do we now hear something coming out of the High Court about Mr Big being taken to court in respect of his illegal operations, having a criminal conviction and having his assets seized and all of that being publicised? It has collapsed. The strategic problem is that the Assets Recovery Agency, which was working in Northern Ireland, was, for some reason or other, closed down and replaced by the Serious Organised Crime Agency. The Serious Organised Crime Agency has virtually no profile, and, when it comes to illegality and criminality, it enters into private arrangements with the culprits around which there is a no-publicity requirement.

Where was the problem in respect of the threat of organised crime? The problem was that an agency that was working was closed down to be replaced by an agency that has no publicity around what it is doing. A senior person in the Serious Organised Crime Agency — remember that the chief executive of SOCA in its earlier life was none other than a previous director general of MI5 — told me that what they were really interested in was international organised crime, particularly the risk of

Islamic crime influencing and conducting operations in Britain. That is where the problem arose, Mr Spratt, and you should be aware of that because of your background and your membership of the Policing Board.

There are issues around the NCA, and, at the Executive, I took a view on some of the issues. However, let nobody pretend that my party and other parties are not trying to deal with the issue of organised crime. Let people also recognise that the problem arose when the ARA was closed down and when, wrongly, primacy for national security passed from domestic responsibility to London responsibility. Therein lies the problem around the NCA, and people should recognise and face up to it.

Mr Allister: The Minister has talked at length again about the scourge of illegal fuel on our haulage industry. Apart from talking again about the matter at this meeting of 17 April and lamenting about it again, what steps were actually taken to crush that cross-border assault on both economies? When the Minister tells us that, for example, there is a road where there have been 10 occasions of sludge deposit, it does not exactly create an atmosphere of confidence that, by modern surveillance means and everything else, everything that could be done is being done to crush these operations, about which we seem to have no prosecutions.

Mr Attwood: Although I do not necessarily agree with the extravagance of some of the language of Mr Allister, I do not differ with his sentiment. I have a map — I have shared it with Mr Kennedy — that shows that, in south Armagh, there is not one place where there has been dumping of sludge on 10 occasions but multiple locations where there have been multiple dumpings, on occasions, of sludge. The map brings home in stark terms the scale of the problem and the confidence of organised crime that it can dump the sludge in the same place as it did heretofore with confidence and, as it might see it, impunity. Let us not differ on the scale of the problem and the need for a scale of response. It is the case that there are virtually no prosecutions. The Member, with his legal background, should understand that there may be good reasons why, on occasions, there are no prosecutions and the evidence does not stand up. However, it is a fair question. If there are few or no prosecutions, that raises some challenging questions. I am sure that Mr Kennedy will touch on that in his comments on the statement.

I was on the Policing Board, and I sat on the advisory committee of the Organised Crime Task Force at one stage. Unfortunately, members of the Policing Board are not allowed to sit on that task force, because it was deemed — in my view, wrongly — an operational matter rather than an accountability mechanism. I did not agree with that approach at the time; I do not agree with it now. In fact, there were many people around the Policing Board between 2000 and 2007 who thought that the Policing Board should have been on the Organised Crime Task Force and there might have been more accountability for what is or is not happening.

I do not deny that there is work ongoing, and I know the scale of what the gardaí, the police and the South's Criminal Assets Bureau are doing about all this. However, let us be honest: there is a lack of public profile and a lack of prosecutions. My Department is now picking up the bill for the collection of all the sludge under a new fly-tipping protocol entered into with the councils, in particular the

council that is responsible for south Armagh. Whatever good has been done is falling short of what needs to be done. If you want to hear that, speak to the hauliers, who are pulling out their hair as they see their businesses going under. There could be a number of reasons for that, but at the centre is illegal fuel and non-compliant hauliers being able to cut their costs to compete with and drive good businesses out of business. That is not a very healthy sign, so we clearly need to do more. That is why I have reconvened the meeting with them, which will take place in the next month.

North/South Ministerial Council: Roads and Transport

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development):

I join others in extending my sympathy to the families and friends of all those who have lost their life as a result of road traffic accidents this year.

In compliance with section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I wish to make the following statement on the meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council in the transport sector held in Armagh on Wednesday 17 April 2013. As you have heard, the meeting was chaired by the Environment Minister, Alex Attwood, and attended by me and Minister Varadkar. We also met at an EU conference held in Dublin Castle on 28 March to facilitate the approval of an amendment to the rules of the North/South pension scheme. My statement will address the agenda items that relate to my Department, including the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport paper on EU matters.

The Council discussed the importance of the Narrow Water bridge and noted the timeline for drawdown of European funding. We further noted that the project had obtained planning permission and a marine licence and that the Department is publishing the necessary bridge orders for consultation this week. We looked forward to the project's assessment process being completed as soon as is practicable.

We also discussed the negative impact of illegal fuel on the transport industry, revenue to the Exchequers and the environment.

In relation to major road projects, the Council noted that a court order had been sought by the Alternative A5 Alliance to quash my decision to proceed with the A5 scheme. On 12 March 2013, the High Court rejected the overwhelming majority of the applicants' grounds of challenge. However, one of the applicants' grounds relating to the habitats directive was upheld. At a further meeting on 8 April, the judge confirmed that he would quash the orders relating to the A5 scheme. I decided not to appeal. The non-appeal route offers the best opportunity to progress the scheme in a reasonable timescale. However, the decision of the court means that there will be a delay while further assessment work is completed. We noted that construction work on the A8 project is progressing well and is expected to be completed by early 2015.

12.00 noon

The Council welcomed the ongoing positive co-operation between relevant Departments on EU-related transport issues. We also noted the current position and opportunities for further co-operative engagement on key EU dossiers of mutual interest, including the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) regulation, the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) regulation and the fourth railway, better airports, roadworthiness and clean power for transport packages.

On sustainable travel and transport, the Council noted the co-operation between the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and the Department for Regional Development on promoting walking, cycling and a shift in behaviour to more sustainable forms of transport throughout both jurisdictions. It also heard about the planning under way for the Walk to School Week 2013,

the cross-border Schools' Challenge event scheduled for the week commencing 8 May 2013 and the partnership arrangements being put in place for Bike Week 2013, including the cross-border Workplace Cycle Challenge. We also noted the ongoing co-operation between ecar in Northern Ireland and ESB e-cars on the installation of a common electric vehicle charging infrastructure.

The Council agreed to hold its next North/South Ministerial Council transport meeting on 28 November 2013.

Mr Spratt (The Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development): I thank the Minister for his statement. With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will ask him about a couple of areas.

The Minister has explained his logic for not appealing the court decision on the A5 project. Will he confirm, however, whether the £50 million due from the Irish Government in 2015-16 is still earmarked for the project? Will he also advise the House on his discussions with Executive colleagues on the £180 million budgeted for the project in this financial year? Has the Department sufficient shovel-ready projects to bring forward to boost the construction industry? Finally, will the Minister advise the House what the latest developments in the TEN-T will mean for Northern Ireland?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary questions.

As yet, there have been no discussions with the Irish Government about their contribution, which was to be made in the later years of the project anyway, so that discussion will be ongoing.

I think that the Member said "£180 million". I stand to be corrected, but my information is that £118 million was allocated this year. My officials are already in discussion with the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) on how money of that nature can be spent, particularly on structural maintenance. The Member will know that the winter conditions that we have endured, even latterly, had a huge adverse impact on all roads, particularly our minor roads. So I am very confident that we can spend most, if not all, of that allocation. Obviously, that will mean co-operation with DFP on the future financing of major road projects, and we will continue to engage in that.

We have had very positive engagement on the TEN-T proposals. We have been working hard. As the Member knows, the Department has a very good record of drawing down European moneys. We have been making further representations, particularly to the Irish Government, given their current presidency of the EU, on the inclusion of Londonderry in the core network. We will continue to do that.

All that work is ongoing, and we have had positive engagement through you and the Committee for Regional Development. You will recall the very successful visit last year of the chair of the EU Transport Committee, Mr Brian Simpson MEP, and we will continue to work closely and engage on those issues.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a ráiteas. I thank the Minister for his statement. With regard to sustainable travel and transport, the Minister will be aware of the hugely successful cycle hire scheme in Dublin. Have

we learned anything from that, and when might we see it being rolled out here?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. He will know that, in January this year, I launched an active travel strategy, and that continues. It sets out targets to increase by 2020 the average distances walked and cycled and the percentage of total trips taken by cycling to be in line with levels to be experienced in the rest of the United Kingdom. I have seen at first hand the bike scheme in Dublin, and we are pursuing how that can be introduced, particularly here in Belfast through the council. I would be optimistic that, in conjunction with others, we will be able to bring forward schemes of that nature. They are positive, and they help with sustainable travel.

Mrs McKevitt: I welcome the statement, in particular the publication of the bridge order, which was placed in the press last week and this week. I have no doubt that the Minister will acknowledge to the House the importance of the Narrow Water bridge project, and I acknowledge his commitment to help to deliver it, including the assessment process and its timeline. Can the House take it as read that he will commit to look at the assessment process as a matter of urgency when the time frame is complete? Does he agree that the building of the bridge at Narrow Water will help complement what he talked about — Walk to School Week, cross-border schools and also the workplace cycle challenge —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has asked a number of questions. I call the Minister.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for her question. I have to say that there is not a school within a hound's gowl of Narrow Water bridge, but anyway.

I assure the Member and I assure the House that there has been no delay on the part of my Department. Every effort is being made to progress the necessary orders. I say to the Member and, perhaps, to some of her political colleagues and Members of other parties in the House that it seems to me that there is an ongoing battle — a type of turf war — between the SDLP and Sinn Féin for ownership of the project and who should celebrate and who can claim victory on it. I have no interest in that. That is not relevant to my work or the work of my Department. I am not going to get caught up in the crossfire between the two parties, and I have been careful about that. However, I should say that it is absolutely clear that there are processes that we cannot shortcut for political convenience or political expediency or for the benefit of waving manifestos in the air and saying, "We got it, and everybody else did not really want it".

I am not interested in the party politics of the scheme. I am dealing with the legal processes that I have to deal with. After the consultation period has ended, I am bound to consider whether it will be necessary to bring forward a public inquiry. I am aware that the Minister of Finance and Personnel has to consider the business case.

I have no doubt that he will consider that on its proper basis. However, I have to say that it is not helped by unnecessary political grandstanding, which the two nationalist parties in that area are engaging in as they attempt to claim ownership of the project. I say that in the spirit in which it is intended. It will not bring the bridge's overall prospects any closer.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for the statement.

In the previous statement, we heard the Minister of the Environment indicate that some elements of fuel laundering were discussed. I wonder what the Minister for Regional Development can tell us about progress on cutting out fuel laundering. It is a scourge on this society, and the general public in Northern Ireland do not see any positive action with prosecutions coming forward.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for raising this very important subject not only because of my responsibilities as Minister for Regional Development but because of my constituency responsibilities in Newry and Armagh. The earlier statement and remarks from the Minister of the Environment confirmed the seriousness of the issue. I think that I recently described the situation as an epidemic in south Armagh, but that does not even do proper justice to the scale of things. There are multiple examples of where sludge is being dumped at the same locations in the same area. That is clearly having not only a very severe impact on the economy as a result of lost revenue, on the environment and in the costs that are entailed in cleaning up but, as far as I am aware, a very worrying and sinister impact on community relations in south Armagh.

I recently visited families who are part of the Protestant and unionist minority living in isolated border areas. They are law-abiding citizens and are entitled to the protection of this Executive, this Assembly and the neighbouring jurisdiction. However, they are living in fear. It was put to me frankly and starkly, and I shared this at the sectoral meeting with the other Ministers, that people are dumping diesel where once they dumped bodies.

That has very sinister implications for what is called a shared future and community relations. The law of the land has to extend to all areas, including to those areas of south Armagh, or wherever those actions are taken. It may be an unpalatable truth for some to come to terms with, but it is inescapable to me that moneys that are generated as a result of that black economy and that illegal activity will, ultimately, find their way back to republican paramilitaries. That cannot be overlooked and cannot be wished away.

I wish that, through the PSNI and HMRC, more examples were made public of people who are responsible for that activity being charged, brought through the courts and provided with adequate punishment through the law. Otherwise, we are sending a very bad signal to those law-abiding citizens from both communities in south Armagh who are absolutely disgusted and seriously worried about the lack of law and order and due process in that area.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Some latitude has been shown, but I ask all Members to relate their questions to the issues that are in the statement.

Mr McCarthy: I welcome the Minister's statement, but I am somewhat disappointed by his response to Karen McKevitt about Narrow Water bridge. I am not a member of the SDLP or Sinn Féin, but I want to see that bridge go ahead as soon as possible. It is up to him and all Departments to ensure that it is not lost to Northern Ireland.

12.15 pm

Under the heading "EU Matters", six issues of mutual interest were identified. The Minister will know of my concerns about roadworthiness around the Ards peninsula

and the Strangford constituency. Is there anything from the EU roadworthiness packages that people in the Strangford constituency can expect in the near future?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary questions. I was putting accurately on the record the fact that my Department has not been in any way delaying the scheme that is known as the Narrow Water bridge project. I have grown tired in recent weeks of the toing and froing and political grandstanding that some parties have been engaging in. I absolve you of any of that blame, if that is comforting to you.

The Member knows about the road infrastructure network in his area because he continually raises the issue. As roads Minister, I want to see those improvements and structural maintenance brought forward as quickly as possible. Over the past couple of years, we enjoyed record levels of structural maintenance spend on roads. However, the road network, conditions and competing priorities are such that it is not possible to upgrade every road as quickly as we would like. However, we will continue to work at that and use whatever means, and drawdown whatever resources, even extra resources, that are available to us.

Lord Morrow: The Minister rightly sounded a note of caution about Narrow Water bridge. It would behove the House to keep in mind what happened there at a worse time in the Province. There seems to be a race between the SDLP and Sinn Féin to see who can get over the bridge first. Will it be additional funding that will be poured into that project or has the Minister set aside funding from his own budget?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. This has never been a Department for Regional Development (DRD) sponsored project nor was it asked or invited to provide money for it. It is my understanding that the bulk of the money is being sought from Europe and the remaining money has to be provided through DFP and the Executive. That is why the business case is with DFP, which will give it due consideration. In truth, it has never been a Roads Service project, though assistance was given on bridge orders and some technical assessment. The co-sponsors of the project are Louth County Council in the Free State — sorry, the Republic of Ireland — and Newry and Mourne District Council. They are the prime promoters of the project. DRD is not involved.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I will switch it to the other side of the country. Did the western corridor come up for discussion? If not, why not? That is the corridor from Belfast through Enniskillen, where there is also a bridge, and on to Sligo.

Mr Kennedy: The western corridor as such was not raised. There was discussion about the A5, and if you want to include that part of the western corridor, I am sure that you can. I have outlined the discussion and the current position in relation to the A5.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. I suppose that I should say at the outset that, as far as my party is concerned, there is no crossfire and there is no grandstanding when it comes to Narrow Water bridge. We are more than happy to work with any party, and all parties in south Down and outside, to guarantee that very important project. What we are seeing here is a

very robust lobby from the business community, sports organisations and the community at large in south Down to see the project happen.

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

Mr Hazzard: That is what we are reflecting. Bearing in mind the words of the Environment Minister, who spoke earlier, does the Minister agree that if moneys from Europe are not utilised to deliver the project, it would be a serious setback for the business community in such towns as Kilkeel, Newcastle, Warrenpoint and Rostrevor?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. Finance is a matter for DFP, and, obviously, they are the people who will consider the issues that he raises. I cannot not make this political point: if this project was so important to the Member and his political party, why did my predecessor, his party colleague, not bring it forward years ago?

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for his statement and the answers that he has given to some of the questions. Can the Minister reconfirm that a full-steam-ahead approach is being taken to the A5 and that the moneys earmarked for the project will not be distracted away to the detriment of the project in the long term? There is a feeling that there is a very strong democratic will for the project from Donegal through Derry and Tyrone and into Monaghan. It is a flagship project, and any uncertainty must be ended.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. I have set out the current situation; the statement does that accurately. However, I say to the Member, and he will know this: the A5 scheme is delayed, and we have to work through the various processes and abide by those processes to continue to make progress on it. We estimate the delay to be in the region of between a year and 18 months, but it may well be even longer than that. I think that the deputy First Minister made clear earlier that the Executive position on the A5 is unchanged.

Mr McAleer: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I note from recent press that the Minister intends to come down to Omagh to meet some farmers and landowners who are affected by the scheme. I welcome that, because they deserve clarity. Has the Minister any plans to meet other stakeholders affected by the scheme, such as people from small businesses, the chamber, people concerned with road safety and even commuters, or would he be open to such a possibility?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. He may have misunderstood some of the arrangements for the intended meeting. He may be talking about the meeting in the Omagh area to be organised by the Ulster Farmers' Union for early May. I think that the intention is that a senior departmental official will attend that, because it will be dealing primarily with some of the concerns that landowners in the area will have in the situation in which they find themselves. Although I might have a decorative value for such a meeting, I think that the detail would, perhaps, be better explained by senior departmental officials.

My door is open on the issue. I have already met the farmers' union and representatives from the contracting firms involved. We should not forget the impact on the road construction industry at this time. I think that we all

share concerns for that. It is important and incumbent on me, as roads Minister, to begin to look at other potential schemes whereby we can give relief and opportunities to the road construction industry. I have also met members of Londonderry Chamber of Commerce. As I said, my door is open. I am, of course, willing to engage with those who are interested as long as it is done on a productive basis.

Mr Dallat: The Minister has breathed new life into the renaissance of the railways since he took over. Has there been any discussion at the cross-border meetings on renewal of the Belfast-Dublin Enterprise service? Have there been exploratory talks on European funding for the reopening of the Knockmore line, which would allow Derry and Dublin to be connected?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question and, indeed, his ongoing interest, particularly his praise for me for the Coleraine-Londonderry line. The issue did not emerge at the last sectoral meeting, but I will attempt to provide an update to the Member.

Mr Allister: Was there any discussion of viable alternatives to the grandiose new A5 road scheme or, most particularly, the very viable and affordable alternative of upgrading sections of the existing road? Does the Minister agree that that is the sensible way forward in these circumstances?

Mr Kennedy: The Member will know that the judge's ruling has quashed all the statutory orders for the proposed A5 dual carriageway. Effectively, that brings the process back one step to a point at which a public inquiry has been carried out, and I am in receipt of the inspector's report. Any alternative sections or new proposals would, therefore, have to be the subject of a new decision by me and the appropriate making of orders, which would involve significant delay. The Member will also be aware that the A5 scheme is an Executive priority scheme, so it would require acceptance by the Executive. That is the situation in which we find ourselves.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately after the lunchtime suspension. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm, when the next item of business will be Question Time.

The sitting was suspended at 12.27 pm.

On resuming (Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Mitchel McLaughlin] in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Regional Development

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Before I call Mr George Robinson, I inform Members that questions 13 and 15 have been withdrawn and require written answers.

Blue Badge Scheme

1. **Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister for Regional Development what action his Department is taking to maximise the uptake of the blue badge scheme by eligible drivers. (AQO 3909/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): My Department's blue badge scheme is available for people with significant mobility difficulties who travel either as drivers or passengers. The scheme provides an extremely valuable service to blue badge holders, who can park on-street close to the facilities and services that they need, thereby improving their lifestyle, independence and freedom of choice.

Information about the scheme is displayed on the NI Direct website. Application forms for and information leaflets on the scheme are available in many public buildings, including doctors' surgeries, libraries, disability organisations, Citizens Advice and Roads Service offices, including the blue badge unit in Enniskillen.

Once issued, a blue badge is normally valid for three years. Over the past 12 years, there has been a large increase in the number issued each year. In 1999, approximately 17,000 badges were issued compared with over 36,000 during 2012. The current number issued to people with disabilities in Northern Ireland is nearly 106,000.

My Department will shortly commence a public consultation about a number of planned and potential administrative and operational changes to the blue badge scheme in Northern Ireland. Proposals are intended to contribute to the more effective prevention of misuse and fraud and improved enforcement. I encourage all Members to contribute views on these important changes during the consultation period.

Mr G Robinson: Is the Minister confident that all people entitled to a blue badge have applied under the current scheme?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. Given the increase since 1999 and the total number issued, which we estimate to be in and around 106,000, I think that a significant percentage of our population has applied. Of course, the opportunity is there, and we encourage those who may benefit from and genuinely need a blue badge to apply.

Mr Gardiner: How does the cost of a blue badge in Northern Ireland compare with the cost elsewhere in the United Kingdom or the Irish Republic?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary. The current legislation for blue badges in Northern Ireland, which has been in place since the early 1980s, sets a fee of £2. I fully acknowledge that it is difficult to put a monetary value on a blue badge. The main purpose of the badge is to make a valuable contribution to the lives of many people with a disability who have a mobility problem.

I will give you the range of costs across the rest of the United Kingdom and — I nearly said the “Free State” — the Republic of Ireland. Authorities in Scotland can charge up to £20. Authorities in England can charge up to £10. At present, there is no fee in Wales. In the Republic of Ireland, a disabled parking permit costs €35. My Department is taking the opportunity of the consultation to seek views on the cost of a blue badge in Northern Ireland.

Roads

2. **Mr Cree** asked the Minister for Regional Development, following recent developments in relation to the A5, whether other road building schemes will now be progressed. (AQO 3910/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has received funding for the A5 dual carriageway project as the result of an Executive decision. I recognise that it is important that other schemes in a position to be progressed ahead of the A5 are given full consideration by the Executive. I intend to bring to the Executive proposals detailing other options, such as moving forward with procurement on other possible schemes. That approach provides the best possible support for the construction industry. In the meantime, my Department continues to develop a number of schemes to a procurement-ready position, should additional funding become available.

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for his response. Will he provide information on the readiness — he mentioned that schemes needed to be ready — of the Craigantlet project? I know that he recognises the value of that scheme.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his ingenious supplementary question on his constituency interests. He will remember that we were at the site meeting looking at the difficulties being encountered there. I will update him, because I had a sense that he might raise the issue.

A planning application was submitted in January 2012, and, following discussions with local residents and elected representatives, Roads Service engaged consultants to undertake a review of the proposed scheme. It will compare the Department's preferred layout with alternative proposals that have been put forward by local residents. Work on the review has taken longer than expected due to the large number of alternative proposals that have been received.

Although the review should be completed within the coming weeks, the various statutory processes are still at an early stage. Further public consultation will be needed so that the planning process can be concluded. Design work needs to be finalised, necessary land will need to be vested and contract documents need to be prepared so that the scheme can proceed to tender. The timescale for this work will depend on a number of factors. There is a prospect that the scheme will proceed to the construction stage within two years, but it may take longer.

Mr Storey: I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. Will he end the long delay in the provision of the A26 by bringing forward a paper to the Executive? That project is continually being put on the long finger. Will he give the House an assurance that he will make it a priority and deliver the A26 once and for all, now that funds are available and he is the Minister?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. He will know that, since I took charge of regional development, we have carried forward a number of schemes through the various stages, including the A26. I await receipt of the public inquiry details, which will hopefully come later in the year. I am aware of the Member's interest in that scheme, as well as that of other Members. My party colleague Robin Swann continually makes representations to me on the merits of the A26 scheme.

Mr Campbell: Where is he?

Mr Kennedy: He does not have to be here for you to know that. *[Laughter.]* He has been very active in that, as, indeed, have other local representatives. I recognise the benefits that would accrue from a scheme such as the A26. I tactfully say to the Member that I would be pleased to have the support of his party colleagues at Executive level as we seek to bring forward schemes such as the A26 and others.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I would like Members to stick to the original question, if possible, and it would be helpful if the Minister did likewise.

Mr McAleer: Thank you, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Earlier today, the deputy First Minister outlined the Executive's commitment to the A5 project. Will the Minister tell us whether the assessment on the EU habitats directive has commenced? Does he have any indication of when that will conclude so that the project can move ahead?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. He is presumably aware of Lord Justice Stephens's judgement and the ramifications of that. We are seeking to work through that consultation, so we are not in a position to pre-empt or predetermine any outcome. The work on the habitats directive and the necessary consultation has already begun, and we will continue to make progress as that process evolves. I very much hope that the Member understands the need to be cautious and not to arrive at predetermined outcomes. It is enough to say that the Department is working at addressing the issues that were raised.

Mr Dallat: The Minister, as a man with his ear to the ground, will, I am sure, accept that transport infrastructure is absolutely critical to attracting inward investment. He may also know that, in the past three years, of 519 potential inward investors, fewer than 8% visited the north-west. Does the Minister agree that it is absolutely critical that the A5 is on track again as quickly as possible? Will he give us an indication of when that will happen?

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for his supplementary. Of course, the Member will know that, as roads Minister, I am keen to see the upgrading and improvement of the entire strategic network. I have no difficulty with restating that today. As we have clearly outlined, the A5 project is delayed. We will work through the processes that are necessary. We estimate that that delay will be somewhere

in the region of a year to 18 months, but it could be longer. That is why it is necessary and incumbent on me, as roads Minister, to look at possible alternatives and bring them from being perhaps procurement-ready to more shovel-ready.

Traffic Noise: Ardmore, Finaghy

3. **Mr McDevitt** asked the Minister for Regional Development what steps his Department can take to minimise traffic noise from the M1 affecting residents in the Ardmore area of Finaghy. (AQO 3911/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: When my Department builds a new road through a residential area or widens a section of road that brings it closer to existing properties, it must comply with the Noise Insulation Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995. The part of the M1 adjacent to Ardmore Park between Stockmans Lane and Blacks Road was widened in 2004. As part of the preparation for those works, during the legal planning process for the road improvement and, in particular, the preparation of the environmental statement, full consideration was given to the issue of noise, along with all other environmental issues. Mitigation measures were provided in the form of a new road surface. It was considered that the provision of noise barriers was not necessary.

Recent noise modelling work completed as a review of the M1 widening scheme from Stockmans Lane to Blacks Road concluded that none of the properties modelled was assessed as qualifying for insulation under the Noise Insulation Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995. My Department, therefore, does not intend to provide further noise mitigation measures at that location.

Roads Service, along with other competent authorities, including major airports, railways and industry, are working towards the development of a noise action plan for Northern Ireland, in line with the requirements of the Environmental Noise Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006. In that context, I can advise that Ardmore has not been identified as a candidate noise management area. It is anticipated that the work will be completed later this year.

Mr McDevitt: I think that residents in the Ardmore area of Finaghy will be disappointed to hear that the Minister does not seem to think that the noise inflicted by the M1 on their properties is worthy of further investigation. Following the recent upgrade of the M1, with the consequence of extra traffic going on to the M1 as a result of Belfast on the Move and the works being done in the city centre, when will be the earliest point at which he could give me some sense that a review might be possible for those residents?

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. He is being slightly unfair: he implies that I am somehow opposed to the residents of Ardmore benefiting from noise insulation assistance. In my constituency, albeit in a different context, I had to lobby hard during the Troubles to get noise insulation packages for the residents of my home village of Bessbrook because of helicopter noise.

My point is that there are levels of noise that meet the requirement that assistance should and would be given. As a result of the measurements taken and verified, the area in question does not qualify for the scheme. Of course, if additional or new evidence is provided in assistance to that case, I will certainly look at the detail. Representatives

from the general area have made similar representations, but that is the current situation with the detailed noise assessments that have been carried out in the area.

2.15 pm

Mr Campbell: The Minister alluded to the considerable traffic noise in the Ardmore area of Finaghy. He will also be aware that there is considerable traffic noise in the town of Dungiven, which would be considerably alleviated if the A6 between Dungiven and Londonderry were to proceed. I am happy to lobby the Finance Minister. Is he happy to co-operate?

Mr Kennedy: I am not going to say anything about a marriage of convenience or anything like that. The Member has skillfully moved from the M1 motorway to Dungiven, where, as yet, there is no bypass. He will know that that is still under consideration. The argument for the Dungiven bypass has been a compelling one for many years, and the assistance that it would bring in reducing environmental damage would be considerable. So, I am very happy to consider it, and I welcome his offer to lobby the Finance Minister. I hope that he has more joy than I have sometimes had.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I welcome the flexibility of the supplementary question and the Minister's reply.

A6: Castledawson to Randalstown

4. **Mr Milne** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on progress on the Castledawson to Randalstown section of the A6. (AQO 3912/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The direction order and environmental notice to proceed for the Randalstown to Castledawson scheme were confirmed in March 2011. The vesting orders remain in draft and will be made after funding for the scheme has been confirmed.

The inspector's report on the November 2007 public inquiries into the Toome to Castledawson part of the scheme recommended that detailed plans for the construction of the dual carriageway, as designed, should be progressed, and that the recommended changes to the published proposal to connect the dual carriageway to Annaghmore Road and Bellshill Road at Castledawson be considered as a separate issue. My officials are examining a further junction layout following the inspector's rejection of the alternative, which was examined at a public inquiry in February 2012. Officials intend to submit a planning application within the next month. The Castledawson junction would not delay progression of the main scheme.

Mr Milne: Thanks very much for your answer, Minister. Will you give us an update on the Cookstown and Magherafelt bypasses?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Minister can regard that as a bypass if he wishes.

Mr Kennedy: Everybody has been terribly ingenious. If only you would ask questions that were in any way relevant to the ones that were tabled.

The Magherafelt bypass scheme is, potentially, procurement ready. Should finance be made available by the Executive in the current situation the scheme would be considered. Considerable representations have been made to me about that scheme from local MLAs, such as

Sandra Overend, council colleagues, such as Councillor George Shiels from Magherafelt, and representatives from other political parties.

Having been in Magherafelt and taken the opportunity to witness some of the traffic delays and difficulties, I understand the importance of a bypass to the town and the local economy. You will not find me opposed to bringing forward a scheme like the Magherafelt bypass. I look forward to you encouraging your Executive colleagues to make additional moneys available so that a scheme of that nature can be brought forward as quickly as possible.

Mr Spratt: Will the Minister ensure that every area of the A6 project is covered — habitats and whatever — so that we do not find ourselves in a court situation that is similar to that of the A5? Will he ensure that his Department looks at all of that properly this time, before any of the schemes go into operation?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member and Chair of the Regional Development Committee for his supplementary question. He raises an important point, to which I am alert, which is absolutely vital as we move forward with all schemes. I draw to the Member's attention the number of legal difficulties that are encountered in other places, such as the Republic of Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom, where objections are lodged on various issues, such as environmental and planning issues. We live in a democratic society, so processes are in place whereby people who have concerns have the opportunity to raise those issues.

I am happy to confirm that, even at this stage, a habitats directive assessment has been carried out for the A6 scheme. That was a key feature of the stage three assessment of the Toome to Castledawson part of the scheme because the preferred route lies adjacent to Ramsar and special environmental sites in the area. The test of likely significance concluded that, although it is highly unlikely that there would be a significant impact, an appropriate assessment should be carried out. A report to inform an appropriate assessment has been prepared, and it concludes that, after inclusion of the proposed mitigation measures, there would be no residual adverse impacts to the integrity of the site. That will be reviewed.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as na freagraí. My thanks to the Minister for his responses. Given that he has taken us down that route, may I mention the Magherafelt and Cookstown bypasses? Will he clarify whether his Department has made specific financial bids for those two proposals?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary questions and for his interest in local schemes. I can confirm that we have brought forward those schemes and will continue to do so. As for the financial position on road schemes generally, I intend to bring a paper to a forthcoming Executive meeting for consideration by colleagues to ensure that we support the road construction industry, which is in dire need of such support. That is a recognised fact, so a scheme in any part of Northern Ireland would be a welcome asset to the construction industry. I am mindful of the Member's points about Magherafelt and Cookstown.

A6 Road Project

5. **Mr Durkan** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the A6 scheme. (AQO 3913/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am pleased to advise the Member that I recently received the inspector's report on the proposed A6 Londonderry to Dungiven dualling scheme. I intend to publish a statement on the way forward in due course after issues arising from the report have been fully examined and resolved.

With regard to the Randalstown to Castledawson scheme, I can advise the Member that, following last year's public inquiry into an alternative junction arrangement at Castledawson, I published my response in the form of a departmental statement in January this year. My officials in Roads Service are now taking forward the inspector's recommendations for that junction. The remainder of the scheme is already through the planning process, and its progression should not be delayed by issues with the Castledawson junction.

The Member may be aware that the investment strategy for Northern Ireland 2011-2021 includes the construction of a number of high-priority schemes on the M2, A6 and A26 as part of a £390 million package funded through alternative finance in the period 2015-16 to 2020-21. However, a commitment to fund the revenue consequences of that roads package will be required. Therefore, the timing will depend on future resource budget settlements. In the event of alternative finance not being available, the scheme could be included, together with other priority schemes, in the bidding process for conventional funds in the next Budget period.

In my response to the Member for North Down Mr Cree, I outlined my intentions to engage with Executive colleagues in considering options for advancing other possible schemes in conjunction with a delayed A5. Those include improvements to the A6, which is a scheme that, it is fair to say, would make a great deal of difference to the many people who use that stretch of road on a daily basis as well as providing much-needed support to the construction industry.

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. After earlier questions, it feels like we have been up and down this road a few times this afternoon. I look forward to the publication of the report he mentioned and welcome the fact that the A6 remains a high priority. However, given the slippage of this project under the Minister's predecessor, is he confident that it can and will be delivered on time?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. I remind him of what I have tried to outline in my answers, which is that we are seeking to bring the project forward. The delays involved in the A5 scheme have meant that it is incumbent on me to look at other options, including schemes such as the A6, the A55 and the Magherafelt bypass.

We are exploring those options; the public inquiry is, of course, part of that process, as is the inspector's report that arises from it. We will give consideration to that, but I will not be shy in bringing forward schemes to Executive colleagues so that the overall infrastructure, which benefits the economy and the road construction industry, can be brought forward at the earliest possible dates.

Lord Morrow: Will the Minister acknowledge that he and his Department have a credibility problem in relation to the A5? Does he agree that he should come to the House with a statement on the A5 and the A6 to try to close that credibility gap? Undoubtedly, the taxpaying public are very concerned about the shambolic state of the A5. Normally, the Executive are the whipping boys, but there is no doubt that, in this instance, the Department for Regional Development's Roads Service needs to stand up.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. I do not accept the implications or the thrust of his remarks. I hope that he has taken time to study seriously the judgement delivered by Mr Justice Stephens. I hope that he has taken time not only to read it but to understand it. That would be a very good starting point for everyone in this debate.

My door is open. I have issued statements, made comments and made myself available for questions in the House on the situation. I have also taken the opportunity to meet the contractors involved, who are obviously concerned. I have met representatives of the Ulster Farmers' Union and Londonderry Chamber of Commerce. I would prefer that the Member came to see me to discuss the issues in some detail rather than politically grandstanding in the Chamber.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's statement earlier when he said that the argument for the Dungiven bypass was compelling. That being the case, can he outline any progress that may have been made to date in decoupling the Dungiven bypass from the rest of the A6? If so, is there a timeline for procurement and tendering?

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. He has, of course, lobbied strongly for the Dungiven bypass and has raised the issue of decoupling.

Again, I am pleased to confirm that the design of the scheme allows for the Dungiven bypass to be taken forward and completed as the first phase of the scheme. It will provide 4.8 kilometres of dual carriageway bypassing Dungiven to the south at a total cost in the range of £60 million to £80 million. The construction of this element of the scheme would be dependent — and this is the key thing — on the availability of finance in subsequent periods.

2.30 pm

Social Development

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Members should note that question 3 has been withdrawn and a written answer is required.

Boiler Replacement Scheme

1. **Mr Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Development how many applications have been received and successfully processed for the boiler replacement scheme since its commencement. (AQO 3924/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): Since the launch of the boiler replacement scheme in September 2012, 14,184 application forms have been received. The Housing Executive has processed 14,084

of those applications. That has resulted in boiler installer forms being issued to all those applicants; 8,771 applicants have completed and returned their installer forms, and 7,884 approvals have been issued to have boiler replacement works completed. Of those, 4,271 applicants have already carried out the works. Sampling of applicants has shown that 90% of people who get formal approvals will go on to complete the works.

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. Given those figures, which do appear to have improved dramatically over the past month or so, does the Minister believe that the scheme could be made more effective? How does he intend to make it so?

Mr McCausland: I notice that the Member says that there has been a dramatic improvement. We should welcome that, as I am sure he does; indeed, he indicated that he does. The improvement indicates that the scheme is actually now working really well. It only started back in the autumn. We are a limited period of time into it. There is a lead-in time. It is now delivering well, and we are well ahead of target at this point.

Mr Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for the positive information in his response. Will he confirm whether the initiative is effectively tackling fuel poverty? If so, can it be extended further?

Mr McCausland: It is one of a number of initiatives that we need to take forward to address fuel poverty. Addressing fuel poverty can be taken through in a number of ways, but one in particular is energy efficiency. Alongside that is the energy efficiency of homes, including insulation and double glazing. There are a number of initiatives that we are working on and taking forward. With regard to this particular scheme, we have the budget for each of the years and, in addition to that, the extra £6 million that we were able to draw in for the last two years. So, we will actually have a larger amount of money in the last two years — the extra £6 million — to deliver on the programme. I think that it will be extremely successful.

Mr Campbell: The Minister said that about 4,000 people seem to have availed themselves of and benefited from the boiler replacement scheme. Can he also outline the beneficial effect that I presume would have followed from local installers engaging in the work?

Mr McCausland: We estimate that almost 800 local installers have had installation work from the scheme to date. Those tend to be smaller firms, and they are spread across Northern Ireland. The work that is coming from this has been of great benefit, therefore, to local businesses.

Mr Cree: The Minister has certainly brought some very interesting statistics to light. I wonder whether he can detail the average time from submitting an application to the actual project being completed, if he has that?

Mr McCausland: When approval is given, it is anticipated that someone will get the work commissioned and completed within a period of about three months. Sometimes, it is much quicker than that. For some folk, it may take a little bit longer. Once the work has been completed and the bill submitted, the payment time is around three weeks, which is in advance of the normal payment time of four weeks.

Northern Ireland Housing Executive: Restructuring

2. **Mr Douglas** asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the future restructuring of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the role of housing associations. (AQO 3925/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Since my statement to the Assembly on 26 February, the exploration of the proposals by my officials and me has begun in earnest. The programme team, encompassing staff from my Department, the Housing Executive and the Strategic Investment Board, has begun work on the proposals. I met the programme board on 18 April. Programme planning is under way, and governance structures are in place.

A series of meetings has taken place with key stakeholders, including the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations, the Housing Executive and NIPSA. Other meetings are imminent, such as one with the tenants' representatives, the central housing community network. On 17 January, my officials and I also briefed the Social Development Committee, which will be fully engaged in the exploration and further development of proposals.

Work is ongoing, including on these consultations, with the aim of developing and firming up the restructuring of housing functions and their delivery mechanisms. I envisage that, at a later stage, when the process has progressed and there is something more substantive to report, I will come to the Chamber with a further, fuller statement.

Mr Douglas: I thank the Minister for that full response. In a recent statement following a BBC interview with the new chairman of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, NIPSA spoke of the unnecessary break-up of the Housing Executive at a time when other areas of the public service are being amalgamated to save money. Will the Minister respond to that statement, please?

Mr McCausland: I think that NIPSA is not entirely clear on the fact that the economics involved are more complex than they first appear. The focus should be on the longer-term economic benefits that can be realised through the introduction of landlords in a housing association model that is free to obtain funding from a variety of sources. Benefits include local landlords working from within communities and giving back to communities via social enterprise development.

Housing Executive staff and tenants are key stakeholders in this programme. Immediately following my statement on the proposals in February, I met the Housing Executive's board and chief executive to agree how we can work together to allay staff anxieties throughout the process. My officials have met, and will continue to meet, trade unions to ensure that staff concerns are raised and to keep staff up to date.

I have a meeting scheduled with the central housing community network, which was established as an innovative structure to ensure that residents have meaningful involvement with the Housing Executive. It has agreed to act as a conduit between my Department, the Housing Executive and tenants.

There was some speculation on the number of housing associations to be created and at what cost — that is

just speculation. Viable options will come to light only once economic considerations have been fully taken into account and political agreement has been reached.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagraí go dtí seo. I thank the Minister for his answers up to now. Will the Minister please reaffirm his stated commitment that there will be no predetermined outcome of the discussions on the future of the Housing Executive?

Mr McCausland: I set out a general direction of travel in my original statement. The details of all of this have still to be worked through. There is a lot of work to be done to prepare business cases that look at various options. There will have to be detailed discussions with potential funders to see what is the best model. So nothing is predetermined. We are looking at a direction of travel but nothing other than that. It is the detail that now has to be worked out.

Ms Lo: Will the Minister guarantee a clear focus on the delivery of shared housing under whatever new structure there may be in future?

Mr McCausland: This is an issue that members of the Alliance Party bring up again and again and again. There is merit in looking at such options, but I point out, as I have done on previous occasions, that segregated housing is not unique to the social housing sector. The Member may shake her head, but the reality, if one is honest and looks across the entire Province, is that there are many, many private estates that are segregated. Segregation goes wider than social housing; it impacts on education, sporting facilities and a whole range of other areas. Therefore, the issue of segregation and a shared future needs to be looked at in a wider context.

Northern Ireland Housing Executive: Glass-fronted Fires

4. **Mr Milne** asked the Minister for Social Development when the last glass-fronted fires will be removed from Northern Ireland Housing Executive properties. (AQO 3927/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that only 1,777 glass-fronted fires remain in its stock. In all cases, that is due to a tenant's refusal to allow the Housing Executive to complete works. Replacement of those 1,777 glass-fronted fires will be undertaken at change of tenancy or when parts are no longer available for the fires. The glass-fronted fires are currently safe, although the Housing Executive expects that they will be replaced in the forthcoming 12 to 18 months.

Mr Milne: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for his answer. Can he guarantee that future budgetary restrictions will not impact on the Housing Executive's ability to replace that form of heating?

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive is doing some work on its policy on heating. That work is being taken forward and will come to the Executive's board and to the Social Development Committee in the near future. I do not see finance being in any way an issue with taking this work forward. It is something that is obviously necessary, and I do not see there being a financial problem there.

Ms P Bradley: I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. He just mentioned the Housing Executive's policy. Will he give us an update on what that is?

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive is reviewing its heating policy. The basis of that review is to maximise the opportunity for tenants to benefit from a clean, efficient, safe and affordable heating system that will provide thermal comfort in their homes.

The policy was subject to formal consultation for eight weeks and was circulated widely. In addition, presentations were made to housing community network forums and to other groups, including a number of councils. Responses have been received from a wide-ranging group of councils, councillors, statutory bodies and others. The comments that were received raise a number of issues, which the Housing Executive will consider, but they do not fundamentally challenge the policy's proposals.

Gas will remain the only option that is offered in a gas area. Tenant choice outside the gas area will increase to include wood pellet boilers. A number of those ideas are being taken forward. For example, in an oil boiler replacement scheme, tenants may opt to retain an oil system and so on. There are a number of elements to that, and there is also an emphasis on ensuring that insulation is upgraded where you have heating replacement schemes.

Strabane: Regeneration

5. **Mr Byrne** asked the Minister for Social Development what action his Department plans to take to enhance the regeneration of Strabane. (AQO 3928/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department is working with Strabane District Council to bring forward a public-realm scheme for Abercorn Square, Market Street, Castle Street and Railway Street. We aim to appoint a consultant later this year to design the scheme, with a view to starting construction work in late 2014. We are also working in parallel with Roads Service to deliver a smaller public-realm scheme in the town centre later this year.

Officials from my Department have also been working with Strabane District Council to develop a revitalisation scheme to improve the external appearance of shop fronts, signage and building facades. My Department is also in the process of appointing a team of professional advisers to take forward a market-testing exercise for the SCORE site in the centre of the town. Subject to that exercise demonstrating sufficient demand, we will move to prepare and issue a development brief, inviting prospective developers to submit their proposals for the site.

Outside the town centre, my Department continues to deliver a range of projects in the Strabane neighbourhood renewal area.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for his answer, which was quite comprehensive and encouraging for Strabane. Given that the SCORE site has been on the cards for nine or 10 years, is he committed to making sure that the time frame is realisable and that we can have a meaningful project there? Secondly, has he had any indication of what sort of moneys are being earmarked for the scheme that he just outlined?

Mr McCausland: The Member focused particularly on the SCORE site, which the Department for Social Development (DSD) owns. It was identified in the master plan as a key redevelopment site and was regarded as suitable for either leisure use or mixed-use development, namely commercial, retail, car parking and leisure.

The master plan also recognises that a larger site may be required to make any project viable, and the Department has subsequently reached agreement with Roads Service to include the adjacent Dock Street car park in the overall site that will be offered for development.

Work is being taken forward on the next stages, but I could not go into any more detail on that at this point. I hope that the Member finds that helpful in outlining the line of travel.

2.45 pm

Landlords: Registration

6. **Ms S Ramsey** asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the registration of landlords. (AQO 3929/11-15)

Mr McCausland: First, let me emphasise the importance of having a landlord registration system to assist with the regulation of an ever-growing private rented sector. I remain committed to driving up standards in that sector. I informed the Assembly on 15 January 2013 that it was intended that a landlord registration system would be ready by the summer. Although there may be some slippage, I am pressing my officials to work to that date. Work is well under way on the design of the system, and a final decision on who will act as the registrar should be made very soon.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. It is important that we get the registration scheme up and running. I do not need to remind the Minister that that sector is the biggest provider in the social rented scheme and costs and gets tens of millions of pounds. I am concerned when you say, Minister, that there is slippage, even though you say that the summer is still your target. Can you give us an idea of what you mean by that type of slippage?

Mr McCausland: I will indicate my intention —

Ms S Ramsey: Is it an Indian summer?

Mr McCausland: I will indicate my intention to ensure that the officials who are taking that forward do it with the maximum alacrity, and I can assure you that, when we talk about the summer, it is definitely the summer of 2013 and not any other. It will be done as quickly as possible.

Mr Anderson: Minister, in the past, you have said that councils would be best placed to administer such a scheme. Is that still your opinion, or has anything changed?

Mr McCausland: No final decision has been made on who the registrar will be, and it is possible that the matter may be tied to the direct payment of housing costs to landlords under welfare reform. My Department is considering whether we can make use of the information collected for the landlord register to facilitate the direct payment of universal credit housing components to landlords. Work is ongoing with the Social Security Agency, policy and

legislation colleagues and NI Direct to ensure that the IT solution will provide that capability. If we can use the system to help to offer better services for tenants and benefit claimants, we will do so.

Mr McDevitt: What specifically is the cause of the delay?

Mr McCausland: The issues that are being taken forward are complex. The civil servants who are working on the issues are working hard, but, as with most things in life, it is always difficult to predict exactly, down to the weeks or days, how long it will take to complete a piece of work. I am sure that the Member, in all his years in business and other areas of life, will have his own experience of that. Therefore, the work is taking a fraction longer than may have been originally intended, but, as I said clearly, it is a priority, and the Department and I intend to take it forward to completion as soon as possible. As has been indicated, the private rented sector is a very important sector for the provision of housing in Northern Ireland, and we want to make sure that we get the best outcome possible for tenants.

Empty Homes Strategy

7. Mr Brady asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the empty homes strategy. (AQO 3930/11-15)

Mr McCausland: It is my intention to publish the empty homes strategy and action plan in the coming weeks and to be in a position to give details on the steps that will be taken to bring empty homes back into use. I am determined to maximise all opportunities to meet housing need, reduce blight and tackle antisocial behaviour. Therefore, I want to pursue a comprehensive approach to tackling empty homes not only to provide much needed housing but to transform streets and areas right across Northern Ireland. The strategy seeks to consider and address why homes become empty; the profile of empty homes in Northern Ireland; the benefits of bringing empty homes back into use; and how to assist and who can assist in the process. The success of the strategy will require a considerable investment of money and other resources.

The work that we are taking forward on the empty homes strategy, together with the work that we are taking forward on the previous issue of landlord registration, the development of a housing strategy and the review of housing structures, alongside welfare reform and all the other things, indicates the scale and scope of work being taken forward in the Department and our commitment to ensuring the best possible outcome for taxpayers and for tenants and the general community.

Mr Brady: I thank the Minister for his answer. As he is aware, a number of these empty houses are derelict and are often a blight on their area. Will the Minister accept that, if this strategy is expedited, these houses could go some way towards alleviating the housing waiting list, particularly for social housing?

Mr McCausland: Tackling the issue of empty homes has a number of benefits. Clearly, it has the benefit of providing another home for an individual or for a family. Often, it removes blight, blight that can often attract antisocial behaviour, and there is a cost associated with dealing with that. It may be that a garden becomes littered, and people have to come in and clear it out. With all of the costs associated with the issue on one side and the benefits to

be gained on the other side in getting an extra home into use, this is one of those things that is rightly described as a no-brainer. It makes really good sense, and that is why we have been focusing on this.

Mrs Overend: To extend that question into further detail, can the Minister detail whether he will consider using existing powers to vest long-term empty homes so that they can be brought back into public use?

Mr McCausland: A range of approaches are being looked at. Last year, we carried out a pilot exercise in Fortwilliam in north Belfast and on the Upper Newtownards Road in east Belfast. It had limited success, but it did provide a number of lessons that have been invaluable in trying to shape the strategy and the action plan. In some circumstances, it turned out that properties that were thought to be empty were not actually empty at all but were occupied. It is a more complex issue than you sometimes imagine. When you look at a street, you imagine that there are an awful lot of empty homes, but that may not necessarily be the case. There are lessons to be learned from that pilot.

The main reason for lack of success was lack of information on the owners of properties. That is the most difficult thing. We were able to contact the owners in some cases, but some of them were reluctant to engage because there were no incentives to assist them to bring the property back into use. Owners preferred to wait to see whether the housing market picked up. The main lessons learned were the importance of having accurate data at the outset and ensuring that measures are in place to assist owners to bring properties back into use. On that basis, the Housing Executive and the Department have been looking at this, and the new action plan is being developed.

Ms Brown: How many empty homes are there throughout Northern Ireland, and where is the highest concentration of those empty homes?

Mr McCausland: One of the major challenges in all of this remains the issue of reliable data about the location and ownership of empty homes. The Department is working with Land and Property Services, and data received to date on the number of vacant properties in each council area is being analysed. Officials are in the process of preparing a business case so that Land and Property Services is able to share the names and addresses of the owners of empty homes with us. This information will hopefully be made available before the end of June, and it will be published in future.

There was a previous empty homes strategy in 2007, but, because of the lack of information on addresses and contact details of owners and the lack of a proactive approach at the time, the strategy did not result in any homes being brought back into use. My officials are now driving the issue forward, and I hope to publish the new empty homes strategy very shortly. We will then seek to take it forward.

Mr Rogers: Will the Minister give us the detail on the scheme where empty houses are given to housing associations to renovate and sell on?

Mr McCausland: In my constituency at the moment, eight empty homes that belonged to the Housing Executive are being handed over to a housing association to redevelop

with new homes. There is a range of approaches in the action plan that I will be happy to share with the Member in the near future.

The necessary steps to fix empty homes are these: we need reliable data; we have to raise awareness; we have to bring forward proposals for legislative change, as there are issues that need to be tackled; we need to identify funding streams; and we need to implement initiatives used in other jurisdictions, which could include partner landlord grants, loan schemes or sweat equity. A range of options will be teased out. In due course, we will require proposals for legislative change so that we have all the necessary tools — the most appropriate and most effective — at our disposal.

Queen's Parade, Bangor

8. **Mr Dunne** asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the acquisition of the Queen's Parade site in Bangor. (AQO 3931/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department has agreed to purchase landholdings at Queen's Parade assembled by the developer, Karl Greenfarm Properties Ltd. The contract of sale was signed on 25 March 2013 and is due to complete in May. Following completion of the sale, my Department will commence the process of drawing up detailed plans, securing planning permission and assembling the remaining properties to be included within the development boundary. The Department's intervention to acquire this key regeneration site is in keeping with the town centre master plan. It is a major regeneration project, and it will take in the region of 24 months to assemble all the land needed, take forward a planning application and bring on board a developer.

The Department will work in partnership with the council and all other stakeholders to gain agreement to ensure that the development plans for Queen's Parade are right for Bangor. In time, delivery of the Queen's Parade development will require a significant commitment by the private sector.

In advance of the main scheme proceeding, work was completed earlier this month on a revitalisation project to develop new activities and facilities to encourage people back into the area.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for his answer and for his keen interest to date in the project. I also record my thanks to DSD officials for the work done to date at Queen's Parade, with the recent investment in the art and craft pods. It makes Bangor a very acceptable place to visit this summer.

Can the Minister give expected timescales for the long-awaited Queen's Parade development? In writing would be good. *[Laughter.]*

Mr McCausland: I can see the writing appearing in due course in a local publication.

The Bangor town centre master plan proposed that a major development scheme in the Queen's Parade area was needed to regenerate Bangor town centre. Schemes of that size and ambition are complex and challenging to deliver. A number of key steps need to be taken, the first of which is to assemble the site. My Department has completed the first major step by agreeing to purchase

the developer's land. Following completion of the sale, my officials will speak to the remaining property owners within the proposed boundary to discuss our plans for the area and to negotiate the purchase of those properties. My Department will also commence work on the planning application, which will take in the region of two years. Following planning approval, it will take the developer a further two to three years to complete the detailed design and bring on board a contractor to construct the scheme. If all progresses smoothly, construction will commence in 2018.

I appreciate very much the recommendation of staff and officials in DSD. I will certainly pass those comments on to them.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Minister for his answers. I concur with Mr Dunne and thank the Department for the recent work on the art pods.

As well as seeking planning permission and then seeking to purchase the remaining properties, the Department will ultimately require a private developer. Is there any more security in the new plan than there was in previous proposals that fell?

3.00 pm

Mr McCausland: The Department has put its full weight behind this. There is a real commitment to see the project through to completion because this has been a blight on the front of Bangor. As the Member will know, it is now a much more attractive location with the new pods in place. I had the opportunity to go down there the other day to meet some of the artists who are in residence, and it is beneficial to the community, to us and the artists. I was impressed by the number of people who stopped to look at the artists at work. The people who were quite negative about it all at the start have been shown to be wrong. It is a good short-term initiative. There is a real commitment from the Department, and, as we see this through, there will be interest from the private sector in due course, when we get the whole site assembled.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Members may take their ease while we change the top table.

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

Executive Committee Business

Marine Bill: Consideration Stage

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call the Minister of the Environment, Mr Alex Attwood, to move the Consideration Stage of the Marine Bill.

Moved. — [Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment).]

Mr Deputy Speaker: Members will have a copy of the Marshalled List of amendments detailing the order for consideration. The amendments have been grouped for debate in the provisional grouping of amendments selected list. There are three groups of amendments, and we will debate the amendments in each group in turn. The first debate will be on amendment Nos 1, 2 and 3, which deal with the duty to contribute to sustainable development, the creation of a marine management organisation and arrangements to promote the co-ordination of marine functions between public authorities. The second debate will be on amendment Nos 4 to 6, 9 to 14 and 19, which deal with marine planning and marine protection and enforcement, together with Mr Steven Agnew's opposition to clause 8. The third debate will be on amendment Nos 7, 8, 15 to 18 and 20, which deal with the commencement and technical amendments.

Once the debate on each group is completed, any further amendments in the group will be moved formally as we go through the Bill, and the Question on each will be put without further debate. The Question on stand part will be taken at the appropriate points of the Bill. If that is clear, we will proceed.

New Clause

Mr Deputy Speaker: We now come to the first group of amendments for debate. With amendment No 1, it will be convenient to debate amendment Nos 2 and 3. Members will note amendment No 2 is mutually exclusive with amendment No 3.

Ms Lo: I beg to move amendment No 1:

Before clause 1 insert

"PART A1

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable Development

A1.—(1) *Nothing in this Act affects the duty of the Department under section 25 of the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006 to exercise its functions in accordance with that section.*

(2) *Accordingly, the Department must in exercising its functions under this Act—*

(a) act in the way it considers best calculated to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development in Northern Ireland, except to the extent that it considers that any such action is not reasonably practicable in all the circumstances of the case; and

(b) have regard to any strategy or guidance relating to sustainable development issued by the Department."

The following amendments stood on the Marshalled List:

No 2: Before clause 1 insert

"PART 1

THE MARINE MANAGEMENT ORGANISATION

The Marine Management Organisation

A1.—(1) *There shall be a body corporate known as the Marine Management Organisation ("MMO").*

(2) *The MMO shall consist of no fewer than 10 and no more than 12 members appointed by the Minister.*

(3) *The marine functions and associated powers exercised by the bodies listed in subsection (4) shall instead be exercisable by the MMO.*

(4) *Those bodies are—*

(a) the Department;

(b) the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development;

(c) the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure;

(d) the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment;

(e) the Department for Regional Development;

(f) the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute;

(g) the Northern Ireland Environment Agency

(5) *For the purposes of this section a "marine function" is any function which relates to, or whose exercise is capable of affecting, the whole or any part of the Northern Ireland inshore region.*

(6) *It is the duty of the MMO to secure that the MMO's functions are so exercised that the carrying on of activities by persons in the MMO's area is managed, regulated or controlled—*

(a) with the objective of making a contribution to the achievement of sustainable development,

(b) taking account of all relevant facts and matters, and

(c) in a manner which is consistent and co-ordinated.

Any reference in this Act to the MMO's "general objective" is a reference to the duty imposed on the MMO by this subsection.

(7) *In pursuit of its general objective, the MMO may take any action which it considers necessary or expedient for the purpose of furthering any social, economic or environmental purposes.*

(8) *The Department may give the MMO guidance with respect to the exercise of any of the MMO's functions.*

(9) *The MMO must have regard to any guidance given to it under this Act by the Department.*

(10) *Before giving any such guidance, the Department must consult—*

(a) the MMO, and

(b) such other bodies or persons as the Department considers appropriate.

(11) *The Department shall publish any guidance given to the MMO under this subsection.*

(12) *The Department may give the MMO general or specific directions with respect to the exercise of any of the MMO's functions.*

(13) *Before giving directions under this section, the Department must consult the MMO.*

(14) *Consultation under subsection (13) is not required if the Department considers that there is an emergency.*

(15) *The MMO must comply with any directions given to it under this section.*

(16) *The giving of any directions under this section must be publicised in such manner as the Department considers appropriate for the purpose of bringing the matters to which the directions relate to the attention of persons likely to be affected by them.*

(17) *Copies of any directions given under this section are to be made available by the MMO to members of the public on payment of such reasonable fee as the MMO may determine.*

(18) *The MMO shall use its best endeavours to meet such objectives as the Department may from time to time set with regard to the quality and effectiveness of its performance.*

(19) *For each financial year, the MMO must prepare an annual report on how it has discharged its functions during the year.*

(a) *The MMO must send the report to the Department as soon as possible after the end of the year to which it relates.*

(b) *The Department must lay a copy of the report before the Assembly.*

(c) *In this subsection "financial year" means—*

(i) *the period that begins with the day on which the MMO is established, and ends with the next 31st March;*

(ii) *each subsequent period of 12 months ending with 31st March.*

(20) *The Department may by order make such supplemental, incidental or consequential provisions as appear to the Department to be appropriate as a result of subsections (1) and (2).— [Ms Lo.]*

No 3: After clause 1 insert

"Arrangements to promote co-ordination of functions in Northern Ireland inshore region

1A.—*(1) The Department may enter into arrangements with a relevant public authority designed to promote the effective co-ordination of the exercise by the parties to the arrangements of their respective functions in the Northern Ireland inshore region.*

(2) The Department shall keep arrangements made under this section under review.

(3) The Department shall—

(a) within one year of the date on which this Act receives Royal Assent publish details of any arrangements made under this section; and

(b) within three years of the date on which this Act receives Royal Assent lay before the Assembly a

report on the effectiveness of any arrangements made under this section.

(4) For the purposes of this section "the relevant public authorities" are—

(a) the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development;

(b) the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure;

(c) the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment;

(d) the Department for Regional Development;

(e) the Agri-food and Biosciences Institute;

(f) the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission."— [Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment).]

Ms Lo: I am very pleased to have this opportunity to speak on the amendments in group 1 as the Alliance Party's spokesperson on the environment. I welcome the Consideration Stage of the Bill and want to thank all the stakeholders who contributed to the scrutiny of the Bill during Committee Stage.

Amendment No 1 is about sustainable development. Northern Ireland's seas contain a rich biodiversity and a wide variety of habitats. It is vital that we protect our seas so that those species and habitats can continue to exist. Our seas are also essential to the economy of Northern Ireland, particularly with regard to fisheries and tourism, yet our activities, both on a global and local level, pose direct threats to our seas. It is imperative that we have strong and effective legislation to ensure that our marine environment is well planned and managed.

The Marine Bill is the most important marine legislation that we have had so far in this region, and it serves as our mechanism to fulfil international, European and UK commitments to achieve the healthy, safe, productive and biologically diverse oceans and seas envisaged by the Oslo and Paris Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic.

There are strategic aims across the UK for both climate change and sustainable development, and it is disappointing that the Marine Bill does not make reference to either for duties on public authorities. While the Marine Bill sets out to address all the high-level priorities and principles, it has not spelt out in the context of the Bill an overarching core purpose, which must be to achieve the sustainable development of our seas. That is in contrast to the Marine (Scotland) Act 2009, which states that public authorities have a duty to further the sustainable development of the marine environment and climate change mitigation and adaptation. Similarly, the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 requires the Marine Management Organisation to conduct its functions in keeping with the need to contribute to sustainable development.

Amendment No 1 would include a new clause to place a general duty on the Department at the beginning of the Bill to set the tone for the rest of the legislation. It requires the Department to act in the way that it considers

"best calculated to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development"

including, of course, the protection and enhancement of the marine environment. The amendment recognises that, although not always practicable in all circumstances, the Department should have regard to

“any strategy or guidance relating to sustainable development issued by the Department”

when carrying out all its functions.

The aim of achieving sustainable development should underpin all the actions of the Department. During the Committee's scrutiny stage, departmental officials responded to the issue by stating that the provision on sustainable development under section 25 of the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006 was a sufficient safeguard to place a duty of sustainable development on Departments and there was no need to reiterate it in this Bill. The intention of the amendment is not to place any additional duty on the Department or to overlegislate. However, if it does not clearly name sustainable development as its core aim, the Bill lacks its soul.

It is worth mentioning that there does not appear to be any reference in the Bill to the 2006 Act to inform the reader of the already-existing duty. It is, therefore, essential that that core duty is highlighted in the Bill. The environment sector voiced serious concerns about the omission of that duty, and the Minister also wished to include it as a departmental amendment, but I understand that he did not receive approval from the Executive. However, in the Planning Bill, we see clearly that sustainable development is recognised as an objective in carrying out planning functions. How, then, will we reconcile the fundamental difference between the two pieces of legislation, one of which makes spatial planning for land and the other for the seas?

Sustainable development does not seek to stop us growing our economy. Rather, it aims to put in place a balance of economic, social and environmental measures to ensure that we continue to do things effectively in the years to come. Sustainable development has been defined in many ways, but the most frequently quoted definition is from 'Our Common Future', also known as the Brundtland report:

“Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it two key concepts: the concept of ‘needs’, in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organisation on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs.”

Given that the marine strategy framework directive requires the UK seas to achieve good environmental status by 2020, establishing marine protection areas and managing human activities, it is a major priority for Northern Ireland. As defined in the directive, achieving good environmental status means that the use of marine and coastal environmental resources must be kept at a sustainable level that safeguards potential uses and activities by current and future generations. To achieve that goal, the directive promotes the adoption of an integrated approach to the protection of the ecosystems.

Before I address amendment No 2, I want to jump to amendment No 3. I appreciate that the Minister has taken on board the concerns of the Committee by putting in place, through amendment No 3, a new clause on the arrangements to promote the co-ordination of functions in Northern Ireland's inshore region, but I remain unconvinced that such loose arrangements will be effective. Such a clause will have little or no power to ensure that other Departments comply with any request from DOE to enhance the environment, given their very different functions and competing loyalties to their sector. I have, therefore, tabled amendment No 2 for consideration today.

The Marine Bill does not directly address the issue of its practical implementation under the current management structure. We have a new marine division in DOE, but how will interdepartmental responsibilities be managed? The existing governance model, with marine responsibilities scattered across Departments and agencies without any clear lead or cohesion, worries me greatly. Amendment No 2 responds to the call from the environment sector that a non-departmental marine management organisation sponsored by DOE be established to provide for the greater integration of delivery functions and separate policy and delivery responsibilities. That will enable the organisation to adopt a holistic, consistent, less bureaucratic, independent and transparent model of working while retaining accountability to the Assembly.

There is an independent MMO for England, and Marine Scotland is a separate Department: why should we have less? Whether Northern Ireland justifies an MMO has nothing to do with its size; we need a unified approach to marine management and the co-ordination of marine functions in one place. With fishing, transport, tourism, aquaculture, aggregate extraction and renewable energy protection likely to continue to be significant marine activities in the coming years, a single authority would be a logical and cost-effective way of regulating the sustainable development of Northern Ireland's seas.

3.15 pm

Effective management is vital. I believe that Strangford lough acts as a warning for the perils of mismanagement. It is our most highly designated site, and, unfortunately, the past decade has shown how interdepartmental power struggles can lead to the mismanagement of natural resources. Northern Ireland is now facing the long-term cost of the restoration of the horse mussel reefs and the loss of a fisheries area, which, in theory, should have been a sustainable practice but which can no longer continue in the protection zone to allow the restoration of the ecosystem to take place.

The 2009 McCusker report, although not recent, makes a compelling case for changing from the current fragmented marine management structures and arrangements in a specifically Northern Ireland context. The report highlights the potential advantages and costs of consolidating powers and responsibilities into a new marine management body. It states:

“the status quo is clearly unsustainable, with minimal integration of marine functions and potential long-term damage to the marine environment ... In terms of costs, the report concludes that even maintaining

the status quo has an increased cost, estimated in the region of £250k per year, on top of current spending."

That is a rough projection, given that the report was produced several years ago. It states that the setting-up costs of a separate MMO would be about £650,000, with an annual saving of £250,000. Although those figures are not guaranteed, it is expected — I see that the Minister is scribbling away, and I know that he will probably talk to me about those figures. I stress that this is an old report, and I am going on the figures that are in the report.

Mr Attwood: Will the Member give way?

Ms Lo: Yes, Minister. Delighted.

Mr Attwood: I think that it was an excellent report. *[Laughter.]*

Ms Lo: Thank you. According to the report:

"an MMO could deliver improved co-ordination of information and data, and so reduce the administrative burden."

It is my belief that the Marine Bill would be greatly strengthened by a streamlined management model that had the authority to properly oversee all our marine activities from the application process and bringing together marine expertise and information to managing the impact of commercial activities in the marine environment in a sustainable, equitable and long-lasting way.

Mr Hamilton (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I will speak initially in my capacity as Deputy Chair of the Committee before, with your indulgence, making personal comments on the amendments in this group.

I welcome the Consideration Stage of the Marine Bill. Some of us on the Committee wondered whether this day would ever come. The Bill was referred to the Committee on 6 March last year, and the Assembly agreed to extend the Committee Stage to allow us to enough time to scrutinise it fully.

We gave the Bill careful consideration. There were 31 written submissions in response to the Committee's call for evidence, and we took oral evidence from 16 organisations, including key stakeholders such as the Northern Ireland Marine Task Force and the Anglo North Irish Fish Producers' Organisation. On behalf of the Committee, I place on the record our gratitude to all those who gave evidence. That evidence was crucial in enabling us to make our recommendations.

The Committee agreed its report on the Bill on 5 July 2012, so we have had to wait 10 months since then to get to Consideration Stage. Members of the Committee did not think that such a delay was appropriate. I am in no doubt that the Minister will tell us that the delay was unavoidable, that there were good reasons for it and that he needs to take as much time as necessary to get the Bill right. I accept that we legislate in haste and repent at leisure, but that does not mean pausing for nearly a year between stages of a Bill. I hope there shall not be any similar delay with some of the Minister's other Bills that are coming our way. Nevertheless, we are at Consideration Stage now, and the Committee supports the Bill and the amendments in the name of the Minister.

I begin, however, by addressing amendment No 1, which has been tabled by Ms Lo, the Chair of the Committee,

although not tabled in that capacity. The Committee considered whether it was necessary to include within the Bill an overarching aim or general duty outlining the responsibilities of the Department around sustainable development. However, the Department told us that existing legislation places an obligation on all public authorities to consider sustainable development and to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change. We accepted that it would be inconsistent with current legislative practice to reiterate any such existing duties in the Bill. In doing so, we also agreed that, during Consideration Stage, it was important for the Minister to remove any lingering doubt there may be about the impact of the Bill on existing duties. I, therefore, ask the Minister to place on record the fact that the duties placed on all public authorities around sustainable development and climate change by the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006 and the UK Climate Change Act 2008 apply to the implementation of this Bill. If he does so, we can be satisfied that amendment No 1 is unnecessary.

I turn now to amendment Nos 2 and 3. Almost all those who spoke to the Committee drew attention to the need for greater co-ordination of marine functions, which are currently spread across six Departments. Many suggested that that could be achieved through the introduction of a marine management organisation, as is the case in England and Wales, but that view was by no means unanimous. There is no question about the need for better co-ordination of marine functions across Departments, but the Committee agreed that, in the absence of any change to the management of marine functions by central government, the most effective approach in the short term would be to strengthen and enhance the co-operation of Departments and other public authorities that have responsibility for marine functions.

Consequently, the Committee agreed that an amendment should be made to the Bill that would require agreement between the relevant Departments and other public authorities. That position is reflected by amendment No 3. Therefore, on behalf of the Committee, I oppose amendment No 2 and ask the House to support amendment No 3, which will ensure greater co-operation, without the additional cost and bureaucracy which would come with the creation of another quango.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I will speak now in a personal or party capacity, and I will take the amendments in order. I will look first at amendment No 1 and amendment No 2, which I will be arguing against and opposing in a personal capacity. It is a bit odd in some ways: when opposing, you are objecting to things that you agree with. I do not disagree with the need for better consideration of sustainable development. I am not arguing against sustainable development; in fact, I am very much in favour of sustainable development. Equally, when I get to amendment No 2, I am not against better marine management. I am against the format of marine management that is proposed in Ms Lo's amendment.

With regard to amendment No 1, I have no objection to the principles of sustainable development, but, as I mentioned in my comments in my capacity as Deputy Chair, there are duties and responsibilities on Departments and all public authorities via the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006. It sets out the duties on all public bodies to deliver all their functions and sets

out the attention that they have to have to sustainable development. There is no need to double up and legislate again to reiterate those duties and responsibilities. They are catered for in legislation that is on the statute book.

I know that, sometimes, it appears that it is sitting in a law that was passed in 2006, which is some seven years ago, and that, therefore, you have to read this legislation in conjunction with that other legislation, and that it is maybe not as user-friendly or as obvious as we would like it to be. However, that is the way legislation in this part of the world develops. It has to be viewed in conjunction with other legislation that is not mentioned in the Bill that is before us.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he agree with me that one of the rationales for having that specific statement in the Bill, and the reason why we are still pushing for sustainable development, is that we do not actually see it in the actions of public authorities? As it has been pointed out, we have had legislation since 2006, but we still fail to see action.

Mr Hamilton: I was coming to the issue of the applicability of that and how you do not see it, as you said, Mr Agnew. I have no objection to sustainable development; none at all. It is carried in legislation already. When the issue was raised, as it was on several occasions during the Committee's deliberations, the advice that came back, time and time again, was that it is not required and is superfluous, additional and unnecessary because it already exists in legislation. There is a perception that it is not being carried forward. That is fine. However, that argument then carries forward into other pieces of legislation that are before the House.

Although I do not think that the amendment is necessary, I am not massively opposed to it. If it is the will of the House, we will not stand in the way of the amendment's going forward. I just want to make the point that I do not think that it is particularly necessary. I would not use the word "oppose" particularly strongly towards it. I just think that it is absolutely unnecessary. That has been shown in the evidence that we have had throughout the Bill's fairly lengthy Committee Stage.

If the issue that was raised by Mr Agnew and, indeed, Ms Lo in her comments — that it does no harm to reiterate things in legislation — is the principle to which they now abide, I look forward to them supporting clauses 2 and 6 of the Planning Bill, which is currently before the Committee. I do not wish to get into that; that is a fairly lengthy debate for another day. However, the principle is, of course, the same. If you think that things are not being done in practice; that, sometimes, it is not as clear as it might be; and, indeed, that just to highlight and reiterate the point does no particular violence, adds no weight and creates no different responsibilities or duties, the principle that you are applying to this piece of legislation, the Marine Bill, surely applies to the Planning Bill, which will be before the House in due course. I look forward —

Ms Lo: I thank the Member for giving way. How do we, then, reconcile having the words "sustainable development" in the Planning Bill and not in the Bill on managing the seas? How do we manage that difference? How do we tell planners what to do?

Mr Hamilton: I do not see any inconsistency. Sustainable development applies to this Bill, as it does to every other, by virtue of the 2006 Act. I gave way because I thought

that the Member would rise and say, "You are absolutely right. We will support clauses 2 and 6 of the Planning Bill." I make the point to her and Mr Agnew that if they wish to highlight — which is all that they are saying that they want to do — sustainability in the context of this piece of legislation, the principle that they are raising today applies to other legislation as well.

Mr Agnew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Hamilton: Yes, I will.

Mr Agnew: I, certainly, will not rise to support clauses 2 and 6 of the Planning Bill. I want to make the point that it is not just about reiterating but about setting out the ethos of the Bill and giving direction to the courts, if needs be, where it is applied, that that is the ethos of the Bill and how it should be interpreted. Therefore, it is giving a signal, which is exactly why we have our concerns about the Planning Bill.

Mr Hamilton: I did not expect the Member to rise to support clauses 2 and 6 of the Planning Bill. We will have that debate in due course.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Could I ask Members to come back to the Marine Bill, please?

Mr Hamilton: I am more than happy to, Mr Deputy Speaker. I raised the Planning Bill only in the context of the argument that is being made by some Members who wish to highlight sustainable development in this Bill, in order to say that the same principle applies to the Planning Bill. It is not the case that we, on this side of the House, are opposed to sustainable development. We do not object to the principles of sustainable development. We do not think that the amendment is particularly necessary. We will see what the mood of the House is before we decide whether we want to push it much further.

3.30 pm

I now move to amendment No 2, which introduces a proposed new clause to create a marine management organisation. There will be no equivocation and no waiting from this side of the House on this amendment. We will oppose the proposed new clause, and we hope to be joined by others in the Lobby in opposing the amendment and the creation of such an entity.

I oppose the amendment for various reasons. Having fought for years and years — others in the House fought for much longer than I did — to establish this institution and to get a democratically elected, accountable Assembly in Northern Ireland where we, the elected representatives of the people of Northern Ireland, could take decisions on their behalf, we would be somewhat reluctant — to put it mildly — to give away the power that was granted to us by virtue of the devolutionary settlement.

Our objection is as much philosophical as it is based on how this is actually structured. I am not in favour of freely or easily giving away power over anything. That has happened before, and, in fact, we operate a system here where a lot of power has moved outside this place. However, on something as important as this, I am reluctant to see much more power move from here — from the Government, the Executive and the Assembly — to an independent body.

I want to get on to the exact structure of the proposal in a moment or two. I am reminded of hearing a similar argument — without wanting to go on to another debate altogether — about the creation of an independent environmental protection agency. I have heard and listened —

Mr McDevitt: *[Interruption.]*

Mr Hamilton: I hear the Member talking from a sedentary position. He is a great fan of chirping from the Back Benches all the time. If he wants to make an intervention, I will freely give way.

Mr McDevitt: I thank Mr Hamilton for giving way. I was making an observation about this apparent DUP philosophical objection about shifting what the Member describes as power; it might just be governance issues a lot of the time. That extends to the most successful non-departmental public body in this jurisdiction, the Policing Board, and the way in which it holds the police to account independently without in any way undermining the authority or the place of the House. In fact, it does quite the opposite and has probably played more than its fair role in protecting the integrity of the House and ensuring that you, I and the rest of us get to come here and do our job as legislators.

Mr Hamilton: There were many things about the way in which the Policing Board was constructed that my party was not overly amused by, but there is a fundamental difference between the Policing Board and the proposal in the amendment. Proposed new clause A1(2) states:

“The MMO shall consist of no fewer than 10 and no more than 12 members appointed by the Minister.”

As the Member knows very well because he is a current member of the Policing Board, the majority of its members are political representatives. He and nine other colleagues from different parties in the House are represented on it. So, they have a major influence on the direction of policing in Northern Ireland by virtue of the fact that they have majority representation on the Policing Board. However, this new clause would construct an MMO that has no such political representation and that would, in fact, be filled entirely by people independent of the House. I have a philosophical objection to moving power or governance or whatever entirely away from this place and handing any political input or responsibility to a bunch of unelected people who would have significant power.

Proposed clause A1(7) states:

“In pursuit of its general objective, the MMO may take any action which it considers necessary or expedient for the purpose of furthering any social, economic or environmental purposes.”

That is a fairly broad, wide-ranging and massively sweeping power that would be given to a group of 10 or 12 unelected individuals. That is what I have a philosophical objection to. Neither my party nor I is in favour of that.

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for giving way. He mentioned the Policing Board, of which I was previously a member as well. Does he agree that the construction that has been put in place is the worst of possible worlds? You have a situation in which appointment is, essentially, full patronage of the Minister. I hope, at this point, that I am not persuading the Minister to support the amendment. Essentially, it is full patronage without the matching

accountability. As the Member indicated, the MMO would not contain Members of the Assembly, would not be answerable to the Assembly and would not really be answerable even to the Department. So, essentially, the Minister would have power without responsibility.

Mr Hamilton: Absolutely. I agree entirely —

Ms Lo: Will the Member give way?

Mr Hamilton: I agree entirely with what the Member said, and I will give way.

Ms Lo: I suggested 10 to 12 members. The amendment does not rule out them being from political parties. We are suggesting, generally, the number of people to be in it. If the clause is approved, the Department would have to take it away, think up the structure and go out to consultation. It is, in many ways, an enabling clause for the Department to have that power to do so.

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for the intervention. The clause before us proposes an MMO of:

“no fewer than 10 and no more than 12 members appointed by the Minister.”

That is what is before us, so that will be what is enacted. When the commencement of the Bill takes place, the Minister could appoint 10 or 12 people whom he wants.

I made the point about having political representation. I am not sure that a lot of Members in this place would volunteer to go on to such a body, but the point that my colleague made is absolutely right. I have listened to the Minister talking about how he has had difficulties with his Environment Agency on various issues, and how he has spoken to staff and said that he wants this or that done. That is exactly how it should work: he should have a very positive robust engagement with the agencies under his control.

However, if we have an independent MMO, in exactly the same way as we would with an independent environment protection agency, the Minister would not have the ability to do that. In fact, the power vested by the clause would give an independent MMO the power to further any social, economic or environmental purpose. The word “may” would very quickly become “will”, and it could do whatever it wanted. Of course, we would have ultimate control and could take all that power back, but that seems to be a fairly nuclear solution to the problem and not one that I imagine would be advisable.

Mr Weir's intervention reminded me of a point that I wanted to make: exactly who would populate it? As I said, I do not think that a lot of Members would be rushing to populate an independent MMO.

Mr Weir: Jim Wells?

Mr Hamilton: All right. There may not be a massive amount of Members. *[Laughter.]* I am not sure whose nominee Mr Wells would be, but I am sure that he would do a very good job.

I imagine that the people who would populate it would have a deep interest in the environment. That would be, understandably and naturally, the people who would want to go for that sort of thing. I would be deeply concerned about the views that they would bring and the breadth of those views. The clause talks about

economic responsibilities. They may have a bias towards environmental issues as opposed to economic concerns.

Without wishing to cause you, Mr Deputy Speaker, to stop me raising the Planning Bill again, if the Committee's deliberations on the Planning Bill and the evidence that has come forward are anything to go by, I would have great concern about the background and views of the people who would populate a body such as this. I will not go into some of the stuff that was said now, because that is not the purpose of today's debate. However, whenever we get around to that debate, I think that Members will be shocked by the views on the economy that have been expressed by people who are very close, not in a political sense, but a departmental one, to the Minister. Some of those are incredibly shocking. I am deeply worried about that.

I recall a visit that the Committee made to Scotland to look at its marine set-up and how marine issues are governed there. Scotland has gone for very much an in-house departmental approach and has established an agency that straddles a couple of Departments. I asked why they did not go for an independent MMO model, as England and Wales have done. The response was that they believed they were too small to have an independent MMO. When you consider that Scotland accounts for roughly two thirds of all the UK's territorial waters, for them to believe that that area is too small for them to govern really highlights the fact that Northern Ireland, with a much smaller percentage of the UK's territorial waters, is far too small to do it.

On a positive note, I learned something from the Scottish visit. We have one option here, which is an independent MMO. We also have amendment No 3, which I support. That is the Minister's amendment that came out of points made during the Committee deliberations, and I remember Mr Elliott, in particular, pushing that point. I support that amendment as a reasonable compromise in the circumstances, but there is another way that is consistent with principles that my party has espoused for some time.

I think that the best way to solve the problems with marine management — and there are problems. I only have to look at Strangford lough, in my own constituency, to see that there are difficulties, particularly where responsibilities straddle more than one Department. I do not, for one second, say that we should not have better marine management or better-co-ordinated marine management. In fact, I am very supportive of that. However, just because I think that what is there at present is not good does not mean that I should jump to another extreme for an answer. I think that there is another way, and it is presented by the possibility of reorganising Departments. If you look at the examples in other jurisdictions, they have consolidated marine functions in one Department.

To, in one respect, laud the Minister, I think that he has shown the way by creating a distinct and separate marine division in his Department. The problem with that marine division is that it does not have responsibility for all marine functions in Northern Ireland. There are others in the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) and there are others in the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD), principally concerned with fisheries. I do not wish to make it a political issue; it is an issue of common sense. If, in the context of reorganising Departments or reducing their number, the opportunity arose to move responsibilities of a marine nature from one

Department to a new Department and to consolidate them all in one marine division, that would clearly get over some of the impediments and problems that we have had in the past in getting properly co-ordinated marine management in Northern Ireland. It is —

Mr Weir: Will the Member give way?

Mr Hamilton: Sorry, yes.

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for giving way. The Member has highlighted particularly the example of how things have been done in Scotland. The Minister frequently quotes the politician whom he most admires — I suspect that he knows what is coming next. The politician that he most admires in these islands in government is John Swinney, who, as the Minister would put it, knows the difference between being in power and being in government. Indeed, the Minister also aspires to that.

It seems to me that the approach taken by the Scottish Administration, where arguably the case for an MMO is a lot stronger than in Northern Ireland because of the extent of their coastal waters — essentially the approach taken by the Scottish Executive of, shall we say, co-ordination and consolidation, which is very much the approach that the Member has outlined here — is surely the flagship for us. I am sure that the Member will agree with me — as, I hope, the Minister will as well — that, if it is good enough for John Swinney, it should be good enough for this House.

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his intervention. When he started talking about the politician the Minister most admired, I wondered what Bobby Kennedy had ever said about marine management. However, he went on and clarified that.

I would not say that everything that the Scots are doing is an exact template for what we should do in Northern Ireland; it is not a direct read-across. My argument is that, just because we have been presented with the extremes of an independent marine management organisation or retaining what is currently there, which is not very effective, that does not mean that we should not seek a better third way, for want of use of that phrase. We could look at the opportunity that is presented by the reorganisation of Departments to consolidate, in one Department, as many marine responsibilities as possible, if not all of them. I believe that that would overcome the problem of the lack of co-ordination in marine management and reconcile the issues of control, power and who is responsible.

I have considered that to be the best option for a long time.

3.45 pm

With that in mind, I oppose amendment No 2 and support amendment No 3, which, I accept and acknowledge, is far from ideal and far from perfect, but at least it places in the legislation a duty and responsibility on various Departments and other agencies to create a structure for better co-ordination than currently exists in Northern Ireland. We will observe with interest its operation to see how it works, but I maintain that there is a better way, which is reorganising Departments and drawing many, if not all, marine functions into one Department. We oppose amendment No 2, support amendment No 3 and await with interest what the House says about amendment No 1.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom cúpla focal a rá. I would like to

say a few words. From the experience of working in the Committee, I am somewhat disappointed that the Bill has taken so long to come through because this whole process started for us last March. One side of that is that I would not mind such a long time frame if we were waiting to get something correct or producing good legislation; the other side is whether it was held up because people did not get their way, which is another question that must be put on the table.

I want to go back to Anna Lo's amendment on the general duty. I am thinking back to what departmental officials said to us about general duties and sustainable development. They said that there was a raft of legislation, guidance and policy in place and that we had no call to bring forward this legislation. I agree with the Member who spoke previously. I do not think that we would consider pushing this to a vote. I do not think that it would do any harm if the amendment was accepted, but I listened to the arguments that other Members put forward in support of it. It is about time that officials in all Departments took this on board when they bring their advice to Committees: we sat through a long period of scrutiny being told one thing; now, 13 or 14 months later, we are reconsidering something that we have talked about over and over again.

I know that Members are entitled to table amendments. That is grand, but, in this case, I ask the Member who proposed the amendment whether she is seeking clarity. Another Bill is in progress — I will be careful not to break into any other legislation that we are dealing with — but it seems to me that, in the Planning Bill, we also seek clarity on sustainable development. Where is the difference? If the Member proposes to seek clarity in a Bill on sustainable development duties, that is grand. We will look at that differently once we move to the Planning Bill itself.

On sustainable development, we need to look at both marine legislation and terrestrial planning legislation because I think that sustainable development sits within terrestrial planning. Maybe we could look at that.

I want to go back to some of the points that Mr Agnew, in particular, raised. It is all right for us to bring forward legislation, but it has to be implementable. My fear about all of this, especially amendment No 1, is how it will go down to local authority level and affect roles and responsibilities there. It is all right talking about public bodies, authorities and everything else, but my question is this: how would this impact on ratepayers and their responsibilities? It is all right setting it at the top level, but it is about how it is rolled out on the ground. We should be thinking about those sorts of issues and the possible impact of the likes of this once we bring it forward.

We will listen to the debate on amendment No 1, but I do not think that this party will oppose it if there is a strong enough argument for bringing it forward.

I will now turn to amendment No 2, which deals with the MMO. The proposed new clause contains 20 subsections. Are we saying now that we want another quango to look after marine functions? That is the question that has to be asked. I know that the Chair quoted some figures on the amount of money that would be required, and I hope that the Minister will reflect on them. I did not hear the comment that he made to the Chair earlier, but I would like to know what it was. If that is what it is about, and if we are considering costs as an issue, they will always be an issue

when we are bringing forward legislation. That is because some costs are involved in all this.

In her opening remarks on the MMO, the Chair mentioned Strangford. I agree with her that that was a bad example, so perhaps we should not use it as an example. However, if we have to adhere to European laws, we need to look at costs and resources in general across the board. There is no point in our trying to enforce legislation here without considering that. I do not mind taking account of conservation and protection issues, but, in passing any Bill, it is about whether we can achieve what we are setting out to. To be fair to Departments, are we saying that we should set up a separate body that includes departmental officials and ministerial appointees?

The proposed new clause allows the Minister to appoint members to the MMO. Obviously, DARD will have a major contribution to make to this legislation. However, do the ministerial appointments suggest that we are saying that we do not have the expertise in the Departments to carry out those functions? That is one question that I might ask. I might then ask whether those who operate in Departments are held to account for their roles and responsibilities.

I am sure that local authorities are doing a lot of good work with their marine responsibilities. That moves me on from amendment No 2 to amendment No 3, because I think that there is something in amendment No 3 that we could support. It is about accountability and a new role. It is also about how we communicate and tie that all together, recognising that each Department has its own roles and responsibilities anyway. We should not step outside any Department to create another quango just to deliver these functions. I think that it is about working together collectively.

Perhaps the Minister will bring forward some ideas about the costs of all this and about the impact that it will have. I have reservations about the impact that some parts of this legislation will have on ratepayers. Thankfully, unless there is major erosion, I do not think that Newry and Armagh will be affected by the marine just yet. However, the local authorities involved need to know what the impact will be on their coastal areas, given that more powers will be transferred to them. I hope that the Minister can respond to that and tell us how he thinks that that will have an impact.

We will not oppose amendment No 1. We are not in favour of amendment No 2, but we will support amendment No 3.

Mr McDevitt: It does need to be said that amendment No 1 need not be here had the Executive been in a position to support it being included. However, it being brought by Ms Lo is second best in this situation. I and my party agree that there is no harm in stating the obvious on the face of a Bill; the obvious being that sustainable development is the bedrock on which you would wish to plan and manage marine resources, habitat and environment in the years and decades ahead.

It is the case that the Miscellaneous Provisions Act has been on the statute books for some eight or nine years. It also appears to be the case that very few people seemed to get the memo. That is not a remark that I make with particular regard to the Department of the Environment, but it appears to me that generally, in government, certain duties are created and placed on the statute book but very many parts of government seem to think that they are someone else's duty, on someone else's statute, for some

other random purpose. So, I am a supporter, and the SDLP is a supporter, of stating the obvious as often as possible and as loudly as possible. If we depart from the principles of sound sustainability in the marine environment, we depart from the opportunity to properly manage the potential of the marine environment in the years ahead.

I am one of the people who maybe has some sense of appreciation of what our marine environment is like. Strangford lough is a very, very special place. It has been trashed. That is the only word for it. I have the advantage of being able to scuba-dive, and have dived most of the lough. When you dive along what were horse mussel beds, it looks like you are diving a ploughed field. Except a ploughed field is ploughed for a purpose; its purpose is to grow new stuff and to manage the land. This has just been raped. It is criminal. However, there is so much that we have not lost from the lough. There is tremendous biodiversity. The number of fish, sponges and small cold-water coral that are still in the lough would really surprise you, as well as the very beautiful underwater habitat. If the visibility was a bit better, it would be absolutely world-class diving.

So, there is no objection to including sustainability in the Bill. In fact, looking at amendment No 2, there is no objection to thinking about the architecture of ensuring absolutely beyond any doubt that marine management is organised in the best, most effective and powerful way possible.

I find it interesting that Mr Hamilton tells us that there is some philosophical issue with getting experts to do an expert job. I do not go to hospital expecting to meet the legislators. I do not ramp up at a police station looking to meet the Minister of Justice to be given some sort of wise counsel from him as the elected authority of this land about how the police may go about their business. I certainly do not ramp up at NISRA and expect to meet a bunch of politicians who would not know a statistic if it hit them in the face.

There is nothing to be feared from entrusting people with the capacity to make independent, evidence-based, informed decisions with the power to do so. Unless, of course, you are worried that their decisions might not suit your political agenda. That is the only point at which a legislature should fear evidence-based policymaking. It is the point at which, for whatever reason, a legislature, or people within a legislature, may feel that the decisions that will be made on the basis of evidence just may not suit a political agenda.

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for giving way. I do not think that any politician or legislator should ever fear evidenced-based operations being put in place for operational matters. The distinction is that, where evidence-based actions are taken, they should ultimately be politically accountable. That is the fundamental difference. It is not that we are trying to second-guess the professionalism of those who are directly involved at the coalface, or, in this instance, the water face. It is the fact that, ultimately, decisions should be politically accountable. That is the objection to an MMO and why the Department's proposals in amendment No 3 make it preferable.

4.00 pm

Mr McDevitt: That is an interesting point about accountability. I do not think that the Deputy Speaker

and most of my colleagues would appreciate it if took myself off on too much of a tangent about the principles of accountability, but let us look at it.

There are two levels of accountability in science. The first is that science is science. It exists to challenge itself and continuously ask questions of itself. The first level of accountability needed in science and, therefore, in an evidence-based approach to policymaking is accountability in the body of experts itself. You need to have a capacity to review the work of someone who is informed in their work by their expertise and specialisms. You cannot expect lay people to peer review academic work. You cannot expect lay people to assess the strength and value of the academic contributions that our universities make to society. In fact, we deliberately do not do that. It would be reckless to do so, because we do not have the capacity.

What would the MMO do? I have some issues with the MMO in respect of the amendment. However, if we are having a reasonable debate, what would you think an MMO would do? You would think that it would act both as a centre for informed, accountable decision-making and an opportunity to challenge those who have political motivations for a particular course of action.

There is a tribe of people — I think that they are called the Xhosa — based up around the Great Lakes in North America. They have the rule of seven. They take decisions based on how they might impact on seven generations; not one, not two, not three, but seven. When they take decisions about how they wish to change the environment around them, they do so with practically a century and a half of future-proofing. In our politics on these islands, we have an awful habit of reducing decisions to being simply about what suits this generation — or indeed the generation of those who happen to be above 40 years of age today — and not understanding the value of the very thing we are the custodians of: the natural environment. We are at our most ignorant when it comes to our seas.

If you have never stuck your face in the sea with a pair of goggles on, do so some day. You will enter a different world. Very close to where Mr McCarthy grew up, lives and represents, you can walk off the beach at Ballyhenry and, within 10 metres, be in about 15 feet of water. You are practically in a different environment. You are no longer the boss. The wrasse, a few pollack, quite a few lobsters and lots of crabs are in charge down there. Their contribution to our lives is not just in providing us with an occasional bit of fodder for fish and chips. They make a tremendous contribution to our sustainability as a civilisation. You would think that providing an MMO is the least that we could do to acknowledge the importance of that habitat to who we are.

If it is an accountability question, structure it in a way that makes accountability explicit. If it is a question of membership and if the real issue for Mr Hamilton is that there would have to be some MLAs on it, I must say that I, personally, would not be awfully against the idea of some MLAs building up their capacity. I am speaking personally now — the Minister and, indeed, everyone else in the House may take a very different view — but I think that Mr Wells would be a perfect candidate for such an organisation. I have never understood the fact that he does not sit on the Environment Committee. Not having his expertise, commitment to sustainability, knowledge and perspective present on the Environment Committee

undermines the way that we are able to do environmental governance here.

I want to deal with a couple of specific points about the MMO and Ms Lo's amendment. The SDLP will support this in good faith, but we have concerns about the structure. The law of unintended consequences may be buried in the amendment, and I want Ms Lo to address that at some point in her response. We are not particularly happy, for example, with the way the organisations are identified: the DOE and the NIEA are both identified, yet jurisdictionally they are probably the same organisation. So why separate them?

From our reading of the amendment, there appears to be a general power that all marine functions associated with the powers exercised by the bodies listed would be passed to the MMO. That is probably not what you mean, because not all powers would want to go into the MMO: some powers would want to remain in the Department that sponsors them, yet the way in which the amendment reads is that that is what would happen.

Provisions are also being given clearly and explicitly to the DOE to provide guidance and direction over the MMO, but no power is being given to the other Departments listed to provide direction and guidance. So, you have a potential issue because the DOE has power over its bit, but it is not being given power over other Departments. That is not clear in the amendment, and Ms Lo should, if she can, return to that during her closing remarks.

As colleagues said, amendment No 3 is a compromise. Even if we do not get it in this Bill, there is a serious debate to be had about expert bodies doing expert jobs. I take Mr Hamilton's point about Scotland and the country not being big enough. That would arguably be the case if membership were to be drawn from a very local pool of people, because there could be too many conflicts of interest to be able to provide independence. However, I do not see why Scotland cannot view its coastline or inland waters as significant enough to justify —

Mr Hamilton: Will the Member give way?

Mr McDevitt: Of course I will give way.

Mr Hamilton: It is not about a lack of expertise, because you can, of course, draw that from beyond your boundaries. The Member is not only telling this House what it should think but is telling Scotland what it should believe. The point that was specifically made, which was tested time and time again, was that Scotland did not feel that it had sufficient scale in terms of the size of its seas. That is the judgement that Scotland came to. If Scotland, having gone through this process, created something and concluded that a marine agency was a better way forward, was arguing on the basis of size, that is of interest to us given that we are significantly smaller.

Mr McDevitt: That is an interesting point, although I am not sure that it is a particularly strong argument.

As I said, the SDLP will support amendment Nos 1 and 2. Obviously, we will support the Minister on amendment No 3.

Mr Elliott: Having deliberated on the Bill in Committee for some time, I am pleased that it has at last come to the House for Consideration Stage. The Minister and the Department have carried out a lot of work and have come to the Committee regularly to try to improve certain

aspects of the Bill. I welcome that and the co-operation between the Committee and the departmental officials. In principle, I support the Marine Bill becoming Northern Ireland legislation.

A number of issues arise from the three amendments in the first group. Obviously, sustainable development is one, and the Ulster Unionist Party and I support the principle of sustainable development and have always done so. Departmental officials and Committee members debated at length the rights and wrongs of sustainable development being included in the face of the Bill. I have come to the conclusion that it is not necessary for sustainable development to be in the Bill because it is already there. It is already a responsibility for each Department and for the Marine Bill to recognise sustainable development and to ensure that the ethos of sustainable development is carried out in the Bill.

The second amendment is about the marine management organisation. I did not get any feeling that there was an attraction in the Committee, or among the broad number of members, for a marine management organisation, and my view has always been that if there are opportunities for better governance without an over-bureaucratic nature, we should take them. There is no clarity or surety about that potential over-bureaucracy with the proposal on the marine management organisation in this amendment. I have been on enough organisations and gone through enough business opportunities to realise that some quangos, if they are not properly managed, can make life extremely difficult no matter what vein of it you are in.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Member for giving way. He refers to an MMO possibly being over-bureaucratic, and we all want to avoid that. However, given that the amendment proposes to take responsibilities from the DOE, DARD, DCAL, DETI, DRD, the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, I think the problem is that we are over-bureaucratic now and need to move away from that.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Member for that intervention. I do not think that he was suggesting that we do away with all those Departments, because that is the only way you would simplify it and reduce the bureaucracy. You will be creating another tier on top of that, and that is the difficulty.

Ms Lo: Will the Member give way?

Mr Elliott: I am quite happy to give way to the Chair.

Ms Lo: Thank you, Tom. The idea is to take the marine functions from the seven Departments and agencies and put them into one body. In many ways, it will be less bureaucratic because you will not be talking to seven different agencies and authorities but to one body that regulates and monitors, issues licences and works together in the one place.

Mr Elliott: I admire the principle behind Ms Lo's assertion, and I know that she has argued that case very strongly. I do not necessarily agree that that will be the outcome, because it has not been the case in other organisations, and we do not seem to have learned from the mistakes of the past.

One thing that really concerns me is that, when I enquired whether the Northern Ireland Marine Task Force contained representation from the fishing industry, which is one of the biggest influences on marine aspects in Northern

Ireland, I found that it did not have a voice on the Northern Ireland Marine Task Force. That gave me additional concern about the membership of any new organisation or body that would be established.

As a compromise, the Committee came up with the issue in the third amendment, which is the interdepartmental organisation or group. Mr Hamilton has given me some credit for trying to be at the fore of bringing that forward, and it is unlike him to do that. I was trying to ensure that we had something, at least, on the ground that could help to manage the situation. The Department has taken that on board. As others said, it is not perfect, and there may be opportunities, even at Further Consideration Stage, to improve it somewhat, but we will have that debate then. For now, it is probably the best that we will get at this stage, and we can hopefully make improvements. We need to ensure that it is workable and that Departments sit down and work out a process for managing marine life.

I listened to Mr McDevitt say that when you step into the sea and put your goggles on, you are in a different world. I totally accept that.

If you go up into the Mourne, or into Lough Erne in Fermanagh, you will feel that you are in a different world as well, so I do not believe that that in itself is an argument to have a marine management organisation. We want to make sure that the interdepartmental group that, hopefully, will be established will actually work. That is why I believe that it is helpful to have the reporting mechanism back to the Department and to this House.

Mr Boylan: Will the Member give way?

Mr Elliott: I am happy to give way.

Mr Boylan: I have a point that I forgot to raise, and I thank the Member for giving me the opportunity to come in. In relation to amendment No 3, which you suggested and the Minister has tabled, would you not suggest an improvement in the first line, where it says:

"The Department may enter into arrangements"?

Would you not suggest that:

"The Department must enter into arrangements"?

Would that not be a way of improving that amendment?

Mr Elliott: I thank the Member for that. That is a potential improvement or change that he or others may want to bring forward next time. I am quite happy to look at those aspects and see whether we can come up with a better form if this part of it goes through at this stage. Obviously, we are subject to what happens today.

In rounding off, I want to ensure that we have a workable process that is not over-bureaucratic but is representative, and that the industry and all of those who have an input into marine life and the marine aspects of Northern Ireland feel confident and comfortable in having that discussion.

Mr Weir: As I made some of my points during interventions, I will try to keep my remarks reasonably brief. As a member of the Environment Committee, I welcome the fact that we have reached the Consideration Stage. I think that there was an anxiety out there among some in the wider community that this was simply disappearing into the ether. I am glad that I do not know the backstory of why it has taken as long as this, and I will

not make particular comment on that. Suffice to say that, if the time that has been taken is time to get things right, it will have been time well spent. We are talking about a piece of legislation that is not going to be here today and gone tomorrow but will shape marine conservation and marine protection for decades to come. Therefore, it is a very important piece of legislation.

I grew up in an area more or less beside the sea. Indeed, North Down very much markets itself as Northern Ireland's premier marine borough. Some of the Members who spoke previously, from their landlocked constituencies, were able to give great philosophy on marine situations. I appreciate the expertise of some of the Members opposite who have shoved their heads in the water from time to time. It is important that we get it right.

Amendment No 1 is on sustainable development. Again, I do not think that there is a fundamental problem with the centrality of having sustainable development at the heart of things. I slightly take issue on the basis that there is a certain lack of logic on amendment No 1. Mr Agnew, possibly the proposer and certainly Mr McDevitt quoted the concern that sustainable development has been put in place in legislation and then ignored. The logic is that it has been ignored, even though it is in legislation, so let us simply repeat it in legislation. Possibly, that might mean that it gets ignored for a second time. There is a certain weakness in that argument.

Where a legislative provision is put in place that is overreaching and deals with successive pieces of legislation, not to simply repeat things is the general legislative practice. Having said that, reiteration may be needed and desired. I remain to be convinced on the necessity of this. However, in the same way that the Member drew a parallel between creating a distinction or a difference between planning on land and planning on sea, I have to say — and I appreciate that the Deputy Speaker will not be indulgent of me descending into other legislation — this has ramifications for other legislation. Those who are so intent on reiteration now may find that reiteration in other legislation may be of significance.

There seems to be something of a dichotomy between amendment No 2 and amendment No 3. I share Mr Elliott's concerns. In many ways, Ms Lo's belief — blind optimism, one might say — that simply creating an organisation will remove all that bureaucracy does her great credit. However, it has been my experience of the real world, and certainly my experience of Northern Ireland, that the creation of an additional body does not take away from bureaucracy but adds another layer to it. I think that the same would be the case with a marine management organisation.

With respect, some of the accountability analogies are not particularly apposite. A Member opposite mentioned the Policing Board. Realistically, we are not talking about some sort of aquatic policing board. This is not the DOE's duck patrol but potentially something that bears no real relation to the Policing Board. Whatever one thinks of the exact policing structures or the experience of Northern Ireland over the past half century, law and order and policing were clearly acknowledged as having a high level of political sensitivity that required particular solutions. As significant as marine issues are, we did not have rioting on our streets on the basis of poor protection of molluscs. Perhaps we would have been a better society if we had

done, but the reality is that the issue does not have the same sensitivities that required the sorts of solutions for which the Policing Board was brought into place.

It is not really the same as the question of whether we have so many MLAs. Sending Mr Wells out permanently onto the waters of Northern Ireland in a little patrol boat will not be the solution, and this is about providing proper solutions.

What Members would like a marine management organisation to consist of has been mentioned. I think that we can deal in the first instance only with what is there. Let us be honest: the Member opposite referred to the fact that some degree of challenge function to government would be quite useful. That is undoubtedly the case, but the MMO would not be a challenge function to government but a substitute for government. I see that the Member is shaking his head.

Subsection (3) in the new clause proposed under amendment No 2 states:

"The marine functions and associated powers exercised by the bodies listed in subsection (4) shall instead be exercisable by the MMO."

It would be taking over those functions, not challenging them. Similarly, subsection (7) states:

"In pursuit of its general objective, the MMO may take any action which it considers necessary or expedient for the purpose of furthering any social, economic or environmental purposes."

I think that "may" will be interpreted in practice as "will". Subsection (7) is a wide remit writ large. The Minister of the Environment —

Mr Hamilton: Will the Member give way?

Mr Weir: I am happy to give way.

Mr Hamilton: Does the Member agree that the proposed new clause from which he has just read would run the very serious risk of an independent MMO enacting things, doing things and taking actions that directly contradict what Ministers from this place decide to do in their Department? The main difference is that the Ministers responsible for issues in this place are directly accountable to and elected by the people of Northern Ireland, unlike this creation.

Mr Weir: That is fundamentally correct. The lack of ultimate accountability is what lies at the heart of the problem. You could have a situation in which —

Ms Lo: Will the Member give way?

Mr Weir: Yes, I will give way briefly.

Ms Lo: Subsection (7) states:

"furthering any social, economic or environmental purposes."

That is very much the definition of sustainable development. That is really what the subsection means — the balancing of those three factors. In many ways, having an MMO would give the Assembly more accountability. It would be established as a non-departmental public body under DOE, so it would be accountable to a Department and to the Assembly.

Mr Weir: With respect to the Member, again, I am not sure that she has read her own amendment. It essentially

means that a report will be produced to the Department, which will lay a report before the Assembly. That is not proper accountability or holding a Minister or government body to account. It is not challengeable. It is a document after the fact — that is what that is.

No one has a general problem with advancing social, economic or environmental purposes. That subsection of the proposed new clause is widely drawn, and, indeed, it means that the MMO itself could simply make the interpretation. It "may take any action" to further any of those purposes. A coach and horses could be driven through that. The reality is that, if we had a situation on any issue, the entire Executive across all divisions could be united on it. Indeed, the entire Assembly, possibly with the exception of Mr Agnew, could be united on a particular issue. However, that would not matter a jot, because the MMO would be completely independent.

We have a Minister. Sometimes I agree with some of his decisions, and, at other times, I think that he has got it wrong. However, the one thing that I will say about our Minister of the Environment is that he is very proactive in intervening when he feels that it is in the wider interests of Northern Ireland, which several court cases are testament to. On a range of issues, we may disagree or agree with him. I suspect that, for a lot of us, opinions are mixed. However, at least the Minister is democratically accountable to the House. He has taken those decisions in the wider interests of Northern Ireland as a whole as he sees them. In his Brucie catchphrase, he claims to know and enact the:

"difference between being in government and being in power." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 77, p257, col 1].

So, this proposal is simply a device to put things at arm's length. It would remove any opportunity for either this or a future Minister to exercise that power by showing the proper level of intervention. It would create a completely independent body. It is not accountable.

Mention has been made of Scotland. It seems to me that the Member on the opposite Benches misunderstood. The point was that the scale of the Scottish waters was not great enough to have an MMO. You have to look at that decision, and when you think it through, you see that it was possibly against the political thinking of the Government in Scotland. It shows the overwhelming case for not having an MMO. The Scottish Government are pressing the value of independence, the need for Scotland to be independent and the idea that Scotland itself is big enough to stand on its own two feet and be Scotland the Brave. The Scottish National Party (SNP) had the opportunity to illustrate an example of Scotland acting independently and setting up its own body, but, despite the overwhelming political considerations, accountability, commonsense, practicality and the cost of any quango led the Scottish Executive — a nationalist Executive — to say, "No, there is a better route."

Mr Hamilton suggested that better route, and it is very compatible with the Minister's own amendment No 3. It suggests co-ordination first of all. I think that it would be accepted across the House that that should be the first step in leading to consolidation. Similar to what the Scottish Government did, Departments need to be streamlined so that functions can be put more coherently into a smaller range. So, I think that co-ordination lies at the heart of that.

Members said that problems have been created in Strangford lough, and that is certainly so. Ultimately, a lack of co-ordination and a lead from Departments lay at the heart of that. To be fair, DOE performed its job admirably. My view is that, if there was a fault, it lay with another Department. Lack of co-ordination was responsible. That very focus on arrangements to promote co-ordination lies at the heart of a proper solution.

I suspect that, had the functions that are proposed under amendment No 3 been in place 10 or 15 years ago, as an Executive and a region, we would not have got ourselves into the mess with Strangford lough that we did. We would not have risked the problems that we face with Europe where Strangford lough is concerned. So, I believe that amendment No 3 is a much more sensible way forward as it places that co-ordination at the heart of government. Amendment No 3 is the better of the two routes that we can go down today as it provides that co-ordinated response while ensuring that we have those functions held in an entirely accountable way. I support amendment No 3.

4.30 pm

Mr McCarthy: Members will not be surprised to know that I support my esteemed colleague Anna Lo in supporting amendment Nos 1 and 2.

Northern Ireland is already far behind other regions of these islands with regard to environmental consideration. I fear that, without emphasis on sustainable development, we will fall even further behind. The Marine Bill fails to identify an overarching aim or general duty against which the provisions and actions under the Bill can be assessed. The Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 sets a clear precedent in adopting such standards, and those relate to the achievement of sustainable development and mitigating climate change.

Amendment No 1 seeks to include provisions for sustainable development and the protection and enhancement of the health of the Northern Ireland inshore region. Amendment No 2 calls for an independent marine management organisation. Our marine habitat is an extremely important part of life in Northern Ireland, yet the fragmentation of many agencies with different roles and responsibilities makes it harder to protect. A single independent agency would not only ensure that there was sustainable management but would deliver one set of rules and regulations for all our waters.

We have seen what is possible if we do not have a streamlined system for protecting our marine habitat, as my colleague Anna Lo and others mentioned the example of the Strangford lough horse mussel. Strangford lough's unique natural features and outstanding beauty have led to it being the most highly designated and protected site in Northern Ireland. Unfortunately, the mismanagement of certain aspects of wildlife and ecosystems in the lough has caused concern over the past two decades.

The decline in the horse mussel reefs is particularly worrying, and it impacts on fishermen who should be able to sustainably fish but cannot now that protection zones are in place. The uniqueness of the mussel reefs in Strangford led to them being a key feature in the lough's European designation as a special area of conservation. Maintaining European standards of environmental protection is important for so many reasons, not least

economics. Failure to protect the horse mussel meant that we were faced with the possibility of huge European fines. Northern Ireland's international brand of a clean, green and beautiful place to live in, to visit and to spend time and money in could be adversely affected.

In conclusion, I welcome the marine legislation as a step forward. However, failure to include sustainable development and the establishment of a marine management organisation would, in my opinion, be a missed opportunity.

Mr Agnew: I welcome the Consideration Stage of the Marine Bill. We discuss many issues in the Chamber that are important and, indeed, many issues that are controversial, and yesterday's debate on marriage equality was an example of that. However, of all the issues that the Assembly has dealt with since I have been elected, I have received the most correspondence on this one. I see that Mr Weir has just left the Chamber. However, the majority of that correspondence was cc'd to all MLAs in my constituency. I have been overwhelmed by the amount of interest and, as somebody who has to go into a future election, I am delighted that my constituents are so concerned with the Bill, and I hope that they will be pleased with my contribution.

Coming specifically to the amendments, I welcome amendment No 1, which is the sustainable development clause. The Green Party took the somewhat unusual step of writing in to the Committee's consultation, and that was one of the things that we asked the Committee to consider. It may not be normal practice for political parties, but, as a party with a single MLA, we recognised that we needed to get the support of other parties. We were keen that the Committee gave consideration to a number of points that we wished to make on the Bill. So, I welcome Ms Lo bringing this forward. I had hoped that it would come forward from the Committee, but I am delighted that the Committee Chair, in her capacity as an individual MLA, has brought it forward.

At the outset, it is critical to set out the purpose of the Bill and the ethos that should flow through it. It gives a base when interpreting the Bill of what we are seeking to achieve with it. In past debates and in some Committee discussion, there has been seen to be tension between environmental NGOs, environmentalists more broadly and the fishing community. The Marine Bill is about sustaining fishing stocks not just for today's fishermen but for fishermen for generations to come. I note Mr McDéviot's comments about looking forward for seven generations. I wish that I had that kind of foresight, but we must at least start to think in those terms and think of future generations.

We have to look beyond economic short-termism. A number of mentions have been made of the Planning Bill, and I will not go off on a tangent, but there is a concern that at the heart of the Executive and some quarters of the Assembly is a drive of economic short-termism without looking at long-term impacts on our economy, as well as social and environmental impacts.

I made the point in an intervention, so I will not labour it, but we have not seen sustainable development at the heart of decision-making and in the action of public bodies. I make no apologies for re-emphasising it at every opportunity. We must seek a balance between policies that are good economically, policies that are good socially and

policies that are good environmentally. We say things like “we are putting the economy first”, and I am not convinced that that has been the case with some of the decision-making that we have seen. However, when we have said that we have put it first, we are also saying that we are putting social and environmental needs second and/or third, and that is not a way forward.

So, on behalf of the Green Party, I support amendment No 1 and welcome it being brought forward.

I will take amendment Nos 2 and 3 together because I think that they are two different approaches to trying to do the same thing. I accept what has been made clear, which is that amendment No 3 is a compromise. It can be agreed, or, at least, you would find it hard to take exception to it, except that I take some amount of exception to it, in that it may suggest that we are doing something, but, to me, it does very little. I see that I have amused Mr Weir with that comment.

Mr Weir: Will the Member give way?

Mr Agnew: Sure.

Mr Weir: The Member said that you would have to try hard to object to amendment No 3. Obviously, the Member has tried very hard to find objections to it.

Mr Agnew: I take the Member's point. I will outline my objection. It will do no harm, and if amendment No 2 fails — I hope that it will not, as I will be supporting it — I will support amendment No 3. My objection to it is that it almost pretends to solve an issue, when, to me, it does nothing. I will read some aspects of it out:

“The Department may enter into arrangements with a relevant public authority designed to promote the effective co-ordination of the exercise by the parties to the arrangements of their respective functions in the Northern Ireland inshore region.”

I do not see anything in that that the Department cannot currently do. The Department may approach other Departments and public bodies, and they may work together or they may not. That is currently the case and will continue to be the case if amendment No 3 is passed.

When the Department was in front of the Committee, it stated that it would have difficulty holding other Departments to account and that if actions required as part of a marine conservation zone fell to another Department, the DOE could only request action. I do not see anything in amendment No 3 that would change that. My objection to it is not that it will do any harm but that it proposes to do more than it will.

I have not heard from the Minister, but from what was said across the Chamber, the amendment is being presented as a step towards better co-ordination of Departments. However, I see nothing in it other than providing a report to the Assembly, which may put some pressure on Departments to work better together, but that in itself is insufficient.

At the heart of many people's frustrations with those institutions, probably most correctly laid at the doors of the Executive and Departments, is their failure to work together and the silo mentality that is perceived to exist at the heart of government. That is a fair perception. Not to

introduce an MMO, or even to have the halfway house of the Scottish model, will be an opportunity missed.

My preference is for an independent marine management organisation, but amendment No 3 is certainly not the Scottish model. I think that Mr Hamilton agrees with me on that. He referred to reorganisations of Departments. If we ever see that, something along the lines of the Scottish model could be possible. However, amendment No 3 is not that, and if it is a choice between amendment No 3 and amendment No 2, an MMO is much more effective.

We need that co-ordination. We need one body taking on marine management.

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for allowing me to intervene. Does he agree that reorganisation of government and consolidation of all, or certainly most, marine functions within one Department would achieve the aim that he and I probably share, which is better and more co-ordinated marine management? That could do that every bit as effectively as the proposal in amendment No 2.

Mr Agnew: I want better governance, and I do not think that the Member disagrees with that. In other words, I think that that is the point that he is making. However, I will draw a distinction. The Sustainable Development Commission was independent of government, had a high level of expertise but advised government. I would argue that it also held government to account. It was done away with but not on the grounds of cost. It was called a quango, and there is now an assumption that if you call something a quango, it must be bad, so enough said. I do not accept that.

The Sustainable Development Commission cost very little money, had a high level of expertise and was done away with at UK level, but we could have maintained our own commission in Northern Ireland. We chose not to and were told that the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) has the sustainable development unit. I can honestly say that the sustainable development unit, and with the best will in the world to all those who work in it, does not have the expertise, passion and drive of the Sustainable Development Commission. That unit is not achieving what the Sustainable Development Commission achieved when it was operating.

Indeed, the lack of sustainability at the heart of government suggests to me that the sustainable development unit in OFMDFM is not driving that agenda within government. That is an example of the difference between an independent body with expertise and a body that sits within a Department, which, even if it brought those aspects together, would still fall short of an independent MMO.

Cost is another aspect of quangos that is often criticised.

We have the McCusker report. I heard the arguments from across the way that an independent MMO would be more bureaucratic and that, generally, more bureaucratic organisations cost more. The McCusker report, which the Minister has given credit to — rightly so — states that an independent MMO would save us in the region of £250,000 a year, with set-up costs of £650,000. I have not heard anyone go into detail and say why that is a poor report; in fact, I have not heard anyone say that it is a poor report. If we accept the report, it is a body that would pay

for itself in efficiencies within three years. In respect of the cost element, I do not think we can merely criticise an MMO as a quango and dismiss it in that regard. In my opinion, we would have better governance and more efficiencies.

4.45 pm

The third aspect is independence. The Bill, as drafted, will fail to achieve the effective management and independence of government that we need. I heard the calls about us being here to govern and the comments about the difference between being in government and in power, but there are times and places when we should wield power, and there are times and places when we should accede power. We accede power to the police. One of the key functions of an MMO would be to police our coastal waters. Reference was made to whether we had an independent environment agency. In both these arguments, I find it hard to understand why we think it is acceptable for Departments to police themselves. We need that independence, because we need —

Mr McDevitt: Will the Member give way?

Mr Agnew: I will certainly give way.

Mr McDevitt: I appreciate the Member returning to the question of independent supervision or policing of the marine environment. It seems to me that quite a few Members do not seem to think that it is their responsibility. They think that, somehow or other, life ends at the shoreline and the seas will look after themselves. The damage that we are doing to our marine environment is damaging our existence as human beings.

I appreciate what Mr Elliott was trying to say earlier. He was saying that being out in the wilds of Fermanagh is very different from sitting in the Chamber in the middle of town in Belfast. There is a fundamental difference between the land and the water environments. We cannot afford to underestimate the precarious nature of so many of our waterborne environments, whether they are inland waterways like the ones Fermanagh is so blessed to have or our marine environment. Therefore rather than being caught up in Mr Weir's well-given gift for an occasional bit of humour, it is about policing molluscs, invertebrates and sponges. It is about appreciating the contribution that all those animals make to your existence on the coastline in north Down. It is about those of you who have the great privilege of representing a coastal constituency valuing the treasure that you have right on your doorstep.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Member for his contribution. I completely agree: this is about policing our waters, giving protection to our inshore region and independence. We would not accept anything less when we are policing the land. We would not want political intervention. We certainly challenge police decisions and whatever else, but, as a legislature, we allow them the independence to do their job and give them the respect that they have the expertise to do their job. Maybe we do not always do that as much as we should in this part of the world, but, as a legislature, we give them those powers.

I welcome amendment No 2. I have made my points on amendment No 3. The point was made that amendment No 3 is a compromise, but it is a poor compromise. To anyone looking at it who has a concern about marine management and has a passion in this field, it will

reflect poor governance. If that is the best compromise that could be found at the Executive, the Bill will be a missed opportunity. Amendment Nos 1 and 2 give us the opportunity to rectify deficiencies in the Bill in order to make it fit for purpose and, indeed, fit for Europe.

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): I thank all the Members who have contributed on the first group of amendments. I acknowledge and applaud the work of the Committee in taking forward the Committee Stage of the Bill. I will touch on some of the issues raised about the management of the Bill subsequently in my contribution. I acknowledge all the marine stakeholders, who have been mighty in their contribution to the discussion around the Bill, their interrogation of amendments and the toing and froing of arguments in order to try to make theirs prevail. The marine stakeholders are a very wide range of people. It is not just marine NGOs who have been very diligent in respect of this legislation; it is also the fishermen.

Later in the debate, we will touch on the issue of marine conservation zones and confirm that the first marine conservation zone will, obviously, be Strangford lough, for the reasons that everybody has articulated this afternoon: the damage that has been done to the modiolus modiolus. I will touch on that later. If there is going to be a second marine conservation zone, it is likely to be in the waters around Rathlin Island. Who is promoting that MCZ? It is the fishing community. Why does it promote that MCZ? Because, in the areas that might be zoned for marine conservation, there are sponges, and sponges are incubators for crab and lobster. The fishing community recognises that, if those sponges and that zone are protected, not only is that good for that zone, but it is sustainable in terms of their fishing interests. Steven Agnew said in his very last comment that, if we do not take forward some of the opportunities in the amendments, we will have missed those opportunities: I actually look at it somewhat differently. The Bill is littered with opportunities that will be grasped if we do the post-Bill work properly and follow the leadership of those who argued for the protection of the modiolus in Strangford lough and the fishermen who now talk about the protection of a sponge off the coast of Rathlin. If that becomes our twin leadership to follow going forward, the Bill will be all about opportunities grasped and not about missed opportunities in relation to some of the amendments.

I turn to the amendments. Earlier, one Member — I think it was Mr Weir — differentiated the scale of the challenge around the policing issue over many years and how it has been managed, including by Mr Weir on the Policing Board, in more recent years. He indicated that the scale of that issue was somewhat higher and different from the scale of issues that this Bill touches on. Clearly, given the disputes and divisions on issues of law, order and justice in our society, that is a strong argument. However, given the scale of the issues that now face our wider environment, heritage and seas, my intuition is to look at the issue of policing the seas and the need for protection and reform around all of that in much the same way as we looked at policing during all those years of negotiation and implementation of the 175 Patten recommendations.

At least 75% of schools in Northern Ireland are now members of Eco-Schools. That is a global movement touching millions of school students who have a commitment to protect our environment. They know about

the threat that exists, perhaps even better than we do, because of global warming and climate change and about the need to protect our heritage, terrestrial and sea-based life, ecosystems and biodiversity. I make that point because I see the Bill as a part of a family of measures through which the DOE and this Government can define and reconfigure our ambition over the lifetime of this mandate. The Marine Bill should be followed by a climate change Bill. Before the climate change Bill, there should be a second carrier bag levy Bill. After the climate change Bill, there may yet be a national parks Bill. In my view, that family of measures indicates that the legacy of this mandate can be to take forward the challenge from those young students in Eco-Schools in protecting ecosystems and nurturing our biodiversity. That is the measure of the Bill and should be the measure of all the other legislation that I referred to.

In dealing with the amendments, I will respond as best I can to the comments from Members. I will not respond to them all — *[Interruption.]* Thank you, Mr Ramsey. I will not respond to them all because that would not go down so well with some of the people behind me, although I am sure that everybody else wants to hear everything that I have to say.

It seemed to me that Mr Weir quoted me with approval not once but twice in his contribution. I do not even get that from my colleagues, never mind those who are seen to be in a slightly different place from me on a lot of issues. He is right to rely on John Swinney and, forgive me for doing this, Robert Kennedy — *[Interruption.]* Sorry, was that you, Simon? It is no coincidence that Robert Kennedy's son, Robert Kennedy Jnr, is one of North America's leading environmental lawyers. There is a clip in the middle of the movie 'Bobby', which came out six or seven years ago, in which Robert Kennedy talks to young children about the environment. He was, therefore, ahead of his time in his commitment to the environment and heritage, as he was in so many other ways.

If you take today and tomorrow together, you see that this is, in my view, arguably the most significant week for a generation when it comes to our seas and the marine. That is because, with the will of the Assembly, Consideration Stage will be agreed to today, and tomorrow, a couple of hundred yards from here, down at the Pavilion, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and I — there is something significant in both of us doing this — will launch a consultation on marine issues. That is a dramatisation of the fact that, whatever the history surrounding issues such as Strangford lough, both of us will talk about marine issues in front of 80 or 90 people from a vast range of organisations and backgrounds. That is a representative moment of what is the most significant week in a generation for water, sea and marine issues.

Although Anna Lo spoke in a party capacity, I acknowledge that she led the Committee through all these matters in the Bill. The Member said — this was a thoughtful remark — that, without the sustainable development duty, the Bill lacked soul. Although I am attracted to the concept of the wider dimensions of the soul of politics and legislation, I do not think that it is a matter of soul; it is a matter of will and political leadership.

5.00 pm

I think that Mr Weir asked why we should legislate twice to have something ignored twice. There is a point in that, but the real point is whether we, as an Executive, understand that all that legislation that I referred to is the outworking of the principle and practice of sustainable development and that, at the heart of that, is capturing the understanding that low carbon, which is good for the environment, is good for our economic prospects. If we do not understand that that is at the heart of economic growth and the protection of all our environments, including the marine, we will be deluding ourselves about the ambition of the law and the outworking of all our laws for the Northern Ireland economy and environment.

I was in the Chamber last Monday, so I missed last week's informal environment council meeting in Dublin. However, there was a debate involving the Commissioner and the full range of Environment Ministers about how Europe was losing its green advantage to China, of all places, and to other areas of Asia because the opportunity to understand low carbon and high growth had been missed. The conversation was about how Europe had lost its place in the global market, as others realised that that was the sustainable and economically prosperous way to proceed. So, I appreciate Anna Lo's comment about soul, but this is much more fundamental than soul: it is about the will to mainstream the sustainable development principle or, as I prefer it, the sustainable growth principle into the life of our economy and government and into its outworking in practice and policy.

As I think people know, I support putting in this legislation a reiteration of the sustainable development duty that exists in prior legislation. I support that, but, as is occasionally the case, my argument did not prevail at the Executive meeting in March at which this matter was discussed. I thought that I had the votes, but, when the hands went up, the votes were not there. I acknowledge that the Alliance Party endorsed that approach. I do not know whether that is a breach of confidentiality; I apologise to Peter Robinson in advance if he thinks that that is the case. Other members also put their hand up, but there was not a majority. If there had been, this may have been different. I got the sense from Simon Hamilton, speaking on behalf of his party, that he was not going to die in a ditch over this. He is nodding in agreement, so he is not going to die in a ditch. However, there is an Executive position on this, and I am bound by that. So, I will recommend to the Assembly that the sustainable development duty is not voted for.

Nevertheless, to create certainty and avoid doubt and to give reassurance to all those who support that amendment to the Bill, section 25 of the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006 places a sustainable development duty on all public authorities. My view is that the Scottish approach is the right one. There are times when it is timely, useful and even necessary to restate a principle or statutory duty. That is why I was in favour of that proposal when it went to the Executive. Nonetheless, there is still a sustainable duty on all public authorities. So that there is no doubt, that will mean that Departments with marine responsibilities will have to exercise their functions under the Marine Bill in a way that contributes to the achievement of sustainable development. This is essential at a time when we need to strike a balance between

social, economic and environmental factors in the marine environment. At the same time, we need to challenge a particular view that the economy and the environment are incompatible and that, in order to achieve economic benefits, the environment has to suffer. It will be one of the great ironies when Strangford lough is designated as a marine conservation zone — the first in the North — that, as I keep saying, you will also have SeaGen, the world's birthplace of modern tidal power, in the middle of the lough. That proves that you can reconcile the economic, the environmental and the energy going forward. That is a lesson that others do not seem to have acknowledged in respect of other sites in Northern Ireland. This need not and cannot be the case if we are to ensure that the sea's resources are managed in a sustainable way.

I was asked by the Deputy Chair of the Committee to put on record the provisions of the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006 in respect of sustainable development and to put it on record that the duty placed on public authorities by the Climate Change Act 2008 will apply to the implementation of this Bill. However, I want to go further and give some reassurance that, although it is not the will of the Executive and it may not be the will of the Assembly for the amendment to be made, there are other checks, balances and safety nets in the Bill that will address the issue of sustainable development. For example, the aims of the sustainable development duty are explained in the Executive's sustainable development strategy entitled 'Everyone's Involved', which was published in April 2010.

I note the comments made by another Member of the House — I think it was Mr Agnew — about the sustainable development function of OFMDFM. However, nonetheless, it is in black and white and mainstreamed into the Executive's sustainable development strategy. In addition, the Marine Bill will require the Department to undertake a sustainability appraisal of proposals for inclusion in a marine plan. The Department can proceed with those proposals only if the appraisal indicates that it is appropriate. So, as we go into the next phase of work on the far side of Royal Assent to develop a marine plan — it is a big piece of the overall ambition of the legislation — we will have to undertake a sustainability appraisal. It may not be explicit in this Bill — it is explicit in other Acts — there will be mechanisms built into the work of the Department to ensure that the issue of sustainability and the appraisal of that requirement is undertaken. Moreover, sustainable development aims for the marine environment were set out in the high-level marine objectives that were published jointly by all the Administrations in Britain and Northern Ireland in April 2009. In that way, I hope that Members are reassured that the difference between having this duty in the Bill and not having it has been closed somewhat. It does not close it completely; I would rather have seen that, but that is not the view of the Executive. Obviously, in due course, it will be the view of the Department.

I want to deal with some of the other issues raised by Members about the sustainable development duty. I have to say that there were some comments, which, given that they are in Hansard, may well come back to haunt people and pretty soon. It seemed that the argument that came from a number of Members on the Benches opposite was "If you want to put a sustainable development duty in the Bill, you will have to support, for example, putting

economic considerations in the Planning Bill". That was the argument. The only political and legislative logic of that argument is that we will have to put all material considerations of planning applications into the Planning Bill. That is the logic.

Mr Weir: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Attwood: One second. If you are saying to those who want new clause A1 to go into this Bill that they will have to live with putting relevant clauses into the Planning Bill for the economic imperative, it seems to me that Steven Agnew or others may table amendments so that all material considerations are put into the Planning Bill. Indeed, that may be what Steven Agnew was probing. In that way, they will be saying that, if you are going to put something into law, you should put it all into law. I give way to the Member.

Mr Weir: The point I was making was that, I think, the proposer of the amendment said that, essentially, the purpose of it was to reiterate and magnify what is there — I paraphrase — and, effectively, to underline the commitment on sustainable development. When your departmental officials were in front of the Committee on that issue and were asked about the purpose of clauses 2 and 6 of the Planning Bill, the reply was that it was not making a new provision but was a reiteration. It was effectively underlining what was already there. The point I am making — I think that Mr Hamilton made this point as well — is that those who are making a die-in-the-ditch opposition to those references, which are, by the Department's own admission, a reiteration, cannot then use an opposite logic as regards what is proposed today.

Mr Attwood: The Member makes a brave defence of what he outlined earlier, but I do not think that it addressed the fundamental point. If it is the view of Members opposite that they are not going to die in the ditch over putting sustainable development in this Bill, is the logic of that position not to put all material considerations into the Planning Bill, rather than one or other material consideration? I would not bring forward the legislation in respect of this Bill or the Planning Bill —

Mr Weir: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Attwood: I will give way. I would not bring that legislation forward if I was not comfortable that what is in the Bill is adequate, satisfactory and does not create any risks. The Deputy Speaker will call us out of order in a second.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask Members to focus on the legislation in front of us today.

Mr Weir: Obviously the issue is having sustainable development on the face of the Bill. I am not quite sure if the Minister's memory of the Planning Bill is accurate. The direct reference in the Planning Bill to sustainable development is already there on the face of the Bill. The issue is whether economic development should also be on the face of the Bill. From that point of view, sustainable development is already there and would not need to be added, so the parallel is not the same.

Mr Attwood: I will take the hint from the Deputy Speaker and move on to my next point.

I will touch on the MMO in a moment. On the principle of borrowing from the Scottish experience, what I think

we should do is borrow from best practice and best experience in other jurisdictions, wherever they might be. That might mean that we end up not adopting the Scottish approach. We might adopt the English approach, or, more likely, we will create our own approach. If the Scottish Government are relied on with such enthusiasm, remember that they have challenging targets on emissions in their Climate Change Act — something that the Assembly and Executive will have to think carefully about, given that there is now a pre-consultation in respect of a climate Bill — and so on and so forth, including their own legislation on national parks.

Comments were made about the delay in getting from Committee Stage to Consideration Stage. The record confirms that there has been delay. I think that the Committee will confirm — I think that Mr Elliott touched on this — that, after the Bill came out of Committee, there was not just toing and froing between me and the Committee and between me and stakeholders but between the Committee and stakeholders, in respect of both the MMO and the issue around the sea fishing defence, which we will touch on later in the Bill. There were ongoing conversations that, I thought, were useful, even though I accept that they went on somewhat longer than might otherwise have been envisaged. I go back to the point made by Mr Agnew: this is very powerful legislation — the Marine Bill, marine conservation zone, marine planning and all the issues therein. This is us catching up with the jurisdictions in Britain. Let us get it right in catching up, because the ambition of this law and its outworking in practice will be of such significance.

5.15 pm

I released my Executive paper in November, and it was tabled at the Executive following a request that I made under the three-meeting rule, although it did not take up that much time at the Executive. Nevertheless, I am not going to walk away. Given the challenge that has been put to Executive Ministers about putting legislation before the Assembly — with the will of the Executive, five Bills will come before the House at various stages of the legislative process before the end of June — points have been well made about how I and, perhaps, others could have better managed this process to get the Bill before the House at an earlier stage.

I will now turn to amendment No 2, which deals with the marine management organisation. Although Ms Lo did not mention it in her opening contribution, that was another proposal that I brought to the Executive in my original Executive paper last year and in the paper that I brought to the Executive, which led to today's Consideration Stage. In that paper, I asked that the principle of an MMO be endorsed. Again, unfortunately, my argument did not prevail.

I will continue to work through the business case for an MMO in the conviction that, eventually perhaps, the weight of argument will prevail in some other places, but it has not. I accept the Executive's will and abide by it, which is why I will recommend to the Chamber today that we should not endorse amendment No 2. I can understand and accept the sentiment and principle behind the amendment. I do not discount that, but the Executive, of which I am a member, think otherwise.

It is curious that some Members have relied on the Scottish model, which, essentially, comprises a marine directorate that is a Department of the Government that fulfils all marine functions. That is relied on as being a better model than an independent MMO. England, however, has an independent MMO. The London Government have, for England, an MMO that is responsible for conservation, marine planning, licensing and fishing. Policy, however, is retained by the Department.

There are multiple models that might or might not apply in the North. My view is that to shape public policy fundamentally, especially when there may historically have been a culture of resistance to change, the more that responsibility for areas of public policy is embedded in independent organisations, a better tension is created on those issues between government, as the policy and legislative arm, and the other NDPBs or independent third-party organisations that have responsibilities outwith policy and law. That has served us well, and, as Mr McDevitt said, the policing structures, the Police Ombudsman, the Prisoner Ombudsman, the Human Rights Commission, the Equality Commission and other agencies such as Tourism Ireland that operate on an all-Ireland basis have served us well. My intuition and judgement leads me to go in that direction, which is why I argued for the principle of an MMO.

There are, however, issues around the drafting of amendment No 2 — Mr McDevitt touched on this — that I have to bring to the attention of the House. Although the sentiment and the ambition of the amendment are good, and I can understand in principle why Members would back it, including members of my party, the drafting of amendment No 2 is a matter of concern, and I will explain why.

First, the legal advice that I have from the Office of the Legislative Counsel (OLC) is very much that you need legislation for an MMO. That is why, when I made my recommendation to the Executive about the principle of an MMO, I was not proposing that it go into this Bill. The scale of that work, and knowing the mind of the Executive, meant that winning that argument was, in my view, beyond what I could achieve.

In acknowledging the amendment, I have to point out that there are deficiencies in it. I say that benignly and in an attempt to be helpful, rather than to rubbish the amendment: there is no intention on my part to do that. For example, legislatively, there is no provision in the amendment for matters such as the MMO's status, the board's membership — as opposed to the number of members — the terms of appointment, remuneration, allowances, pensions, committees, and accounts and records. You cannot have an NDPB unless you shape the issues around appointment, remuneration, allowances, pensions, committees, and accounts and records. That is best practice. That would be good law. This particular amendment does not capture those issues.

Secondly, and arguably more fundamentally, as was touched upon by Mr Weir, the amendment proposes that all marine functions and associated powers exercised by the long list of bodies in the amendment should be "exercisable by the MMO." That is taking away from government the responsibility for policy and law. Whatever about how we best manage the marine environment,

nobody is arguing that we take away from government and the legislature responsibility for law and policy. Yet, the drafting of the amendment does, unfortunately, propose that everything go across to the MMO, which is, in my view, clearly outwith competence and not best practice.

Thirdly, as was touched upon — and I am using these only indicatively — the amendment proposes that only the DOE could give guidance and direction. That would be a wonderful world, if the DOE could give guidance and direction in relation to fisheries matters, which are currently the responsibility of the Agriculture Department.

Under the law, the DOE can give directions and guidance only in respect of its own responsibility and not in respect of the responsibilities of other Departments. However, there is nothing in the draft new clause that provides for other relevant Departments to give guidance and direction in respect of their marine functions. It is not just about DARD being responsible for fisheries; DETI is responsible for offshore renewables.

Therefore, whilst I very much have sympathy with the ambition of the amendment, even though I am opposed to it because of Executive obligations, I have to point out to the House that the amendment is deficient in a lot of ways. Consequently, if it were to be passed, in my view it would run the risk of being bad law or poor law and certainly not the best law.

As touched on and acknowledged in one of the contributions, it used to be the case that the marine function was fragmented across the DOE. In no time at all, a marine division was created — I think that it took about four months. It was an example of some senior civil servants moving very quickly and decisively to gather together all the marine functions. It means that 62 staff who deal with marine licensing, marine conservation, the marine plan and marine monitoring and assessment are now in the one place. I think that that was overdue and useful.

However, if, as Mr Hamilton suggests, we need to go further than that and build all the marine functions into one Department, then that is a debate that we have to have. I would not have requested that we gather in a marine division the four functions of marine that were previously fragmented across the Department unless I believed that integration is the right model. However, let nobody misunderstand. If that were to happen on the far side of some negotiation — I am putting down now a very strong political marker, Mr Deputy Speaker — this is not a situation where one Department is taking over the marine function. It will have to be a new approach to marine, gathered in one place where all interests are acknowledged but nobody has a veto or a monopoly of wisdom. Heretofore, there might have been a sense that, on some issues, the view of one Department prevailed. You have only to look at Mr McDevitt's testimony about the lough bed down in Strangford lough to see the outworkings of one Department's being reticent to assert the right authority when it comes to the marine.

I will touch on some other matters before I come to amendment No 3. This is in respect of issues raised by Mr Boylan. I did not quite understand the point about "did not get their way", which was his opening remark. I will take an intervention from him, but I am not quite sure what that refers to. If it refers to the two amendments that I lost at the Executive, I regret that. I did get my way on all the

other amendments that I put to the Executive. That might have been the point, but that is not the reason why there was a delay around the Executive table. Others will need to explain why there was a delay around the Executive table, but I am grateful that the Executive accepted the amendments that I brought through. A lot of that was informed by, and at the encouragement of, the Committee. So the Committee got its way; maybe that is the best way to put it.

He also raised the issue of cost. There is going to be cost. However, let us be clear about it: the cost of infraction would be multiples of the cost of taking forward the Marine Bill and the marine plan. It is not an exaggeration to say that, because of the horse mussel issue in Strangford lough, we were on the verge of an £8 million fine, with multiple fines on a rolling daily basis thereafter. Without the good authority of Departments and the Ulster Wildlife Trust's reference to Europe, which concentrated our minds like nothing ordinary, there could have been a multimillion-pound cost.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

To answer that question, the costs of the preparation, adoption and publication of the marine plan will be approximately £1.9 million over three or four years. There will be a rolling cost of £200,000 for MCZ work — probably rolling for four or five years — and, after that, a further annual cost of about £160,000. Those are significant costs, but is it not well worth it to avoid infraction and better protect our marine in the way that has been outlined?

I will think further about the point that Mr Boylan made, in an intervention to Mr Elliott about amendment No 3, which I have not yet touched on, about "must enter into arrangements". It might be that that is just a bit too prescriptive and that some Departments will want more flexibility. I will consider it further at Further Consideration Stage. My intuition is not to favour it, but it is a point worth looking at.

Peter Weir's contribution was — now, let me just check where —

Mr Weir: You touched on it earlier.

Mr Attwood: I probably did touch on some of it earlier, and you are probably getting weary of me going back to it. In the round, I thought that all the contributions were wise and mature.

I will deal, lastly, with amendment No 3, arrangements to promote co-ordination of functions in Northern Ireland inshore region. Whilst there may be differences about the MMO, there are no differences in respect of amendment No 3. That amendment supports the Committee's position that co-ordination between Departments should be underpinned in the absence of any change to the existing governing structure. The amendment provides an effective means by which DOE can enter into arrangements with the other bodies listed so as to promote effective co-ordination of the respective marine functions. It ensures that DOE publishes details of any such arrangements made, and, by requiring DOE to lay a report before the Assembly on the effectiveness of those arrangements, it offers an important review mechanism.

5.30 pm

In effect, it ensures that a joined-up approach will be taken during the implementation of the Bill's provisions, which will be particularly important in the continuing absence of an MMO as an NDPB. I asked Members to accept the amendment, and I did not pick up any dissent in that regard.

Save those comments and any other matters that I come back to Members on, I am prepared to accept the latter amendment.

Ms Lo: I thank everyone who took part in this afternoon's debate. It has really been constructive, and the tone has been delightful. Thank you very much: I enjoyed it.

I am going to be brief and summarise the main points made by Members. Simon spoke on behalf of the Committee. I was delighted to hear him stress a couple of times that he has no objections to the principle of sustainable development. He is concerned because the officials told us that there is no need to double-up legislation in this Bill and thinks that, at the Committee Stage, we did not support that. I am delighted to hear that his decision is not set and that he is keeping an open mind. I urge Members to support the amendment.

On the issue of the MMO, Simon said that he did not want to diminish power and hand it to NDPBs. He also questioned the membership of the MMO. It was interesting to hear Simon say that he is in favour of a third option, which is to go along with the Scottish model. That is something we need to talk about, think about and investigate whether it is an option for us in the future.

Cathal said that there is no need to reiterate sustainable development in the Bill. He was worried that, with the MMO, we will be creating another quango. He said that he supported amendment No 3 but that he was a bit concerned about the cost to ratepayers, which the Minister mentioned.

Conall's contribution was very, very interesting. He talked about his own experience of diving in Strangford lough. We all need to bear in mind that we have such a rich environment, and we really have to protect it. I stay here because I love the countryside. I chose to live here because of the lovely countryside, and we have got to keep it for generations to come.

I came from two cities: Hong Kong, which was built-up, and London, where I never really saw a tree or a field. I only wanted to stay here for six months. I promised my previous husband, who is dead, that I only wanted to stay here for six months. I have stayed here since the 1970s because I love the environment. That is something that you do not understand if you have not lived in built-up environments. The environment is something that we have to preserve and pass on for generations to come.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Ms Lo: Thank you. I did not mean to say that. I just blurted it out. *[Laughter.]*

Mr A Maginness: Give us more. *[Laughter.]*

Ms Lo: You just want praise. Conall made a lot of important points and asked why politicians would fear decision-making based on evidence and the expertise of professionals. He said that we should not be shy, fearful or

suspicious of independent organisations. Those are very good points. He asked a few questions about the details of my amendment on the MMO. To be honest, I know that I will not get the amendment passed. If the Minister did not get it passed, why would I?

Minister, I support you on this, and I wanted the Assembly to debate the need for it. Minister, you worked very hard on this, and I want to support you by raising the point. I will probably not move the amendment, but it is important that we keep thinking about it. We need to think about how it would give us independence and accountability for managing our seas.

Tom Elliott supported the Bill. He also supported the principle of sustainable development but said that responsibility for that was already somewhere else and so there was no need for it in the Bill. He said that he supported opportunities for better management but was concerned about over-bureaucracy. I hope that the MMO, when we get it, will not add another layer of bureaucracy. He supported amendment No 3 because he said that at least there was something on the ground. He added that it was not perfect but that we could maybe table further amendments to improve it at Further Consideration Stage. My concern is that that will be a talking shop, that we will do nothing but tick boxes and that we will not really be effective and efficient. We will wait and see whether we can improve it.

Peter Weir made very interesting comments on the premier marine borough of North Down and said that he was very proud of it. He said that the legal methodology is not to repeat things that are already in legislation because that would have implications for other legislation. I am afraid that I have to mention the Planning Bill again. This is in the Planning Bill, so a precedent has been set. We cannot say that we will do it for one Bill and not the other. We need to address that anomaly.

I will speed on. Peter made a lot of comments about the MMO's accountability and layers of bureaucracy. I do not know whether Peter heard my earlier comment that I was just trying to flag up the importance of an MMO. I admit that I did not put a lot of detail in the amendment, and the Minister, quite rightly, pointed out a lot of deficiencies. As the Minister said, if we adopt the clause, the Department will, I hope, add a lot more detail or maybe produce a separate Bill for an MMO.

Kieran said that the Marine Bill failed to identify sustainable development as a key issue. He talked about the difficulties in Strangford lough, which is in his constituency, and said that, if we did not include an MMO and sustainable development in the Bill, it would be a missed opportunity.

Steven Agnew was very knowledgeable and said that he was overwhelmed by the response from stakeholders, who sent e-mails and so on.

That shows the public interest in this matter, and we should welcome that. He had hoped that the Committee would table an amendment to include sustainable development, but that did not happen. He said that sustainable development is very important because it sets the ethos that flows through the Bill.

He said that the Bill is about sustaining fishing for generations to come and that it is not just about the

environment and economic short-termism with the result that, if we did not look at long-term social and environmental impacts, that would be at our own peril. He said that he has not seen sustainable development in policies and practice over the years, even though it is in the Miscellaneous Provisions Act. He said that the Sustainable Development Commission had been done away with. We have the sustainable development unit, but it does not have the same expertise, and we have not seen a lot come out of it. He highlighted the importance of independence in government for the management of the seas. He supported the clause on the MMO and said that there are times when we should hold on to powers and times when we should pass them on to experts.

I will not say very much about the Minister's contribution. He has been very positive and constructive, and I commend him for his always very strong support for the environment and for his effort over the past two years. He has certainly done an awful lot for the environment. So, congratulations to the Minister.

He said that the Bill is not a lost opportunity but more of an opportunity for us to grasp. He gave the caveat that, if we do things right, post-adoption of the Bill, it is part of a family of measures. I am really pleased to hear that. We now have a family of measures, comprising the Marine Bill, the coming Climate Change Bill and, hopefully, the legislation on national parks that will come along. I put on record, Minister, that you have my support.

He said that he is still working through the business case on the MMO and that he is disappointed that the Executive did not accept his idea. He responded to Simon Hamilton about the idea of using the Marine Scotland model. We need to work on it, and I am glad that the DUP is thinking about it.

I think that that is all that I will say, so thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

Question, That amendment No 1 be made, put and agreed to.

New clause ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Mr Speaker: Amendment No 2 is mutually exclusive with amendment No 3.

Amendment No 2 not moved.

Clause 1 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

New Clause

Amendment No 3 made:

After clause 1 insert

“Arrangements to promote co-ordination of functions in Northern Ireland inshore region

1A.—(1) *The Department may enter into arrangements with a relevant public authority designed to promote the effective co-ordination of the exercise by the parties to the arrangements of their respective functions in the Northern Ireland inshore region.*

(2) *The Department shall keep arrangements made under this section under review.*

(3) *The Department shall—*

(a) within one year of the date on which this Act receives Royal Assent publish details of any arrangements made under this section; and

(b) within three years of the date on which this Act receives Royal Assent lay before the Assembly a report on the effectiveness of any arrangements made under this section.

(4) *For the purposes of this section “the relevant public authorities” are—*

(a) the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development;

(b) the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure;

(c) the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment;

(d) the Department for Regional Development;

(e) the Agri-food and Biosciences Institute;

(f) the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission.”.— [Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment).]

New clause ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 2 and 3 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

5.45 pm

Clause 4 (Withdrawal of marine plan)

Mr Speaker: We now come to the second group of amendments for debate. With amendment No 4, it will be convenient to debate amendment Nos 5, 6, 9 to 14, and 19, as well as Mr Steven Agnew's opposition to clause 8.

The amendments deal with judicial review, social, economic and cultural issues, accountability and enforcement. Members should note that amendment Nos 10 and 11 are consequential to amendment No 9.

Mr Attwood: I beg to move amendment No 4:

In page 3, line 37, at end insert

“—

(a) publish notice of the withdrawal of the marine plan on the Department's website; and

(b)”.

The following amendments stood on the Marshalled List:

No 5: In clause 8, page 6, line 40, leave out “6” and insert “12”.— *[Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment).]*

No 6: In clause 12, page 9, line 16, leave out from “may” to end of the line and insert

“must have regard to any economic, cultural or social consequences of designating that area and, so far as possible, to—

(a) the extent to which any of the following activities are likely to be prohibited or significantly restricted within that area if it is designated—

(i) any licensable marine activity (within the meaning of Part 4 of the 2009 Act);

(ii) fishing for or taking animals or plants from the sea;

(b) the likely impact on the environment within that area if that area is not designated;

(c) the likely impact on the environment elsewhere in the Northern Ireland inshore region as a result of any activity mentioned in paragraph (a) being displaced from that area if it is designated.”— [Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment).]

No 9: In clause 20, page 14, line 32, at end insert

“(8A) Where the authority has given notice under subsection (5), it should only proceed with the act if it is satisfied that—

(a) there is no other means of proceeding with the act which would create a substantially lower risk of hindering the achievement of conservation objectives stated for the MCZ,

(b) the benefit to the public of proceeding with the act clearly outweighs the risk of damage to the environment that will be created by proceeding with it, and

(c) where possible, the authority will undertake, or make arrangements for the undertaking of, measures of equivalent environmental benefit to the damage which the act will or is likely to have in or on the MCZ.

(8B) The reference in subsection (8A)(a) to other means of proceeding with an act includes a reference to proceeding with it—

(a) in another manner, or

(b) at another location.”— [Mr Agnew.]

No 10: In clause 22, page 16, line 22, leave out “section” and insert “sections 20(8A)(c) and”.— [Mr Agnew.]

No 11: In clause 23, page 16, line 32, after “section 20(2)” insert

“, or the duty imposed by section 20(8A).”— [Mr Agnew.]

No 12: In clause 23, page 16, line 37, leave out paragraphs (a) and (b) and insert

“(a) the Department must request from the public authority an explanation for the failure; and

(b) the public authority must provide the Department with such an explanation in writing within the period of 28 days from the date of the request under paragraph (a) or such longer period as the Department may allow.”— [Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment).]

No 13: In clause 32, page 22, line 35, after “fishing” insert

“at a distance of not less than 6 and not more than 12 nautical miles from the seashore”.— [Mr Agnew.]

No 14: In clause 36, page 24, line 35, at end insert

“() Articles 4, 6, 7, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 15A of the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985;

() regulations 34, 36 and 38 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995;

() any byelaws made by virtue of regulations 23 or 31 of those Regulations;

() Article 46 of the Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002.”— [Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment).]

No 19: In schedule 1, page 36, line 35, at end insert

“() report on the proposal within the period of 6 months from the date of that person’s appointment, or such longer period as the Department may approve.”— [Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment).]

Mr Attwood: Amendment No 4 is a straightforward amendment concerning the withdrawal of a marine plan. The amendment supports a Committee recommendation. Indeed, a lot of the body of the amendments was informed, if not crafted, by the thinking and work of the Committee. What it means is that notice of DOE’s decision to withdraw a marine plan would be published on the Department’s website, as well as in ‘The Belfast Gazette’. In that regard, it is an issue of process, technical and communication, and I ask Members to accept that amendment to clause 4.

Amendment No 5 concerns the validity of marine plans. Again, it supports a Committee recommendation. Around the amendment there may be some discussion. In the Bill, a person who is aggrieved by either a marine plan or an amendment to a marine plan can apply to the High Court. The amendment would extend the application period from not later than six weeks to not later than 12 weeks after the publication of either a marine plan or an amendment to a marine plan. That is standard practice, and Members will be aware of applications that are made to the High Court to do with other areas of public policy. I think that it is a good practice, and that is why, in keeping with that standard, I support the amendment.

I wish to remind Members that the marine plan process itself will be inclusive and provide ample opportunities for engagement. That is important to note. Just as when discussing the first group of amendments I referred to the mighty work of so many people — marine NGOs, marine stakeholders and the fishing community — and said that they have been very busy and active with input into the Bill, they are also going to be very busy and active with input into the marine plan. As we will discuss later, work is already ongoing in the Department to get legislative cover in the Bill to prepare for a marine plan and to build relationships with the stakeholders to ensure that they are fully included and involved in the process. Although clause 8 provides a process by which an agreed person can apply to the High Court, I hope that it will be considered only as a last recourse. So, I ask Members to accept the amendment to clause 8.

Amendment No 6 concerns grounds for designation of a marine conservation zone. The amendment also supports a Committee recommendation on the grounds for designation of an MCZ. First, I am satisfied that a duty should be placed on the Department rather than it be given a power to have regard to the economic or social consequences of designating an area a marine conservation zone as part of that decision-making process.

It is very important to understand that an MCZ is not going to be like some other designations that arise out of European directives on wild birds or other habitat issues, where there would be a blanket designation in a part of our waters. The MCZ will be a more subtle tool that will look very precisely at areas that might require zoning

and, having assessed all the issues around that zoning, will then designate. However, in doing so — this is what the amendment does — the Department will have a duty to have regard to the economic or social consequences of designating an area an MCZ as part of that decision-making process. That is because an MCZ could impact on social and economic issues, not least and including those of the fishing community.

Also, it is appropriate to extend the matters to which DOE must have regard so that they explicitly include cultural matters. On one understanding, “social and economic” includes “cultural”. In order to create some further certainty that it does include cultural, which could, for example, include issues around wild —

A Member: Wild fowling.

Mr Attwood: Wild fowling, my apologies — the Committee was inclined, and I agreed, that, without doing violence to or broadening the ambition or the intention of grounds for designation, the inclusion of “cultural” would be appropriate.

Furthermore, I am also pleased to propose that DOE should have regard to the extent to which any licensable marine activity or fishing for or taking animals or plants from the sea is likely to be prohibited or significantly restricted within a proposed MCZ, and that consideration should be given to the likely impact on the environment within that area, were it not to be designated, or elsewhere in Northern Ireland, were an activity to be displaced.

The flexibility introduced by the word “likely”, in my view, strikes the right balance, as it would be difficult for DOE to determine absolutely the overall environmental impacts of all potential activities, given the limited scientific data and knowledge of many activities in the marine environment. As Members have indicated, the marine environment is very precious, but the science around it is somewhat limited. Therefore, the word “likely” strikes the right balance and to go beyond that creates a threshold that, I think, is too high and not sustainable.

I go back to words that the Committee wanted to hear. In addition, I would like to take this opportunity to reaffirm the importance of an open and transparent MCZ designation process. Identification of potential MCZs will be based on the use of best available evidence. Stakeholder participation will be an important element of the designation process, which will provide for social, economic and environmental considerations. It is the Department’s policy to consult fully on all potential MCZs.

I would also like to emphasise that clause 19 requires the Department to lay before the Assembly a report setting out the extent to which the network aims, as described in clause 18, have been achieved and any further steps necessary to meet that objective. The report will contain information on the number, size and location of MCZs and information about amendments to designation orders. It will also include information about activities that have been restricted or prohibited as a result of the designation.

People need to recall that the Department will not necessarily — or at all — use the heavy hand when it comes to activities that might be restricted or prohibited. It will all be dealt with on a case-by-case basis, and, consequently, there will be areas where very few activities might be restricted. Indeed, activities might be restricted

only on a seasonal basis, depending upon the zone in question.

However, there may also be MCZs of such habitat importance that restrictions and prohibitions might be much more significant. You can see that in respect of Strangford lough where, with DARD and DOE agreement, there is now a no-fish zone, in which the taking of any fish is prohibited, in the middle portion of the lough. Consequently, while that might be a more severe restriction, imposed in the event that Strangford lough is made an MCZ, there will also be areas where there will be a much lighter touch. The first report is due by December 2018, with a report in each subsequent period of six years thereafter.

I will listen carefully to what Members have to say in respect of this amendment in particular. I ask Members to accept the amendment to clause 12.

I am content to support amendment Nos 9, 10 and 11. The proposed amendment to clause 20 seeks to impose a duty on actions carried out by public authorities that may pose a significant risk to the achievement of the conservation objectives for a marine conservation zone. That replicates the conditions that are included in clause 21(7), which must be met by a person seeking an authorisation from a public authority to carry out an activity that might risk the achievement of MCZ objectives. The amendment, therefore, provides parity of approach between public authorities and those individuals or organisations authorised to undertake activities in the marine environment.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Minister for giving way. I inform him and the House that I do not intend to move amendment Nos 9, 10 and 11 today. I thank him for his kind comments on the amendment at this point, but I feel that further discussion is needed to get it passed in the House. I welcome contributions from other Members on the amendments. However, I am willing to bring them back to the House at Further Consideration Stage in the hope of getting full Assembly support.

Mr Attwood: I welcome that contribution from Mr Agnew. Clearly, there are ongoing conversations. On the far side of those conversations, there may be an agreed position. However, given that the conversations are only ongoing and that the amendment was tabled last Thursday, I welcome the Member’s intention not to move amendment Nos 9, 10 and 11.

Clause 23 deals with failure to comply with duties, and I am pleased to propose amendment No 12 in that regard. As clause 23 stands, the DOE may request a public authority to provide it with an explanation in writing should the public authority fail to comply with its duties on marine conservation zones or fail to act in accordance with any advice or guidance given to it by the DOE. I am satisfied that the discretionary element here should be removed, so that instead the DOE must request that a public authority provides it with an explanation in writing. That builds up the robust character of the law. Given the concerns expressed in the first group of amendments that, if you do not repeat something, it is not done, by creating vigour around the change from “may” to “must”, you have a higher likelihood of things being done, and that part of the amendment supports a Committee recommendation.

In addition, I do not consider that the time period for that written response should remain open-ended. I appreciate that public authorities will have targets for replying to correspondence within a certain time, but I believe that it makes sense to introduce a response time into the legislation. The tabled amendment will replace a duty on a public authority to reply within 28 days of the date of a request from the DOE, which I consider reasonable. Equally, I acknowledge that there may be occasions on which a public authority might be unable, in exceptional circumstances, to meet that timescale. Therefore, the amendment also provides some flexibility whereby, on request, the DOE could allow an extension to those 28 days. I ask Members to accept the amendment to clause 23.

Amendment No 13 relates to clause 32, which deals with exceptions, and I anticipate some discussion on that. I cannot support amendment No 13, which seeks to remove the sea fishing defence provided by clause 32(4) of between nought and six nautical miles. Under the legislation as it stands, there is a sea fishing defence of between nought and 12 nautical miles. The amendment proposes to vary that defence and to remove the defence for nought to six nautical miles. In my view, such a limitation of that defence could appear to be discriminatory to the legitimate Northern Ireland-licensed fishermen and fishermen operating under legitimate licence elsewhere in the UK.

The position in Britain on the sea fishing defence is that there is a defence from nought to 12 nautical miles. Given the limited seas around these islands and the shared seas between these islands, it could create some confusion and potential disadvantage to the fishing community if the sea fishing defence were to be varied. To stress the point: I know that there have been representations, even in recent hours, on this clause from representative organisations of the fishing community in the North, and I am not inclined towards their view of varying the clause any more than I am inclined towards varying the clause with regard to the nought to six nautical miles. The provisions included in the Bill mirror those in the rest of the UK, which ensure that fishing activity is treated equally.

6.00 pm

Amendment No 14 is a proposed amendment to clause 36, which relates to enforcement officers. The Bill would give the DOE the power to appoint enforcement officers for the purposes of enforcing by-laws made under it and enforcing the offence of damaging protected features of an MCZ. An opportunity exists to apply the common enforcement powers provided by the Bill more widely.

The Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 gives protection to certain marine flora and fauna. It also provides for regulation of the introduction of invasive, non-native animal and plant species. A point that I always make is that invasive species are the second biggest threat, after climate change, to our biodiversity. So, although people may sometimes talk light-heartedly about invasive species, their threat to our biodiversity and ecosystems is huge and is the second biggest threat to our biodiversity and ecosystems.

The Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 gives protection to certain marine species of European importance and provides the powers to make by-laws for the protection of European sites. The

Environment (NI) Order 2002 gives protection to areas of special scientific interest (ASSIs), which can extend to the low-water mark. That includes powers to make by-laws and provides for the offences of intentionally or recklessly damaging or destroying the designated feature of an ASSI. The amendment would extend the remit of enforcement officers appointed under the Bill to include the relevant provisions of those pieces of legislation. That would create a more robust enforcement regime for marine nature conservation generally.

As I have always said, although we need to have proper enforcement and not disproportionate enforcement, we need to go after the worst offenders. By having a more comprehensive, robust enforcement regime, that ambition might be better achieved.

I would also like to make a point on a related matter at the Committee's request. Clause 24 gives the Department the power to make by-laws to prohibit or restrict unregulated activities that may be detrimental to an MCZ. I want to make it clear that by-laws will be site-specific and made on a case-by-case basis, with the level of restriction depending on the features being protected. By-laws will be drafted so as to control only the aspects of the activity that are likely to be damaging. I ask Members to accept the amendment to clause 36.

Amendment 19 relates to the preparation and adoption of marine plans. The amendment relates to the circumstance in which the DOE has appointed an independent person to investigate the proposals contained in its consultation draft of a marine plan and where that person has to report to the DOE on those proposals. I believe that the time period for that investigation should not remain open ended. It should be completed in a timely way so as to avoid any unnecessary delay.

The amendment will ensure that the independent person must report within six months of appointment. That is reasonable. However, I appreciate that there may be exceptional occasions, such as with the public authority, where six months could be unachievable. It would be sensible to provide some flexibility. Therefore, the amendment would provide for an extension with the DOE's approval. I ask Members to accept the amendment to schedule 1.

Having gone through all those amendments, I acknowledge, if I did not do so fully in the first group of amendments, the contribution and work of the DOE and the marine people in the DOE. A lot of work has been taken forward around this Bill, and a lot of work has been undertaken in respect of marine planning generally. That is why we will have a saving provision in the Bill to protect that from challenge at a later date. That is the unheralded work of government.

If the Bill is going to be a defining piece of legislation in terms of marine protection, it is a defining piece of legislation because it is the will of the Assembly, the work of the Department and the officials in the Department, who have undertaken all that work. I know that their knowledge and depth of commitment, as well as their ability to work in a political environment, is very significant.

Ms Lo (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment): On behalf of the Environment Committee, I support amendment No 4 to clause 4. In the event of the Department intending to withdraw a marine plan, the

Committee was concerned about how the public would become aware of that intention. 'The Belfast Gazette' is the official newsletter of record and has an illustrious history, but it is fair to say that it is not necessarily the first place that most people go to in order to get official information. The Committee therefore felt that in addition to publication in 'The Belfast Gazette', the Department should publish on its own website notice of the withdrawal of a marine plan. We are pleased that the Minister has responded to that by tabling amendment No 4.

In relation to amendment No 5 to clause 8, the Committee recommended that an application to the High Court on the validity of a marine plan should be allowed up to 12 weeks after the publication of the plan, in keeping with standard practice, rather than the six weeks initially proposed by the Department. We were concerned that a six-week period would be too short. The Department accepted our recommendation and has addressed it in amendment No 5, which the Committee accordingly supports.

The Committee also agreed to recommend that the Minister should stress during Consideration Stage that there was a recognised process for engagement throughout the preparation of a marine plan, and that the High Court option should not be considered as an alternative. We would welcome that assurance from the Minister.

Mr Agnew indicated that he will oppose the question that clause 8 stand part of the Bill. Self-evidently, as the Committee supports amending clause 8 as per amendment No 5, we do not support Mr Agnew in that regard.

On amendment No 6 to clause 12, the Committee recommended in its report that it should be a requirement for the Department to take into consideration any social, economic and cultural consequences when considering whether it was desirable to designate an area as a marine conservation zone, or an MCZ as we refer to it in the report. The Department agreed to that recommendation. Following that, however, the Committee considered further concerns raised by the fishing industry about the potential for activities restricted or prohibited in an MCZ to be displaced and have detrimental ecological consequences on the marine area outside the zone.

We had a bit of toing and froing with the Department on that issue. Ultimately, however, it accepted the intention behind our desire to consider the environmental and economic implications of any activity that may be displaced as a consequence of designating an MCZ. In turn, we were happy to accept the Department's suggested amendment to address the issue, which is amendment No 6.

The Committee recommended that, during Consideration Stage, the Minister should stress the importance of the MCZ designation process. I therefore welcome his comments on that. The Committee also recommended that the Minister should clarify what will be included in reports to the Assembly. We recommended that they should include retrospective consideration of what impacts were expected prior to the designation of an MCZ, compared with the impacts experienced in practice post-designation.

On amendment No 12 to clause 23, the Committee recommended that public authorities be required to provide a written explanation for failing to comply with duties required by an MCZ. We were glad that the

Department agreed to make such an amendment, and we therefore support amendment No 12.

Following on from that, the Committee recommended that, during Consideration Stage, the Minister should make it clear that the provision of by-laws would be at a level appropriate to meet the objectives of the MCZ but not exceed what was required.

I would be grateful if the Minister could address that point.

Mr Agnew had not asked us to consider the policy underpinning amendment No 13, so I offer no comment on it on behalf of the Committee, other than to say that, during Committee Stage, we were content with clause 32 as drafted.

Amendment No 14 to clause 36 proposes the extension of the remit of enforcement officers to include other relevant nature legislation. That amendment had not been put to the Committee at Committee Stage, but we subsequently considered it at our meeting on 11 April this year, when we agreed that we were content to support it. We recognise that it will create a more robust enforcement regime for nature conservation in the marine environment.

Amendment No 19 to schedule 1 is welcomed by the Committee, as members recommended that, at Consideration Stage, the Minister commit to a time frame for the delivery of a marine plan. The Department subsequently brought amendment No 19 to the Committee, and we were content to agree it.

That is the Environment Committee's position on the second group of amendments. I do not think that I have an awful lot to say as an individual MLA.

Mr Hamilton: Maybe I do, unfortunately for the House.

This group has taken on a slightly different complexion. Unfortunately, I was out of the Chamber briefly, but I understand that Mr Agnew has said that he will not move amendment No 9 and, therefore, amendment Nos 10 and 11. That will somewhat constrict or restrict the debate, but we will touch on it, because it is worth doing so.

Amendment No 4 to clause 4 may seem like an inconsequential technical amendment. In many respects, it is, but it is probably my favourite amendment in the whole Bill. First, it is easily understood, and, secondly, as some Members will know, I have a bit of a thing for trying to modernise how we interact with the public. Institutions such as ours, the Departments and the Assembly must get with the fact that people are communicating and getting their information in a myriad of modern ways. They are ways that I do not always understand or know how to work, but I am told that they are much better and much more efficient. Everybody understands that websites are places from which people get lots of information, particularly from government, and there are lots of successful examples of that in government.

I remember this coming up in the Committee's discussion. The old chestnut of 'The Belfast Gazette' appeared. I am sure that it is not a publication that many of us take every week. We asked, "Why is this down here? Who reads 'The Belfast Gazette'? Why is it always there?". The answer was along the lines of, "That's just the way that we have always done it". I do not accept, nor should anyone here, that just because we have done something in a particular way for a million years, we should continue to do it for another

million years. We should not accept it in health, education or policing and justice, and we should not accept it in the environment. We should not accept it on little, superficially simple, things like this. It is important that, increasingly, we put in legislation to underpin the importance of using modern forms of technology to communicate; it is important that we put little things like this in. It may not seem like a lot, but it is a forward and progressive step by the Department and the Minister to move an amendment of this kind.

I am pleased to see amendment No 6 being proposed by the Minister. There are a couple of reasons for that. Changing “may” to “must” is critical, because many stakeholders had grave concerns about the first draft of the Bill. They felt that the use of “may” rather than “must” meant that their real concerns that the economic and social consequences that actions taken in designating an MCZ would have for their interests would not necessarily be taken into account. Of course, “may” would have permitted their concerns to be considered, but it would not have required their concerns to be considered. The change of “may” to “must” ensures that those concerns are considered in the designation process for an MCZ. That is incredibly important, and it gives a lot of comfort to a lot of people who were sceptical, doubtful, worried and concerned about the Marine Bill. The change of the word “may” to “must” will give them at least some comfort. They will, probably, have some remaining concerns, but I hope that they will be able to see in the outworking of the clause as amended that they, too, will be able to work with the Bill.

6.15 pm

So, too, do I welcome the addition of the word “cultural”. I agree with the Minister that I could easily make an argument that activities such as wildfowling and shooting could be described as “social” and “economic”. However, the inclusion of the word “cultural” has given some comfort to and satisfied that sector that its interests and concerns will also be taken into account in the designation process. I would have been relaxed about the clause as it was drafted, with the words “economic” and “social”. However, if this gives that community and sector additional comfort, I very much welcome that.

The remainder of amendment No 6 has been described as the “displacement clause”. This was talked about at Committee Stage. I welcome the delay in getting the Bill to Consideration Stage. In this respect, if no other: it gave the Committee space and time to look in more detail at other issues that it perhaps had not had sufficient time to examine at Committee Stage. One issue, which had been raised by fishermen, was a concern about displacement. In essence, if I can describe it, displacement is when a particular area is designated as a MCZ for legitimate and good reasons but moving fishing into another area could have an impact there as well and, therefore, on the fishing industry. The Committee showed some interest in the issue and concluded that it was concerned. The Committee discussed it again with the Department and came forward with an amendment that is probably not what everybody would want but is, again, a work of compromise. I think that it has been broadly accepted by the fishing industry and, indeed, the environmental sector as well as by members of the Committee.

Perhaps, if possible, the Minister would put on record a little more detail on how the process will take place. I accept and agree that the words “so far as possible” are included. If you always had foresight and knowledge of what would happen when you did something, you would not be working in the Department of the Environment but sitting on your lottery winnings. I understand and accept that it is impossible to predict everything. However, it would be helpful to the fishing industry in particular to have on the record a little more about how the Minister envisages the process will work and how and when assessments will take place. The inshore region is mentioned at the end of the amendment. A query was raised about why it mentions only the inshore region. Perhaps the Minister could explain a little more about why that is the case. That would be helpful.

I am glad that amendment No 9 is not being moved. Had it been moved, my party and I would have opposed it. I do not want to say too much about it because it is not being moved and I am sure that the Member will talk a little bit about it. I have some concerns. I believe that clause 20 is clear and that the amendment would make certain aspects of it somewhat unclear. I have concerns that the general duty prescribed in subsection (2) of clause 20 is sufficient to deal with the issues. It is not that I do not understand the wording of the amendment; I think that I understand the issues that Mr Agnew puts forward and the concerns that he has. I believe, as I look at the Bill as it is drafted, that subsection (2) is sufficient to cover those.

I have additional concerns about circumstances that are almost unenvisioned. If things were done that had the potential to damage a marine conservation zone, I can see how, in certain circumstances — it may be an energy-related issue — you would have a lot of time to consider other aspects and you would look at the options that were least damaging to the environment and an MCZ. That would be a natural thing for any Department or public authority to do. I do not think that we need to tell them to do that, and, in fact, subsection (2) already covers that. My concerns, which are worth further explanation, are about disastrous situations or something happening out of the blue, such as an oil spillage. In those moments, swiftness of action is essential. Putting additional hurdles in the way of taking prompt and urgent action to resolve something may mean that our response is not everything that it should be and that, instead of just damaging an MCZ, you damage the broader environment. I worry, too, that part of the amendment may be too concentrated on ensuring that damage is not done to an MCZ instead of ensuring that the broader environment is not damaged. So, there is something to work on and to look at in that.

I think that the clause is clear as drafted, so I am unsure whether what the Member proposes in amendment No 9 enhances it; it may actually cause even greater confusion. I welcome the fact that the amendment is not being moved. That will give us some opportunity to examine this even further and to get it right, if we, indeed, need to change things at all.

My party opposes amendment No 13 for two reasons. It would mean that fishermen in this part of the British Isles and the United Kingdom are treated differently to other fishermen and would put them at a competitive disadvantage as a consequence. I would vote against it entirely on those grounds. However, from researching this

beforehand, I recall the Examiner of Statutory Rules' report and, indeed, some evidence from the Department that we cannot remove the sea fishing defence because of EU obligations and treaty obligations, particularly under the common fisheries policy. So, my reading of the evidence that was given to us from two separate, independent sources is that we cannot actually —

Mr Agnew: I thank the Member for giving way. My advice on this is that the common fisheries policy certainly affects 6 to 12 nautical miles but not the 0 to 6 nautical miles that we can legislate for. That is why the amendment is worded as it is. I suppose that I will defend the amendments themselves in my own contribution.

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his intervention. I think that there is, at best, some confusion from the Member over whether we can legislate for this. It would be silly to legislate in contravention of EU obligations, much as I might like to do so. My goodness, I am using the EU as a defence for something here, but it would be reckless if I were to do otherwise. I think that there is, at best, some confusion, although it may be a little stronger than that, from the Member on this. Irrespective of that, if we were to legislate alone in these islands on this, we would create a competitive disadvantage for our fishing fleet, which is under severe pressure as it stands. That is why I welcome the amendments on displacement. People in the industry, like many in the farming industry, are suffering as a result of the bad winter weather and have seen their takes go down radically over the past year. So, we always have to be mindful of that sector. I oppose amendment No 13 for those reasons.

In conclusion, I will briefly talk about clause 24. I welcome the Minister's assurances about that clause. When we first looked at the Marine Bill, some from the fishing and wildfowling sectors, for example, were concerned about the list of by-laws that could be made under clause 24(3), which they viewed almost as an all-you-can-eat buffet — I think that that is the way that I described it before. However, the Minister has helpfully clarified that by saying — this is my reading and understanding of it — that some by-laws would be implemented in the case of some of MCZs. In some MCZs where there is a particular marine interest, all of them might be implemented, and, in others, it could be a few by-laws or only one. The Minister also mentioned that some of them might be seasonal. So, in that respect, it is more an à la carte menu of what you can choose than an all-you-can-eat buffet. That is an important assurance to give to the House and to those listening from the fishing industry, in particular, as well as from other sectors: not all six by-laws that can be made will always be made in the case of every MCZ. So, I welcome the clarification that there has been so far in that respect. It will give some comfort, as will other amendments in the group. I welcome the fact that amendment Nos 9, 10 and 11 are not going to be moved, and I restate our opposition to amendment No 13.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to speak on the amendments in this group. There has been a lot of good work. I acknowledge the work of the Committee, the Committee staff and the departmental officials, especially on some of these amendments. I certainly support amendment No 4 to clause 4 and amendment No 5 to clause 8. I will oppose Mr Agnew on the Question that clause 8 stand part of the

Bill. It is an important issue. He highlighted the issue of getting it right and being open and transparent. It is not easy to put that in any Bill.

My main contribution on the group will be about a vital part of the Bill: Part 3, which is about marine protection and the designation of MCZs. That is one of the key elements. People have talked about other elements of the Bill and have genuine concerns about them, but Part 3 is important for the industry and for protection and preservation. Most of my contribution will be about that, but I want to touch on some of the amendments in the group.

I oppose Mr Agnew's position on clause 8. I support amendment No 6 to clause 12, which I will touch on in a minute. I am glad that amendment No 9 is not being moved. That issue is open for more discussion. As the Member who spoke previously highlighted, there seems to be a wee bit of a loophole. It is open for more debate on whether there is something that we can bring forward. The Member who spoke previously brought forward an example of how that could go wrong. I do not propose to talk too much about that. Obviously, amendment Nos 10 and 11 are consequential to amendment No 9.

I want to touch a wee bit on amendment No 12, which I support. That is another piece of work that was brought through the Committee. I certainly add my support to that. I also support amendment No 14, which the Minister has tabled. It is about enforcement, but it is also about the Wildlife Order. I would like the Minister to respond, because there have been concerns about that. I welcome the amendment; it is one of the important ones. It is important to legislate to ensure the protection of our natural habitats and wildlife. I have been part of the Committee for a number of years. That is a key element. I would like the Minister to talk a wee bit more about that. I welcome amendment No 19 as well.

I want to go back to amendment No 6, which is a key element. It says "must". That word is key. I want to talk a wee bit about the grounds for designation and the whole process. That is a key element of the Bill. There have been some major concerns. Hearing what I heard in Committee, I can say that the fishing industry wants to come forward and work with the Department and all the organisations in the designation process. I have concerns. I talked in Committee about the whole displacement process. There was a lot of talk about Strangford. We support the initiatives that are being brought forward now to protect it, but it is a bad example. Unfortunately, we got it wrong. We have to stand up to that. Now, we have to address that.

But, that is not to say that it should be used as a benchmark that we refer back to with everything that we try to do in the future. Unfortunately, that happened.

6.30 pm

I want to talk about how we go forward in the designation of conservation zones. The key element to all of this is that it will be evidence-based, and I want the Minister to elaborate a wee bit on that. No matter what the organisation is or whether it is a discussion about an MMO where there is departmental responsibility, we will need the evidence base for the designation process. I want to expand on that. We have some expertise in the Department, but we will also have to pay for some expertise. That is only natural. If we are talking about

designating a zone, we will need the evidence base to do that. We will also need to incorporate the industries, including the fishing industry. Earlier, we got into the debate about the MMO, but it would not matter who it is. I want to reiterate that. We will still have to pay for the evidence base; it comes with a cost.

The Minister spoke about infractions, and he is correct; we do not want to go down the route of infractions. I want to get to the point where we put something in the Bill that we can implement, enforce and ensure that we can enact it. I think that, in the past, that has not been the case.

In talking about the marine conservation zones, perhaps the Minister will touch on what he sees as being the key elements in the subsequent legislation that will follow through. I think that the devil will be in the detail in some of it — maybe in how local authorities will play their part in the process and their roles and responsibilities. I think that that is key and needs to be part of the MCZ designation process. I welcome the amendment that states that “the Department must”; I mentioned the word “must” in relation to another amendment. With that, I will bring my remarks to a close.

Mr Rogers: Earlier, Mr Weir talked about premier areas, and I do not know whether it was before or after he met Geoff Hurst and Pat Jennings. South Down is certainly a premier area for the fishing industry, and this Bill is very important for that industry. In 2012, catches worth about £56 million were landed. If you add the value of the fish processing industry of £80 million, you see that fishing is an extremely important industry to the economy of south Down.

Our fishermen are dealing with the reform of fishing policy proactively and have already reduced discard. The proposed development of offshore renewables will create challenges, not alone for the fishing industry but for the preservation of the marine environment.

I want to speak particularly about clause 12 and displacement. The fishing organisations understand the Department’s concern over limited data and the knowledge that is necessary to apply the displacement clause. Those organisations are closely engaged, at a technical level, with the development of methodologies for facilitating marine planning to successfully account for fisheries displacement. The level of protection needs to be considered not only on a site-by-site basis but by considering the whole planning area in order to achieve the best synergies and minimise unintended displacement. As Mr Hamilton said earlier, it is important that displacement is not limited to the inshore, with other sea areas being disregarded. There needs to be a coherent network across Ireland, the UK and even Europe.

Earlier, I was heartened to hear the Minister talk about highly protected marine areas. This legislation provides for a designation regime that is flexible to the needs of species and habitats that require protection. Also, the level of protection will be determined using sound scientific information on a site-by-site basis. That will allow for a range of measures to be applied as necessary, from the very minimum to areas with high-protection measures where no activities would be permitted.

I would like to commend the Committee and the Minister for visiting the fishing organisations; not alone visiting them

but listening to them, making compromises and helping us to get to where we are today.

This is extremely important legislation. I also want to say that we will support the Minister in opposing amendment No 13.

Mr Elliott: I apologise to Mr Rogers; I had to nip out and did not hear most of his contribution. I had quite a bit to say and had queries on this group of amendments, especially amendment No 9. Now that that amendment is not being moved, I hope to continue my conversation with Mr Agnew because I am interested in several aspects. I will not give him a commitment that we will support it, but I will certainly look at it in a positive light. However, I want some more information, in particular on its competence and whether there are some clashing issues. We will continue that conversation.

I specifically mention amendment No 13, which I will not support. The Ulster Unionist Party will support the other amendments from the Minister, but amendment No 13 is going too far. It is moving away from what is being proposed for the marine in the rest of the United Kingdom.

I put those few issues on record. I am sure that we will return to Mr Agnew’s proposals at a later stage. I pay tribute to the Minister, the departmental officials and the Committee officials for steering us this far.

Mr Agnew: I do not propose to speak for too long, but some of my amendments have been raised, and I wish to speak to them as well as to the Minister’s amendments.

My party and I are happy to support the Minister’s amendment Nos 4, 14 and 19, which we view as positive. The Minister and others have spoken to them so, other than to say that I will support them, I will go no further.

I will speak briefly on amendment No 9 and consequential amendment Nos 10 and 11, which, as I said, I will not move because, as other Members said, there may be questions around them. I want to discuss those amendments further and seek to achieve consensus, even majority support, at Further Consideration Stage.

The intention of the amendments is to ensure that we are not light on Departments. I appreciate the concerns raised by Mr Hamilton and Mr Elliott that Departments may need to act quickly. I believe that the amendments would not prevent that because it would still allow Departments to cause harm to an MCZ if it was clear that it was in the wider public interest.

I appreciate the Minister stating that he would have supported those amendments, but further conversations are needed. To a large extent, the amendments were new to many Members, and I would rather have those conversations, get the amendments right and, if possible, get agreement on them than push for a vote today and have them defeated without further consideration. Mr Elliott made a point about their competency. I believe that they are competent, but if the Minister has a point of view, I am interested in hearing it. My advice is that those amendments are competent.

I stated my intention to oppose clause 8, which I have concerns about. I question the need to include it. Judicial review should be the last resort, as was stated, perhaps by the Minister. It is a course of action that is available to

be taken against any departmental action or consideration and it is allowed for in common law.

Indeed, under common law, there are four grounds for judicial review; illegality and impropriety, which are included in clause 8, but also irrationality and incompatibility with the European Convention on Human Rights. I am concerned that those elements are not contained in clause 8. As I say, I fail to see the rationale. The Bill includes the reduction in the timeline to six weeks, and I welcome the Minister's amendment to increase that to 12 weeks, which is more in line with common law. I feel that there is a need for this explicit provision.

My concern is that the explicit reference to judicial review in clause 8 restricts the grounds. Indeed, article 9 of the Aarhus Convention requires mechanisms to reduce or remove financial and other barriers to environmental justice. My interpretation is that clause 8 would add barriers. That concerns me, which is why I intend to oppose clause 8. In that sense, I welcome and support amendment No 5 but I will oppose the clause if it is so amended.

I have one further concern about clause 8. I will take guidance from the Minister, but my reading is that it would exclude NGOs from taking judicial reviews. It refers to "a person aggrieved", and I will listen to the Minister's feedback on that, but I think it is right that organisations concerned with environmental management should be able, as a course of last resort, to take judicial reviews. My concern is that, although case law would allow for environmental NGOs to take judicial reviews, the specific reference to "a person aggrieved" in clause 8 may exclude them.

Amendment No 6 provides for economic, cultural or social factors to be considered in designating MCZs. I have concerns about that, because an MCZ should be designated on ecological grounds, as mentioned before, on the best scientific evidence. The nature of the MCZ, I believe, should and can take economic, social and wider environmental consequences into account. However, as far as bringing that process forward to the designation of the MCZ is concerned, I think that where there is an ecological requirement for a designation, we should designate and look at the nature of that MCZ.

As the Minister said, a marine conservation zone is not a blanket designation. It is subtle, and each MCZ will be different in its nature and in how it is managed. In Strangford, there is an area that is a no-take zone, full stop. That will not be the case for MCZs, and I see MCZs almost in a spectrum from those with soft designations to those with stronger restrictions. That is when we should take economic, social and environmental factors on board.

I am also concerned about the inclusion of the word "cultural". I am not sure of the case law in that regard or of the definition of the word. It worries me that the argument could be used that because we have always done something, we should always do it. Looking at some of the aspects of the Bill, if that means fishing stock out of existence, cultural protection in that regard would not be justifiable. I appreciate that it is being taken as one consideration among others, and I would not die in a ditch over it, but I certainly have concerns.

6.45 pm

The other aspect of amendment No 6 that I have concerns about is the consideration given to the impact on fishing activities. We have that in the Bill. We can take those things into consideration when we designate an MCZ; it is about when we take those things into consideration. We should designate an MCZ on ecological need, if it is there, and then take those factors into consideration when we look at how we manage the MCZ. I have not heard others express concern about amendment No 6, and I fully anticipate that it will go through. However, I wish to put those points on record and am interested in hearing the Minister's response.

I welcome amendment No 12. It is a tightening enforcement that clarifies clause 23. Bringing in an exact timeline is helpful. However, I still think — and it is a point that I have made — we are still a bit light on Departments. I will speak to other parties about amendment No 9. As well, I think we need to see clause 23 not just requiring written justification from a Department if it damages an MCZ but, where it is unable to justify that damage, outlining what fines should be enforced. We have seen, with land environmental management — and I often make the point about Northern Ireland Water — that public authorities do not always take actions in line with legislation. We have seen that in the number of fines received by Northern Ireland Water. We have to ensure that there are disincentives beyond simply justifying an action. We already have various grounds of greater public interest on which damage to an MCZ can be justified, but where damage is unjustifiable, we need the final thing of penalties. I ask the Minister to consider that in advance of Further Consideration Stage. My party and I will certainly look at it.

I am not surprised that amendment No 13 has been controversial. The reason why I bring it forward is that I think that, if we give sea fishing a blanket exemption for damage to an MCZ, we undermine a very important element of the Bill. When we talked about modiolus modiolus in Strangford lough, it was stated time and time again that fishermen were not responsible for the damage to Strangford lough. It is very clear that, if your fishing activity does not damage an MCZ, this legislation in respect of an MCZ is of no threat. Where your activity does do damage, I think that it is right that you should have to justify it. It is right that you should have to put the case that the economic activity of fishing is over and above the need for environmental protection. If you can argue and win that case, so be it. In that regard, I support the other provisions of the Bill. However, as the Bill is drafted, you have that defence.

I do not accept the need for a blanket exemption for sea fishing. That goes too far in protecting the fishing industry. There is enough in the Bill to do that. As I said, not every MCZ will be a no-catch zone. Personally, I think that amendment No 13 is necessary. I take Mr Hamilton's point about his understanding of the common fisheries policy as a member of the Committee. My understanding is that we can legislate and can deviate from other jurisdictions on nought to six nautical miles, and I put forward the amendment on that basis. I am glad to have my points on record on that front. It is clear from the contributions of others that there is no support for it, but, in understanding why we will have MCZs, it was important to put the

amendment forward and to make the case. The blanket exemption for sea fishing is regrettable.

Overall, the amendments from the Minister are positive. I was negative about the Bill during the previous group; however, I very much welcome it and the work that we are doing. I am glad to see it come forward, and I agree with those who are frustrated about the time that it has taken. However, it is a very important Bill in how we manage our marine environment. There are elements that, if I were in Mr Attwood's position, I would do differently, but overall it is a Bill to be welcomed. I am happy to have contributed to the debate.

Mr Allister: I want to contribute on one issue and support Mr Agnew in his contention that clause 8 should not stand part of the Bill. Clause 8 seems to me an utterly unnecessary reduction in the right of the citizen to challenge the implementation of a marine plan, and I have yet to hear an explanation, either at Second Stage or so far today, on why we need clause 8.

I invite the House to consider the impact of clause 8 by considering the legal position if we do not have it. If we do not have clause 8, you have the untrammelled rights that you would have in any other sphere of public law for a challenge on the basis of a motion of certiorari to quash a plan or judicial review. However, under clause 8, those rights are considerably impaired because the grounds on which you can bring a challenge under clause 8 are substantially circumscribed. Clause 8(3) states that:

"A relevant document must not be questioned in any legal proceedings, except in so far as is provided by the following provisions of this section."

Clause 8(4) states:

"A person aggrieved by a relevant document may make an application to the High Court on any of the following grounds—

(a) that the document is not within the appropriate powers;"

— in other words, that it is ultra vires —

"(b) that a procedural requirement has not been complied with."

Of course, in certiorari or judicial review, you could bring a challenge on both those grounds, but you could also, very importantly, bring a judicial review challenge on the basis of Wednesbury unreasonableness, namely that the content, purpose and thrust of the document being challenged is so unreasonable that no reasonable body could have arrived at the conclusions in it. Why do we think it necessary in clause 8 to remove that plank of judicial review? What purpose does it serve? That question has yet to be answered.

The situation gets slightly worse because clause 8(4)(b) states:

"that a procedural requirement has not been complied with"

You have to read it in concert with clause 9.

If you are to succeed in any suppression of a plan under clause 8(4), you must meet the test of clause 9(3):

"Subsection (4) applies if the court is satisfied as to any of the following—

(a) that a relevant document is to any extent outside the appropriate powers;"

That is the ultra vires point. It continues:

"(b) that the interests of the applicant have been substantially prejudiced by failure to comply with a procedural requirement."

Of course, in judicial review at the moment, it being a discretionary remedy, a judge is entitled to balance and weigh whether to grant the relief on the basis of how far someone's interests have been prejudiced. That already exists in judicial review, but this writes it large into the Bill and creates a further hurdle that effectively says that not only can you not challenge on Wednesbury unreasonableness but, if challenging on procedural irregularity, you must cross a very high threshold in demonstrating that you the applicant have been substantially prejudiced by failure to comply.

I am not sure that Mr Agnew is right in his concern that only an individual can bring this limited judicial review challenge. I think that a person can, in fact, be defined as a legal entity. He is right to the extent that, whoever the applicant is, it is the singularity of the prejudice to them that has to be weighed, not the collective prejudice. It is the singularity, the unique prejudice to them as an individual, be they an NGO, if an NGO can bring a challenge, or an individual. So I think that there is a depletion of the rights that currently exist under judicial review, and, frankly, I just do not understand the need for it. The Minister should consider whether he really needs clause 8 at all.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Member for giving way and for his support in opposing clause 8. I would like his view on a person aggrieved, and I appreciate his clarification that a legal definition of a person can be a body. Equally, an environmental NGO may not be aggrieved but would be directly impacted. I am interested in his views on that.

Mr Allister: If I understood the Member right, he is exploring the issue of how far you have to be aggrieved before you can activate the process. I concede that I would have thought it that it would be easier for an individual to be aggrieved and show that they have a grievance of substantial proportion or otherwise than it would be for an NGO, by virtue of the different standing that they have. I would have thought that, in the right case, it would probably be easier for an individual to successfully challenge under clause 8 than it would be for a collective such as an NGO, but I could be quite wrong about that. Fundamentally, I ask the Minister this question: where is the need? Why are we requiring to restrict the rights of challenge to marine plans through the necessity for clause 8? I do not see it, but maybe some revelation will shed some light on that.

Mr Speaker, you will be glad to hear that I will not speak on the other amendments, save to say that I am resolutely opposed to one of Mr Agnew's other amendments, amendment No 13. As a supporter of the fishing industry, I am not going down the road he wants to lead us down in that direction.

7.00 pm

Mr Attwood: I again thank all Members for their contributions. I trust that, in full or in part, I will deal with all the matters to the best of my ability.

I will step back for a moment from the particular details that have been queried and challenged in the legislation to make the following point: sometimes you can miss the wood for the trees — I do not know what a comparable analogy might be for the sea. Although all the questions are proper and legitimate, this should be seen as a watershed moment — excuse the pun — for our marine environment. I will tread carefully here, but my view is that a watershed moment has arisen for planning and spatial planning in Northern Ireland. That watershed moment is to do with reconfiguring retail/spatial planning policy to favour in-town and edge-of-town developments. We will see how that works out for a number of particular matters and for the retail element of the single strategic planning policy statement that is under preparation and should go out for consultation by the end of this year and be in place in 2014 in the run-up to the transfer of functions and the merger of councils.

This legislation is a watershed when it comes to marine spatial planning. We need to acknowledge the opportunity that it presents. We also need to acknowledge that, whatever about the argument around MCZs — I will deal with the points that Members raised on that — there is already a wide range of European designations that are unaffected and will not be affected by our marine legislation. Yes, we will have marine planning and marine conservation zones, but they will be in the wider environment of the protections that already exist. We need to be aware of that. Although marine conservation zones will recognise our habitat requirements for the marine environment, there are already further and, arguably, higher requirements through birds and habitats directives from Europe. Therefore, the legislation adds to the family of protections, but, when it comes to MCZs, it does so in a way that is more discerning. It recognises what needs to be protected and how to protect it, whether that be at a lower or higher level. In so bringing about protections, you have a mighty conversation that involves a wide range of interests to decide what is the right thing to do. ‘State of the Seas Report’, which the Department published, stated — this is what informs the Bill — that there is a competition around marine space. In addressing that, we need joined-up management between government and other agencies, and we need marine planning and marine conservation zones; otherwise, the competition around marine space will not be resolved properly or satisfactorily. Therefore, the Bill is a watershed that should end up being a shield to protect all interests. It should not be used as a sword to assert the interests of one over the other. That is the challenge and opportunity that the Bill presents.

I will now deal with the issue of the sea fishing defence. This may come as a surprise to Mr Agnew, but I believe that he is right. There are requirements laid down by Europe for the sea fishing defence, but they do not require us to have the defence for nought to 6 nautical miles. Although there are requirements laid down by Europe, it is Mr Agnew’s understanding of what is or is not required further to European requirements that is the right one. However, given that we live in a very small place and given the practice on the bigger island to our east where

all those jurisdictions — England, Scotland and Wales — have decided to have sea fishing defence for nought to 12 nautical miles and in order not to create confusion and to have a level playing field for our fishing industry, the balance of argument, in my view, is to have the sea fishing defence apply for the nought to six mile zone.

It is not, as was argued by Mr Agnew, a blanket defence. Ultimately, it could be for the courts to determine whether an interest that relies on that defence is justified. Therefore, if somebody is relying on that defence, it may not prevail in all circumstances. Ultimately, whether it is appropriate could be a matter to be determined by the courts. Indeed, the sea fishing defence will be subject to the test of due diligence. So, a fishing vessel or business that relies on that defence will have to demonstrate that it has shown due diligence in doing so. Therefore, it is not a blanket defence, as has been claimed.

I will turn to the issue of clause 8. Mr Allister now has sympathy with the view of Mr Agnew. Although I am very respectful of the legal authority that Mr Allister and others bring to the matter, let me explain, as best I can, the narrative that leads me not to be inclined to agree with their conclusion on this occasion. The first reason is that what is being proposed is already in law when it comes to High Court challenge and judicial review. That which is captured by the clause as it is drafted is already provided for in other legislation, such as roads orders, local government orders and others. Therefore, on issues about whether you are ultra vires with regard to your function or you are flawed in process, those clauses have been replicated in previous legislation in a way that has not done violence to those who may feel aggrieved and seek the protection of the courts by way of judicial review.

Let me confirm also the point made by Mr Allister with respect to Mr Agnew: “person aggrieved” is not defined narrowly, and there are precedents set in that regard to ensure that, whether it is an individual, a fishing interest, an organisation set up corporately or not in law or an NGO, they will all, as I understand it, be captured by the clause as drafted as a “person aggrieved” in order to seek the protection of the court. I will go further: the legal advice that was given to me says that the challenge of unreasonableness — the Wednesbury test — is also captured by the legislation as drafted. Therefore, “person aggrieved” is inclusive. The model that we are adopting has been applied and successfully deployed in respect of other legislation.

Mr Allister: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Attwood: I will in a second. It does not exclude a challenge of unreasonableness. In my view, it captures the challenge on the basis of ultra vires or improper process. Yes, it lays down a substantial prejudice test only to mitigate the risk of vexatious challenge. I give way to the Member.

Mr Allister: I think that the Minister is wrong about it encompassing unreasonableness. However, if the Minister is right and this is a mirror image of judicial review as we know it, why do we need clause 8 at all if it is not changing anything?

Mr Attwood: I will answer that question in this way: you could adopt the process adopted by Mr Allister, which is that we should rely on the common law, essentially, and not legislate in respect of the matter. However, if I am

right — I believe that I am — that an aggrieved person is an inclusive concept and captures all those who might want to go to court, if I am right — I believe that I am — that the Wednesbury test and a challenge on the basis of what is reasonable or not is captured by the legislation, if I am right — I believe that I am — that that is the model that has been properly deployed in other legislation that emanated from London and if I am right — I believe that I am — that no civil or European convention rights are compromised by the provisions of the legislation, then I would say to Mr Allister, through you, Mr Speaker, that my approach is equally valid and does no violence to the points raised by Mr Allister, just as I can acknowledge that his approach, based on common law, is valid. In my view, my approach is valid as well. It has been legislated before, has worked satisfactorily and has not done any damage to the interests of any individual who may want to apply for JR. I say all that because of the experience of our courts when it comes to judicial review. They have shown a flexibility that has served this society and public policy well over many, many years in challenging what I consider to have been improper behaviour by many organisations of the state. In my view, the courts have granted leave and even granted judicial review further to the model of law that I have outlined and that will be the expectation going forward. Save for vexatious issues, which, I think, should not go before the courts or should not be given an opportunity to go before the courts, the proposal captures all the interests —

Mr Agnew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Attwood: I will. I think that it captures all the concerns and anxieties and mitigates those concerns and anxieties in the way that I have outlined.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Minister for giving way. I stand by my objection and agree with Mr Allister that the clause is not needed if it is as the Minister outlines. However, speaking hypothetically, should the clause be agreed and an amendment to include irrationality and incompatibility with the European Convention on Human Rights is tabled at Further Consideration Stage, would he have any objection to that, given what he has said?

Mr Attwood: I listened closely to the debate with regard to the amendments that were not moved today, and I thought that Mr Hamilton's commentary on the amendments was very interesting. I thought that they were well-made, well-crafted observations about the potential consequences. On the other hand, Mr Elliott seemed to open the door a little. I am sure that he will — oh, he is there; sorry — I am sure that he will appreciate that. *[Laughter.]* I was going to say that he would appreciate all that in his absence, but I presume that, in his presence, he will appreciate it even more. That was interesting, and we may be able to narrow the difference, if there is some difference, with regard to the amendments that have been moved. I will look at what you say, but the legal advice that I have received clearly asserts that, however you may want to interpret those clauses, they in no shape or form do offence to civil rights or convention rights and are compatible with those civil and convention rights. I will look at what the Member says. If we go down that road, we may overlegislate, but I will not close the door.

7.15 pm

The other major substantial matter that was raised concerned the process of designation of MCZs and the assessment of displacement. Those issues go to the heart of those clauses and, therefore, to the heart of the Bill. We are the last part of Britain and Northern Ireland to have a Marine Act, a marine plan and MCZs, so I am anxious that we are at the get-go — to borrow a phrase from one of my officials — as early as we can to ensure that we measure up in the protection and management of our marine heritage, given its scale and wonder. That is why, even at present, there is a massive round of ongoing engagements to scope out the intelligence around a marine plan and marine conservation zones. Those engagements are extensive and include staff from my Department and others travelling on ferries to Scotland to interview people to scope out the issues that they think should be addressed by a marine plan. Similarly, there have been public meetings with all the stakeholder sectors, including schools, fishing interests, renewable interests and ports and harbour personnel. The entire intention behind the legislation is, potentially, to set a new threshold for inclusion and public participation, which is why we sent out a statement on public participation in the process leading to the marine plan and marine conservation zones for people to comment on. That is ongoing.

As we take all that forward, we must capture the views of the vast range of stakeholders — the economic, fishing, renewables and coastal community interests, the concerns of those who run ships and shipping lanes and so on — so that, when it comes to planning the MCZs, everything that should be known is incorporated as fully as possible into the conclusions. The identification of MCZs in the North's territorial waters will be based on the best available science, which goes back to issues raised by Mr Boylan and Mr Rogers. Some existing data can be used to identify the potential locations of MCZs, but new surveys will be required to fill in the gaps. That is why I was not shy about saying to Mr Boylan, when we debated the earlier group of amendments, that costs will be involved in the preparation of the marine plan and making assessments on the management of MCZs.

New surveys will be required because, as was stated on an earlier date, our understanding of the marine environment is not as advanced as that of the terrestrial environment. The surveys will deliver a fuller picture of the number, size and complexity of possible MCZs in our waters. On the far side of all that, together with specific conservation objectives and management features, there will be agreement on a site-by-site basis. As invited by Mr Hamilton, I want to affirm that point: it will be on a site-by-site basis. This will not be a one-size-fits-all scenario. It will be more severe in some places and much lighter-touch in others to recognise that science by its nature does not deliver one picture about potential zones. There will be a range of science for potential areas that will inform what is or is not done about the scale of an MCZ. As yet, however, we do not know what the UK's ecological network will look like, so individual sites will be considered on their own merits. That is the nature of the character that we are dealing with.

Our understanding of a marine conservation zone in terms of science and intelligence is still emerging. Consequently,

there will not be a comprehensive picture because the information is still incomplete.

To conclude, because I hear that people may be getting a bit restless — even Members from my own party are getting restless if nobody else is getting a bit restless. *[Interruption.]* Well, you did ask these questions, so I think that I have an obligation to try to answer them. *[Laughter.]* I want to put this on the record because it is very important. Having said all this, there is some intelligence and a narrative to the science to support the MCZ process. Since 2006, the Department has been engaged in systematic surveys in many parts of Northern Ireland's inshore region for the identification and assessment of European-designated sites and to monitor marine priority species.

Over the next number of weeks, scientists in the Environment Agency will do what they always do at this time of year: they will dive to assess what is happening to the ecosystem below the waves. We have scientists trained to dive in order to monitor, take videos and build up the intelligence picture. They do that work very well. Again, it is unheralded but essential work in order to have the survey of the inshore region to make assessments of designated sites. So, that work is ongoing.

In addition, we have the 2011 'State of the Seas' report, which is part of the UK marine science strategy. There are also data going back to the 1980s, when the Ulster Museum undertook the first wide-scale diving surveys of the sea bed within the UK and Ireland. It is the collation and gathering of all those results, and the analysis of data, that will enable us to make the assessments on conservation and marine conservation zones.

I will conclude with a comment that touches on what Mr Boylan, Mr Agnew and Mr Hamilton said. It is envisaged that MCZs will complement existing site designation and protection measures for European marine sites. They will not be used as a fisheries management tool and will not impinge on the objectives of the common fisheries policy. It is important to acknowledge that this is not a sword to be used against our fishing industry but a shield to protect its interest. At times, however, in order to have conservation, there will be seasonal, limited, or potentially no-take, in designated zones. Consequently, effective engagement appeals to key stakeholders are essential. Potential MCZs will be subject to full consultation and take account of the common fisheries policy.

I hope that that gives reassurance to the people who Mr Hamilton and Mr Boylan referred to, and who Mr Rogers very much referred to, in terms of the fishing interest.

The agrifood industry in the Republic of Ireland is worth €8.8 billion per year. They expect growth of 8% this year, particularly in the African and North American markets. They are predicting that on good authority. Even in recent weeks, the Irish Government appointed an agriculture attaché to its embassy in Beijing because the market opportunities are there, and the quality of their agrifoods, are such that they dedicate a resource and an individual to develop the Chinese market.

At the heart of that is high added-value fish. Therefore, if we are to learn from the Southern experience in agrifood opportunities, we have to learn the added value of certain forms of fish; the prawns of this world. If we do not have a marine strategy that recognises the economic potential of all that, and the need to protect those fishing zones but in

a way consistent with the marine plan and ambition, we will let down not only the marine environment but those fishing interests.

Amendment No 4 agreed to.

Clause 4, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 5 to 7 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 8 (Validity of marine plans)

Amendment No 5 made:

In page 6, line 40, leave out "6" and insert "12".— [Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment).]

Mr Speaker: Mr Agnew's opposition to clause 8 has already been debated.

Clause 8, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 9 to 11 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 12 (Grounds for designation of MCZ)

Amendment No 6 made:

In page 9, line 16, leave out from "may" to end of the line and insert

"must have regard to any economic, cultural or social consequences of designating that area and, so far as possible, to—

(a) the extent to which any of the following activities are likely to be prohibited or significantly restricted within that area if it is designated—

(i) any licensable marine activity (within the meaning of Part 4 of the 2009 Act);

(ii) fishing for or taking animals or plants from the sea;

(b) the likely impact on the environment within that area if that area is not designated;

(c) the likely impact on the environment elsewhere in the Northern Ireland inshore region as a result of any activity mentioned in paragraph (a) being displaced from that area if it is designated."— [Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment).]

Clause 12, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 13 to 17 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 18 (Creation of network of conservation sites)

Mr Speaker: We now come to the third group of amendments for debate. With amendment No 7, it will be convenient to debate amendment Nos 8, 15 to 18, and 20. This group deals with commencing the Bill the day after Royal Assent, and some technical amendments.

Mr Attwood: I beg to move amendment No 7:

In page 12, line 24, at end insert

"(5A) In subsection (3)(a) the reference to "the conservation or improvement of the marine environment" includes the preservation, maintenance and re-establishment of a sufficient diversity and area of habitat for wild birds in Northern Ireland in implementation of Article 3 of the Wild Birds Directive

(including by means of the upkeep, management and creation of such habitat, as appropriate), having regard to the requirements of Article 2 of that Directive.”

The following amendments stood on the Marshalled List:

No 8: In page 12, line 42, at end insert

“the Wild Birds Directive” means Directive 2009/147/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on the conservation of wild birds.”— [Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment).]

No 15: In clause 38, page 26, line 21, at end insert

“(5) In regulation 31 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 (byelaws for protection of European marine site) for paragraphs (1) and (2) substitute—

“(1) The Department may make byelaws for the protection of a European marine site under section 24 of the Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013 (byelaws for protection of marine conservation zones).

(2) The provisions of Part 3 of that Act relating to byelaws under section 24 apply, with the following modifications, in relation to byelaws made by virtue of paragraph (1) of this regulation—

(a) any reference to an MCZ is to be read as a reference to a European marine site;

(b) in section 24(1) the reference to furthering the conservation objectives of an MCZ is to be read as a reference to protecting a European marine site;

(c) the reference in section 24(3)(c) to hindering the conservation objectives stated for an MCZ is to be read as a reference to damaging a European marine site.”.

(6) Regulation 66 of those Regulations shall cease to have effect in relation to byelaws under Article 21 of the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (Northern Ireland) Order 1985.”.— [Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment).]

No 16: In clause 41, page 29, line 13, leave out paragraph (b).— [Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment).]

No 17: In clause 47, page 31, line 2, leave out from beginning to “come” in line 4 and insert “This Act comes”.— [Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment).]

No 18: In clause 47, page 31, line 6, leave out subsection (3).— [Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment).]

No 20: In schedule 1, page 37, line 23, at end insert

“Action taken by the Department before commencement

16.—(1) This paragraph applies to any action taken by the Department before commencement which, after commencement, could have been taken in accordance with a provision of paragraphs 1 to 10.

(2) For the purposes of this Act, it is immaterial that the action was taken before rather than after commencement; and any reference in this Schedule to an action taken under or for the purposes of

any provision of paragraphs 1 to 10 is to be read accordingly.

(3) In this paragraph “commencement” means the coming into operation of this Act.”.— [Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment).]

Mr Attwood: Hopefully, this will not detain the Assembly too long. Certainly, that is my intention. Amendment Nos 7 and 8 deal with the creation of a network of conservation sites. I am happy to move amendment No 7 and to propose amendment No 8 at the same time. They are straightforward amendments. They will provide legal clarity in transposing an obligation arising from the EC's wild birds directive, which requires the preservation, maintenance and re-establishment of habitats for wild birds. I ask Members to accept the amendments to clause 18.

Amendment No 15 relates to clause 38, which deals with repeals and transitional provisions. This is an important one, and I will explain why it is necessary. Clause 38(1) revokes articles 20 and 21 of the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (Northern Ireland) Order 1985. Those articles relate to marine nature reserves, which will be replaced, through the Bill, by marine conservation zones.

However, that revocation will have consequential implications for regulation 31 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995. That is because regulation 31 relies on the revocation of article 31 of the 1985 Order in order to extend its powers to make by-laws to designated European marine sites. The amendment would therefore provide a necessary new link between the by-law-making powers in the Bill and their application to the European sites designated under the 1995 Regulations. I ask Members to accept the amendment to clause 38.

Amendment No 16 is a consequential amendment to clause 41, which deals with regulations and orders. It is the intention to remove those references to commencement orders in clause 47. As such, there will no longer be any requirement to refer to an order under section 47. I ask Members to accept the amendment to clause 41.

7.30 pm

Amendment Nos 17 and 18 are commencement provisions that amend clause 47. That also supports a Committee recommendation. The amendments would ensure that part 3 of the Bill, which relates to marine protection, comes into operation at the same time as the rest of the Bill: the day after Royal Assent is received. I ask Members to accept those amendments.

Amendment No 20 to schedule 1 relates to action to be taken by the Department before commencement, and I touched upon that matter in some of my earlier comments. It is the final amendment in the group and is an important amendment to schedule 1, as it introduces a saving provision to allow the preparatory work that DOE has undertaken on the marine plan prior to commencement of the Act to be treated as steps taken under the Act.

As I indicated, there is a parallel process to the legislation, namely preparatory work that is being undertaken now on the marine plan in advance of the Bill's being passed and receiving Royal Assent. That would include the work that has already been undertaken on the statement of

public participation, which was published in June 2012, and the associated stakeholder engagement and evidence gathering. I want to make it very clear that it would be limited with regard to the period prior to enactment to which it might reasonably apply and by the paragraphs of schedule 1 to which it would extend. A key principle behind the amendment is that DOE should be able to demonstrate that it has discharged its functions under schedule 1 when it is commenced in a bone fide manner.

Therefore, the saving provision would not extend — this is critical — to the publication of a consultation draft; the handling of representations about the consultation draft; independent investigation of the consultation draft; and the adoption and publication of the marine plan. The saving provision is very carefully crafted and drafted to ensure that it does not reach beyond what is proper and, certainly, does not reach into the publication of the consultation draft and the other matters to which I have referred. Importantly, I can assure Members that a draft marine plan would not be published for consultation in advance of the Bill's enactment. That would not be covered by the amendment.

I have set an ambitious timeline for the delivery of the first marine plan. I am confident that with the full and constructive support of everyone, which has been very much the case heretofore, it can be achieved in early 2015. I ask Members to accept that amendment to schedule 1.

Ms Lo: I will begin by addressing amendment Nos 7, 8 and 15 to clauses 18 and 38. Those amendments had not been put to the Committee during Committee Stage, but we considered them subsequently at our meeting on 11 April 2013, when we agreed that we were content to support them.

We are aware that the European Commission is pursuing infraction proceedings against the UK for alleged failings in transposing the requirements of the wild birds directive. The proposed amendments to clause 18 should address the Commission's concerns. We note that other UK Administrations have modified their respective marine Acts in that manner.

With regard to amendment No 15, we noted that it would provide a necessary new link between the by-law-making powers in the Bill and the application to the European sites designated under the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc) Regulations (NI) 1995. We were content with that.

The Committee welcomes amendment Nos 16, 17 and 18 to clauses 41 and 47, as members recommended during Committee Stage that all parts of the Bill should come into force at the same time on the passing of Royal Assent, including the introduction of MCZs.

Finally, on amendment No 20 to schedule 1, the Committee was content with the schedule, subject to a departmental amendment introducing a saving provision to preserve work that is done on the marine plan in advance of the Marine Bill coming into force. Amendment No 20 addresses the Committee's wishes. We therefore support the amendment.

I now turn to my personal comments. Amendment Nos 7, 8 and 15 came to the Committee in April this year, well after Committee Stage, which ended in July last year. That appears to be an oversight on the part of the Department. The problem relating to the wild birds directive had been known for some time, and it was anticipated that the

Marine Bill would address the directive's requirements. So I really cannot understand why these aspects were not included in the Bill in the first place. It took the Department months to realise that there had been an omission, but, luckily, it did so in time to include these amendments in the Bill. I hope that this will not happen again.

Mr Hamilton: I will also seek to be brief in offering my support for the amendments in this group.

I accept and agree with many of the Chair's points about that oversight, if one could describe it in such a way, in respect of the wild birds directive and why these amendments were not produced at an earlier stage. The Committee did not disagree with the amendments. In fact, it understood the need to include them, and it, therefore, accepted and agreed them. However, perhaps one of the beneficial consequences of the delay in getting from Committee Stage to Consideration Stage is that it afforded us a lot of time to look at things in a little more detail than we had done before, and so the oversight was, thankfully, spotted. So I accept the point that it is a little strange, but I have no objection to it being there.

I want to talk about clause 38, which amendment No 15 deals with. I accept what the Minister said about the importance of the clause. During the debate on an earlier group of amendments, Strangford lough was mentioned on several occasions as an example of how not to look after the marine environment in a careful and co-ordinated way. The consequence of the Bill and particularly clause 38 is that — I have corresponded with the Minister on this issue before — Strangford lough will lose its marine nature reserve (MNR) status and, in all likelihood, be first to gain marine conservation zone status. However, I pointed out to the Minister in correspondence that marine nature reserve status — although I accept the argument that it was no longer fit for purpose in offering good, solid, strong protection for the marine environment in Strangford lough — offers us something more in being a selling point for the area.

One of the reasons why Strangford lough attracts tourists, visitors and people interested in the marine environment is because it is so special. The very fact that we were able to sell it as the only marine nature reserve in the UK and, in fact, the British Isles added something a little extra, even though, substantively, it meant nothing in terms of environmental protection. It gave us something that we could sell because it did not exist anywhere else.

My argument, therefore, is that although Strangford lough may be the first marine conservation zone, which is a prestigious title, it will not be the only one. There may be five, six, 10 or 20 MCZs all around the coastline of Northern Ireland, with nothing to differentiate whether one is better — perhaps "better" is the wrong word — or more significant in marine terms than another.

I accept that the Minister and the Department's only concern is offering and affording environmental protection, and the Bill and clause 38 certainly allow that to happen. However, I think that something is lost by losing the marine nature reserve status. I, therefore, ask the Minister to commit to work with others, principally the Tourist Board, to look at ways in which we can afford something a little more to Strangford lough, recognising that it is a site of significant marine importance, not just in a Northern Ireland or British Isles context but in a European and

global context. I accept that this is not in the Minister's bailiwick, but I think that, if he were to engage with others, principally the Tourist Board, something could be done to afford additional status to Strangford lough, which I think everybody here, the Minister included, would acknowledge is a legitimate cause and claim.

I support the amendments in group 3.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. What a great way to spend your birthday. It is 7.40 pm in the Assembly — part of the job.

I support the amendments. We were concerned in Committee about the wild birds directive. However, the amendments will certainly go some way to addressing some of the European Commission's concerns on that. Some of the amendments talk about time frames and everything being co-ordinated so that the provisions can come forward together. With that, I will wind up. I support the amendments.

Mr Speaker: That was a fine example. *[Laughter.]*

Mrs D Kelly: Mr Speaker, I have sat patiently all afternoon; I have not spoken yet. I take this opportunity to wish Mr Boylan a very happy birthday.

As a member of the Committee, it is very pleasing that the Marine Bill has finally reached this stage. However, through you, Mr Speaker, I will say to the Chair of the Committee that, given that, as the Minister indicated, some five pieces of legislation are coming to the Committee in very quick succession, the Committee may have to meet more regularly and adopt a model similar to that which the Committee for Social Development adopted to get through its legislation. At least, in the environment portfolio, work is ongoing once we get past the Executive logjam.

I am delighted that there is a plan for marine conservation and the Marine Bill in general. I lament that Lough Neagh does not have a similar management plan. This group of amendments incorporates the streamlining of applications, particularly for renewable energy. I think that, here in the North and across the island of Ireland, we have a tremendous opportunity to use our coastal and inland waters to be a hydro nation. There are huge economic opportunities for us, and I hope that members around the Executive table will grasp them.

I am also delighted about the wild birds directive and that a clause on that has been added to the Bill, even at this late stage. It is very important that that remains the case. I put on record our party's support for this group of amendments.

Mr Agnew: I also support this group of amendments. I am not keen to keep the House unnecessarily. The points on the wild birds directive have been made. I will not reiterate them, other than to welcome the amendments. Equally, I welcome the amendment to broaden MCZs to bring them in line with the protections of EU marine sites.

So, on behalf of the Green Party, I support these amendments and welcome that the Minister tabled them.

Mr Attwood: I am sure that Colum Eastwood will be pleased to know that he shares a birthday with Mr Boylan and that Mr Boylan will be pleased to know that he shares a birthday with Colum Eastwood.

Mr Boylan: We are the same age.

Mr Attwood: I very much doubt that. *[Laughter.]* I want to deal with two points. Mr Hamilton made a good point. He asked whether Strangford lough, in the outworking of all this legislation, will lose its special status as our only marine nature reserve. I am tempted to ask: would it not send out a much more dramatic and appealing message if we had national parks legislation, on the far side of which Strangford lough were designated a marine national park?

If we are serious about saying that we have this wonderful natural, built, archaeological and Christian heritage, and that, around that, there are heritage obligations and development opportunities, is there not a bigger label than marine nature reserve or marine conservation reserve, namely marine national park? Although I regret how some of the national park debate has gone — I have some culpability in all that — if we really want to scale up our ambition for places such as Strangford lough, the label of national park for it would have a much greater international appeal and tourist draw than any of the designations that there have been heretofore or that will exist hereafter.

However, parking that particular issue for the moment, I think that the essence of the point that Mr Hamilton made is the right. Whether it is an MCZ or an MNR and whether there is one or more than one, we must ask what opportunities that creates beyond the designation and what impact that might have in economic, social and environmental terms. That will allow us to say to people, internationally, that this is the scale of our marine heritage, and that they should come and see it, enjoy it and spend some money.

7.45 pm

On the far side of this legislation, I will write to DETI and the Tourist Board to draw attention to the remarks that you made. My visit to Strangford lough, as with my visits to a lot of the other heritage sites, suggest that there is more to be done: more opportunities to be created; more jobs to be secured; and more protection of the heritage in the way that has just been outlined.

On the criticisms of some amendments coming in late, I think that, every so often, the Committee receives a copy of our infraction schedule. Although the infraction schedule may be losing one risk with the infraction proceedings around Strangford lough, the United Kingdom has an infraction risk in respect of the wild birds directive. Consequently, we are taking the opportunity through this legislation to tighten up the issues around the wild birds directive and the risk that arises. Given that the legal opportunity arose through the Bill to do the right thing and to mitigate risk, we took the opportunity late on. It was intended that there would be a vehicle, through conservation regulations, to deal with this issue, but we are availing ourselves of the opportunity presented by the Bill. It has come late, but it is the right thing to do because of our European obligations.

Amendment No 7 agreed to.

Mr Speaker: Amendment No 8 has already been debated and is consequential to amendment No 7. Amendment No 8 made:

In page 12, line 42, at end insert

“the Wild Birds Directive” means Directive 2009/147/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on

the conservation of wild birds.”— [Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment).]

Clause 18, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 19 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 20 (General duties of public authorities in relation to MCZs)

Amendment No 9 not moved.

Clause 20 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 21 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 22 (Advice and guidance by the Department)

Mr Speaker: I will not call amendment No 10, as it is consequential to amendment No 9, which has not been moved.

Clause 22 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 23 (Failure to comply with duties, etc.)

Mr Speaker: I will not call amendment No 11, as it is consequential to amendment No 9, which has not been moved. Amendment No 12 made:

In page 16, line 37, leave out paragraphs (a) and (b) and insert

“(a) the Department must request from the public authority an explanation for the failure; and

(b) the public authority must provide the Department with such an explanation in writing within the period of 28 days from the date of the request under paragraph (a) or such longer period as the Department may allow.”— [Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment).]

Clause 23, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 24 to 31 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 32 (Exceptions)

Amendment No 13 proposed:

In page 22, line 35, after “fishing” insert

“at a distance of not less than 6 and not more than 12 nautical miles from the seashore.”— [Mr Agnew.]

Question, That amendment No 13 be made, put and negatived.

Clause 32 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 33 to 35 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 36 (Enforcement officers)

Amendment No 14 made:

In page 24, line 35, at end insert

“() Articles 4, 6, 7, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 15A of the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985;

() regulations 34, 36 and 38 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995;

() any byelaws made by virtue of regulations 23 or 31 of those Regulations;

() Article 46 of the Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002.”— [Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment).]

Clause 36, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 37 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 38 (Repeals and transitional provisions)

Amendment No 15 made:

In page 26, line 21, at end insert

“(5) In regulation 31 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 (byelaws for protection of European marine site) for paragraphs (1) and (2) substitute—

“(1) The Department may make byelaws for the protection of a European marine site under section 24 of the Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013 (byelaws for protection of marine conservation zones).

(2) The provisions of Part 3 of that Act relating to byelaws under section 24 apply, with the following modifications, in relation to byelaws made by virtue of paragraph (1) of this regulation—

(a) any reference to an MCZ is to be read as a reference to a European marine site;

(b) in section 24(1) the reference to furthering the conservation objectives of an MCZ is to be read as a reference to protecting a European marine site;

(c) the reference in section 24(3)(c) to hindering the conservation objectives stated for an MCZ is to be read as a reference to damaging a European marine site.”.

(6) Regulation 66 of those Regulations shall cease to have effect in relation to byelaws under Article 21 of the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (Northern Ireland) Order 1985.”— [Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment).]

Clause 38, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 39 to 40 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 41 (Regulations and orders)

Amendment No 16 made:

In page 29, line 13, leave out paragraph (b).— [Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment).]

Clause 41, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 42 to 46 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 47 (Commencement)

Amendment No 17 made:

In page 31, line 2, leave out from beginning to “come” in line 4 and insert “This Act comes”.— [Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment).]

Mr Speaker: Amendment No 18 has already been debated and is consequential to amendment No 17. Amendment No 18 made:

In page 31, line 6, leave out subsection (3).— [Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment).]

Clause 47, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 48 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedule 1 (Marine Plans: Preparation and Adoption)

Amendment No 19 made:

In page 36, line 35, at end insert

“() report on the proposal within the period of 6 months from the date of that person’s appointment, or such longer period as the Department may approve.”.— [Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment).]

Amendment No 20 made:

In page 37, line 23, at end insert

“Action taken by the Department before commencement

16.—(1) This paragraph applies to any action taken by the Department before commencement which, after commencement, could have been taken in accordance with a provision of paragraphs 1 to 10.

(2) For the purposes of this Act, it is immaterial that the action was taken before rather than after commencement; and any reference in this Schedule to an action taken under or for the purposes of any provision of paragraphs 1 to 10 is to be read accordingly.

(3) In this paragraph “commencement” means the coming into operation of this Act.”.— [Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment).]

Schedule 1, as amended, agreed to.

Schedule 2 agreed to.

Long title agreed to.

Mr Speaker: That concludes the Consideration Stage of the Marine Bill. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker. I ask the House to take its ease as we move to the next item of business.

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

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Mr Speaker.]

Adjournment

Special Needs Provision: Larne

Mr Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the Adjournment topic will have 15 minutes. The Minister will have 10 minutes to respond, and all other Members who wish to speak will have approximately seven minutes.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. At this late hour, I do not intend to speak for 15 minutes on this subject, and I know that that will please everyone. I thank the Minister for being here tonight and for waiting for so long. It means a lot to have him here.

Since my election as an MLA for East Antrim, I have come across an alarming rise in cases of families with children and adults with special needs who have concerns, fears and problems that are worryingly similar. Many of them ask what will happen when their children leave school. They ask where their children will go and what they will do. As parents or guardians, they ask what they can do or what it is that they are supposed to do. Those questions are asked year after year, and still we seem to be no further forward.

I should declare an interest. Recently, a special needs group in the glens, the Friends group, of which I am the chair, has linked up with a disability group in Larne called Kaleidoscope.

That was done through a funding opportunity with North Antrim Community Network. It enabled both groups to meet for the first time and discuss their relevant concerns. What emerged was very worrying.

8.00 pm

The parents in both groups sat down to discuss their children's everyday lives etc. Minister, what really came out in that initial meeting was that the parents from Larne, such a large town, could not believe how much they have not been told and what they are entitled to; they had never known that. Considering the large area that Larne covers, it has minimal services for the disabled and those with special needs. The Larne group was amazed to hear how the Friends group managed to access funding for projects, knew how to identify projects and knew who to speak to to get help. Those are the basics for any group, but, sadly, the statutory bodies in Larne have neglected the town and the area right up to the village of Carnlough.

Minister, I take this opportunity to appeal to you to visit the area and meet those involved with disability and special needs provision and hear their concerns. Families are struggling to put their children through school with the appropriate support. It is getting harder, with pending cuts and benefits reform.

Outside school, basic help for disabled and special needs people in society generally stops, or, at best, its availability is a struggle. Government provides no services. Increasing numbers of families are suffering hardship and existing on the bread line. In quite a few cases, those living with a disability are forced into poverty. I acknowledge the

two excellent special needs school units in Larne, both of which agree that much more needs to be done to facilitate social inclusion through after-school activities, weekend activities, etc, which do not happen, and to help fight the disability discrimination that exists in Larne and the coastal district.

At the beginning, I mentioned a group in Larne called Kaleidoscope. It is run entirely by volunteers, all of whom are parents, other family members or friends of the children with a disability. The group runs a very structured youth club from various church halls, as it has no permanent premises from which to operate. Despite having made a presentation to Larne Borough Council, that group, which has children with various degrees of disability, is being shunted from hall to hall. I have to give credit to the organisations that own the halls and allow the group to use them.

It is left to members of the public to do work that, really, is the responsibility of statutory bodies. It rankles most people who work with disability or special needs that it is left to the voluntary sector to do the work day in, day out. The statutory bodies are there, and there is help. However, they do not come forward to tell people what help is available: that is the frustrating thing. Moreover, there is a lack of day-centre provision for pupils when they leave school. There are no real and meaningful programmes to assist those pupils in advancing and developing. I am a parent of a special needs child. She is 16, and we still do not know where she will go when she leaves school or what she would do without the help of her voluntary group. We got the Cedar Foundation to put her on a befriending programme, through which children are taken out once a week. That is the only help that such people get. We would not have got that help if we had not gone looking for it.

Despite the wonderful help of volunteers in groups such as Friends and Kaleidoscope, there is little that can be done in the day centres beyond playing games or watching TV. For pupils who are able to go on to further education, there is a limited choice of courses at the Northern Regional College during and after their school career. I believe that there are no full-time courses post-19. Pupils in Larne are required to travel independently to Newtownabbey or Ballymena, and, for many pupils, that is impractical or impossible. For example, courses for pupils during their time at Roddensvale Special School are limited to woodwork and ICT delivered by tutors in Larne High School. That situation gets worse when you leave Larne and travel to the coast, to Carnlough and into the glens. There is nothing there at all. We have been promised everything, and there is nothing there. Our group was started in 2000. We were promised different things but never got anything at all.

We have to consider that those children and adults have many differing health issues and that long-distance travelling can cause stress, tiredness and irritability. Thus, by the time they have reached their colleges, they have little to no motivation to do anything other than rest. The attention disorder in a lot of those children or adults is a priority, and once they lose that motivation, they have lost everything during the day. That is part of the problem. We cannot expect them to travel miles; it is not practical. We can relate to the effects of long-distance travel on us. So, imagine what it is like for the disabled and those with special needs. This issue affects those in rurally isolated

areas such as the glens where, at present, those with special needs and the disabled have to travel up to three hours a day to get to their centres or to college. Why do we insist on bringing our young adults out of their environment to travel miles away from what they are aware of to avail themselves of further education facilities when that could be done locally? Minister, that is totally unacceptable, and the parents cannot understand that either.

The Northern Ireland European social fund programme 2007-13, which the Department for Employment and Learning — your Department — is responsible for, states its first priority as being helping people into sustainable employment. It supports projects that offer training to disadvantaged people to enter the labour market, and for those seeking further skills. Some of the projects focus exclusively on participants with a disability. At present, there are 17 projects in receipt of assistance in relation to participants with a mental health difficulty, learning disability or physical disability. Therefore, Minister, I can perhaps look forward to you telling me how much of that has been put into the east Antrim coast, and where.

DEL and its delivery partners provide lifelong learning opportunities for young people with severe learning difficulties across a wide range of services. Further education colleges collaborate with special schools and adult day centres to provide discrete courses for young people with severe learning difficulties. That provision can be provided on college premises, at a day centre or at other suitable premises. Thus, why has that not been happening in day centres in Larne and the glens? It is quite apparent that a lot of work has yet to be done in that field, but that work is our responsibility, because those with a disability who can avail themselves of further education at whatever level or degree are not able to speak for themselves. That is why, Minister, I ask you to instruct your Department to carry out an investigation into the appalling lack of special needs provision in Larne and the glens. That is the thrust of the Adjournment debate this evening: that that investigation will be carried out and, secondly, that you will come into the area and speak to the groups. You will learn from them, see the good work that they are doing and also see the lack of facilities there. We are being made to travel further and further to get to central education facilities. Community transport is now gone, and public transport does not suit because of the times. Minister, the only way now is to put programmes back into the day centres or facilities like that in the areas where it matters. The likes of Larne could have a great facility for further education. It could take people in from the surrounding areas, such as Glenarm and Carnlough. The glens need something. We are in the process of possibly starting up a day centre in the mid-glens because the centre in Ballycastle is closing, but the day centre that is currently there has nothing on the premises for those young adults. Minister, thank you for listening, but I ask you again to carry out that investigation and to come down and see what is there.

Mr Ross: I thank the Member for bringing this Adjournment debate to the Floor of the House. I know that it is an issue of personal significance to him, and it is an important issue for all of us. It is more important than perhaps the number of Members in the Chamber tonight reflects, but, of, course that is partly to do with the fact that we had a similar debate in the House last week on this issue, and the Minister responded on that as well.

Many of the issues that were identified in the debate last week are relevant in Larne and, indeed elsewhere in our constituency of East Antrim. Many of the challenges that Members outlined in that debate — to young people and, as Mr McMullan said, to parents and their communities — are very pertinent. A number of themes that came out in the debate last week are of particular relevance to the Minister who is responding this evening. Those were around the types of support that are available for young people, the opportunities that they have to progress, and the transition into employment. We want to ensure that young people with special needs have opportunities to make a valuable contribution through employment.

That is a major issue about supported employment, and I know from my time on the Committee for Employment and Learning in this and the previous mandate that we have undertaken visits. The supported employment opportunity for young people that sticks out for me is Ulster Supported Employment Limited (USEL) in Belfast. Some people in the disability sector do not like that approach, but I found it to be quite a good example of where young people are given supported employment. They can earn a wage, and they make things that are sold as a commercial enterprise. I thought that it was a good model. There are other examples across the Province, and it would be good if that model could be rolled out in other places across the Province. If people in Larne and across east Antrim could participate in similar employment opportunities, it would be very important.

Recently, the Committee has been engaging on the issue of special educational needs. It will come as no surprise to the Minister that experiences across the Province are patchy, and, as Mr McMullan said, there is, perhaps, a deficit in Larne and not a good provision of services in what some people have called a postcode lottery. The Minister has acknowledged that the experience is not great across Northern Ireland and that it needs to be looked at. In responding to the Adjournment debate, it might be useful if he were to set out what support is available specifically in east Antrim for young people, and it would be important to set out what careers help is available in the FE colleges in Larne for young people with special educational needs. I would also like to know what work he and his Department have done with employers in Larne to ensure that they are willing to take on young people who have particular challenges to ensure that they can be employed locally, even if that is on a part-time basis. I would like to know what help has been offered to young people who, as Mr McMullan said, often have to travel quite large distances to go either to care facilities or to find employment.

I was asked by my colleague Mr Hilditch to raise a particular issue about a constituent whom he has been dealing with in the office that we share in Carrickfergus. It is a family who have a young boy of four or five who has to travel from Larne to Mitchell House in Belfast to receive the kind of care that he is looking for. It is a 50-mile round trip every day, and the fact that the young boy is having to travel this distance is causing huge concern to the family. It is an example that he asked me to raise this evening.

We also have to recognise that the Minister is not responsible for all the issues around this; he is having to respond on behalf of other Ministers as well. He does not act in isolation but has to work very closely with the

Minister of Education and, indeed, the Minister of Health, Social Security and Public Safety. That collaboration is hugely important. We should recognise that there is already collaboration going on at that high level to address some of the issues that we have raised, such as the transitions to day care that Mr McMullan talked about, daytime opportunities for young people and the supported employment that I spoke about earlier. The trust in our constituency works closely with the education and library boards to try to meet some of those challenges. There are many challenges in Larne, as there are elsewhere. It is about improving those transitions for young people of all ages and improving the interfaces between the family, the Health and Social Care Board, and the education and leisure elements. Mr McMullan touched on that issue, too.

8.15 pm

The debate has focused mainly on Larne, and I pay tribute to those involved in providing a range of services to preschool and school-age children in the area, including allied health services, speech and language services, nursing, and medical and social care. We acknowledge the work of Roddensvale School, which deals with around 100 pupils between the ages of three and 19. There are many challenges there. There is also the Larne Adult Centre, as well as learning support centres for those with more moderate disabilities in both Larne High School and Moyle Primary School.

Larne has some specific challenges. We are aware that a regional review of the multidisciplinary services to schools is being undertaken by the Public Health Agency. That may have implications for the services currently available in Larne, so we need to keep a watchful eye on it. There is a vacancy in the area's speech and language therapy service, and we want that position to be filled as soon as possible.

Larne plays an important role, not just for the people living in the town but for the wider area. It was interesting to hear Mr McMullan talk about some of the networks that have developed. As he indicated, networks are developing between east Antrim and north Antrim, but they are also developing between south Antrim and north Belfast. Those networks are growing voluntarily, and they are examples of collaboration at a lower level. I talked about collaboration at a higher level earlier. Those are some of the positive developments that we have had. If we look at the bottom of the constituency and at schools in Newtownabbey and Jordanstown, Thornfield School is involved in the provision of speech and language services, as well as services for deaf and blind children.

I encourage the Minister to outline some of the services that are currently available. I encourage him to continue to work closely with his ministerial colleagues in education and health to ensure that there are opportunities for young people and, more importantly, to ensure that parents are not worried about what support will be available for their children once they can no longer provide it. That is a real issue that has come up in my constituency surgeries, and in other Members' as well. It is a real fear for people. If the House can do anything, it is to try to provide some sort of comfort for parents who are worried about what happens afterwards. I hope that the Minister will touch on that in his response.

Mr Beggs: I commend the Member for securing the Adjournment debate on special needs services and provision in Larne. There is a need for special needs support right from early years to the latter years in life. Early intervention is required. The earlier that help is available, the better the outcomes.

I acknowledge the work of Action for Children's Larne parental support project, which covers Larne town and, slightly outside, Glynn and Millbrook. I will come back to that shortly. I also commend the work of Horizon Sure Start — I declare an interest as a member — which works in the wards of Antiville, Ballyloran and Craigy Hill. Both projects are funded for limited geographical areas, although they can provide some assistance outside of those areas where special support is needed. Surely, however, much wider support should be available, and I ask that additional funding be made available to other areas, such as Ballycarry, Islandmagee, Ballygally, Glenarm and Carnlough, to provide wider support for the entire community. Indeed, funding should be made available right up into the glens of Antrim.

Speech and language is particularly important for children with special needs. If they cannot communicate, huge frustration sets in. On occasions, parents need guidance to help them to understand the child and communicate better, so that is an important aspect of the work. It happens at the projects based in a wing of St Anthony's Primary School. On the subject, there is a need for better disability access to that school and on the approach pathways.

I commend the teachers and classroom assistants in all our schools in Larne, primary and secondary, for the work that they do in assisting children with special needs. I commend in particular those who work in Roddensvale special school, and the people of Larne universally appreciate their work. Anyone who visits the school cannot but be impressed by it and its welcoming nature. I notice that a recent inspection report states:

"In the areas inspected the quality of education is very good in this school, and the pastoral care is outstanding."

So, everyone in the school — principal, teachers and support staff — must all be commended for the work that they are carrying out there.

One of the biggest outstanding issues in that school has been its attempts to get a hydrotherapy pool to benefit these most disadvantaged children. Planning permission was successfully obtained in October 2009. Funding was originally awarded, but it was ultimately lost as a result of a legal challenge. That detailed bit of work has been left in limbo ever since. So, I ask the Minister to find out whether funding can be made available to put that very worthwhile project in place for the benefit of these most disadvantaged children.

I notice that the A5 project has recently been cancelled, so Ministers are looking for shovel-ready projects. Minister, that is a shovel-ready project. It has planning permission, and it just needs the money. So, I ask you to take it back to the Executive so that you can ensure that some of our most disadvantaged children are helped.

Respite care is one element that is needed by parents looking after children with special needs. I hear that the one weekend or a couple of days a month at Whitehaven

Respite Unit is greatly appreciated but that more assistance is necessary to allow those families to recharge their batteries. Often they have to look after their loved ones 24/7. Even occasions such as going to the dentist or out to buy shopping can be a difficulty for households that have those sorts of demands. There is no Home-Start at present in Larne, so that, too, should be looked at.

Multi-agency support for schools was mentioned. Again, the additional support in our primary and nursery schools to help the staff there, as well as the specialist help that can be made available for speech and language communication, social, emotional and behavioural training and help with sensory, motor and perception issues, are all needed. That support should surely be available in every school. Why are only 148 of the schools in the Northern Trust area supported at present? Some 103 schools are not supported. Surely that support should be in every school to help to identify those issues at an early stage and provide support.

Where support in post-primary schools is concerned, mention has been made of the close working relationship with Larne High School and Roddensvale School. That is to be welcomed. However, it is unfortunate that there are no appropriate courses in the Larne campus of the Northern Regional College for those older children. That means that they have to be able to travel to Newtownabbey to avail themselves of such courses.

Another important facility that is available and that must be commended is Acceptable Enterprises Larne, where a range of facilities and support are provided. Young people get involved in mop-making. They do valuable work on a subcontractual basis for companies such as Bombardier making Whale pumps. I know that they are developing a small cafe there, and they are hoping to develop a base-style drop-in centre for children with learning difficulties who are in those latter years. That is somewhere where they can take part in other useful activities and socialise. Other Members mentioned how important that is.

One of the biggest concerns for parents of young people with special needs is knowing who will look after them in later life. We have Kilcreggan urban farms in Carrickfergus where there is activity, sheltered housing and a warden on-site to support such people. However, I have been contacted by a constituent living in Lisgarel Residential Home who is a vulnerable young adult and who has been told that that supported living, along with the residential home, is under threat. It is essential that we ensure that there is valuable supported living for such vulnerable people in our community and that they are not put out of their homes and kept in the dark. We must ensure that they are looked after and cared for from the cradle to latter life. I ask the Minister to ensure that that happens.

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning):

I thank the Member who tabled the Adjournment debate and the other Members who contributed.

We recognise, fundamentally, that a lot of young people and adults and their families are dealing with very difficult circumstances regarding special needs provision. Obviously, this is a major challenge for us all in government, but it is an even bigger challenge for those who have caring responsibilities and offer support to vulnerable people. I recognise, sympathise and empathise with the situation that Mr McMullan set out about his

family's situation; it brings the discussion very much closer to home. We recognise, fundamentally, that every citizen in this society, regardless of their individual circumstances, should have the opportunity to engage in appropriate learning, development and employment, and should have the opportunity to progress and achieve in life.

We have had a very wide-ranging discussion on the general challenges facing people and their families right across Northern Ireland and those specifically in the East Antrim and Larne area. As Members will appreciate, this cross-cutting issue impacts on the responsibilities of a number of Departments. The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has been mentioned, as well as the Department of Education, the Department for Regional Development with regard to transport and my own Department with regard to further and higher education and employment. Those Departments all have major responsibilities. I will endeavour to respond to many of the comments that have been made by Members as they relate to my own responsibilities. However, my officials will have taken notes of many of the other comments made by Members and, where appropriate, we will pass those comments on to my colleagues on the Executive so that they can come back to the individual Members on the particular issues or concerns that they put forward. I will include the case that Mr Ross raised on behalf of his colleague Mr Hilditch.

We recognise that a very particular challenge occurs at the age of 19, when young people leave the settled environment of special education. For many parents, it can seem like they are dropping off a cliff and there is a real sense of uncertainty about what the future holds for the young person in question. Although various Departments will endeavour to put in place the proper support, I have no doubt that there are gaps in provision across Northern Ireland, and that is a challenge that we have to rise to and address. Obviously, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has a major role to play in day centres, and our Department has a responsibility for further education and employment. However, the fear of many is that there are gaps between those two different legs that people may fall through and, indeed, that even the provision, whether it is by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety or my Department, is uneven across Northern Ireland.

I assure Members that we have been listening very closely to what they said, either during this evening's debate or during last week's fuller debate in plenary session. We fully appreciate that this is a major priority for MLAs. We have a duty to review what we have and to respond in kind. I have asked my officials to review what we have with regard to disability employment services, and we will conduct that review over the coming months. I do not believe in long reviews. I believe that we need to be short, sharp and focused in what we are trying to do.

8.30 pm

In respect of the further education sector, I have asked that we look across Northern Ireland to see if we have uniformity in the standards that are being provided. No matter how well we can ensure that there is uniformity in what is on offer, we are limited by resources in where we can provide further education facilities. Arising from that, there is the prospect of tutors in those colleges engaging

with people in day centres or other settings. So, there is a range of different responses that we can undertake.

I will make some more focused comments around the specific area. Members will be aware that there is a disability strategy, which outlines the Executive's overarching priorities. Departments work closely, and we will intensify that co-operation and collaboration. Members will be conscious that there are different areas where the Department can intervene. First of all, with respect to careers, in the Larne area, the Careers Service has partnership agreements in place with post-primary schools, including Roddensvale, Rosstulla, Jordanstown and Thornfield special schools, to support the transition phase. That interaction tends to begin at year 10, with subsequent annual reviews. That should allow young people and their parents to make informed decisions about the options available to them on leaving school. I will qualify that by saying that the options may not be as comprehensive as people would wish them to be.

In respect of employment support, the Department manages and delivers a range of planned disability employment services and programmes, which are aimed at helping people to progress, move to and sustain meaningful paid work. Young adults leaving special schools should find that service beneficial. A team of occupational psychologists assist employment advisers in carrying out individual assessments for clients.

Mr McMullan: I thank the Minister for giving way. You said that the children and parents are talked to on the pathway when they leave school. That is part of the problem, but the bigger problem is for those children who leave school and go into day centres. There are no programmes at all in the day centres, unless you want to watch TV or play pool or chopsticks. That is all there really is to do in the day centres, and that is a big problem. It would be helpful if there were some kind of meaningful programme.

Dr Farry: I appreciate what Mr McMullan says. Day centres are an issue for my colleague the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. I understand the concern that people have, but what is important is that we have a range of provision that is available and is appropriate to the individual circumstances of the young people concerned. Whatever we do has to be of quality and has to be meaningful. Perhaps the most urgent challenge for us at the moment is to address any gaps that arise within that.

Members are aware of the various programmes that we have around helping people into employment, for example, Access to Work, the Workable programme and Work Connect, which is the most recent addition to that. Reference has been made to the issue of supported employment, and I recognise that there are contrary views about whether it is appropriate or not. I was with Acceptable Enterprises Limited in Larne only last week, and I saw at first hand the efforts that it is doing in its base in the Northern Regional College.

Turning to further education, Members will appreciate that there is a wider discussion about the future of further education in Larne. It is certainly something that I hope to see continuing in the future. The further education and higher education sectors respond to the needs of their students who have particular learning disabilities or other forms of disability. Indeed, they have a statutory obligation

to respond to those. We also provide funding to all colleges and universities to assist in that regard.

The Northern Regional College offers a range of provision. For example, the part-time Wider Choices course, which is run in collaboration with the local health trust, aims to improve communication and independence skills and is present in east Antrim. Also, a new life skills course is set to be offered in Larne from September 2013, and it aims to develop life skills for those who do not have the ability to complete the Wider Choices programme. That is a small addition to the provision in the East Antrim constituency.

I am also conscious that there are ongoing concerns across the board about the ability to access employment and the need for employers to come forward and offer opportunities. I will certainly provide Members with some of the statistics from the area. I stress, however, that the support is there. In Training for Success, for example, additional support is available for young people through to the age of 22 as opposed to the normal 16- to 17-year-old age bracket for the mainstream population.

Adjourned at 8.35 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 7 May 2013

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Committee Membership

Mr Speaker: The first item on the Order Paper is a motion on Committee membership. As with similar motions, it will be treated as a business motion. There will, therefore, be no debate.

Resolved:

That Mr David McIlveen replace Mr Sammy Douglas as a member of the Public Accounts Committee; that Mr Sammy Douglas replace Mr Sydney Anderson as a member of the Committee for Social Development; that Mr Sydney Anderson replace Mr Alastair Ross as a member of the Committee for the Environment; and that Mr Sydney Anderson replace Mr David McIlveen as a member of the Committee on Standards and Privileges. — [Mr Weir.]

Ministerial Statement

Residential Care for Older People

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Thank you, Mr Speaker. Statements are available for any Member who did not get it outdoors. I apologise that, due to the bank holiday weekend, we did not get them out as quickly this morning as we would have liked to.

I am grateful for the opportunity to make a statement to the Assembly on the important matter of the proposed closure of statutory residential care homes for older people. My primary focus is the well-being and treatment of older people, and I do not want to see any older person distressed or worried about their future. However, I know that several older people have been upset by the proposed changes, and I want to take the opportunity to record my apology to them for any unintentional stress that may have been generated by these consultation proposals.

Although we in the Assembly could have a long debate about the facts and figures that have been reported, that is not what is important. What is important is that we move forward now with a clear policy on and process for achieving the successful implementation of that policy. No one can disagree with the policy that home is the hub of care. However, how we achieve that needs to be carefully planned and communicated. Those older people who currently reside in statutory residential homes need to be listened to and treated with sensitivity and dignity.

There was never any question of making anyone homeless or enforcing change in any draconian way. It was very unfortunate that the clear positive intentions of the policy became lost in the distressing sequence of stories over the past two weeks. It is now essential that we put public assurance and confidence at the top of the agenda. I also hope that some of the positive changes that trusts proposed can proceed. That is because their intention, and mine, remains to actually improve services and to move away from a model of care that is no longer the best that is available and that involves many people living in homes that are not anything like up to the standard that any of us would expect.

On Friday 3 May, I met with senior members of the Health and Social Care (HSC) Board and trusts. I told them that it was unacceptable that any older person or their families should be left upset by the process of consultation on closure of residential homes. I indicated to the HSC that the policy has not and will not change. I now want to state clearly to Assembly Members that I am in full

support of the Transforming Your Care (TYC) approach regarding the care of older people, which is to promote independence, social inclusion, reablement and support in the community for as long as possible. However, the process of engagement with older people, their families and the public has to change. The pace of change needs to be planned in a co-ordinated way across all the trusts. That was not clear. Therefore, on Friday 3 May I called a halt to individual trusts consulting on proposed closures in their areas. We will now make a fresh start.

I have asked the HSC Board to lead on a new process for consulting and implementing change. I expect the board to work closely with trusts to co-ordinate a regional approach on residential care homes, with trusts having more time to engage with individuals, families, communities and staff. There will be a regional approach to the future provision of statutory residential care. Consultation on change will still be necessary, but the pace of change will be clearly defined and is likely to be over a longer period.

However, I accept that trusts should be able to decide not to admit new permanent residents to particular statutory homes. Some have done so already, and others propose to take such action. That is sensible, as there is plenty of capacity in the system to meet all residential care needs. It must be remembered that HSC does not provide any residential nursing care. At present, less than 25% of statutory residential care is provided by HSC organisations.

The new process for engagement will be led by Fionnuala McAndrew, the director of social services at the Health and Social Care Board. I will want assurance from the board that best practice will be followed in the future development of proposals for closure, engagement and delivery of change. That will include communication and engagement with individuals, families and staff; that the needs of individuals will be addressed in any proposed change and their wishes will be listened to; that any proposed change will be in line with policy, the pace of change will be clear, appropriate and in line with policy; and, where change is proposed, there will be clear assurance that better alternatives are being offered in all cases. Oversight from the Department's chief social services officer, Seán Holland, will also provide me with further assurance.

In conclusion, I emphasise that every older person is important to me. Over time, I want a better service for all older people. Achieving that will require change in the model of service provision. I want the management of that change to be as smooth as possible and for those who are affected at present, albeit that they are small in number — around 330 in total — to have time to voice their opinions and to be listened to. I expect their wishes to be respected. No one's care will be put in jeopardy.

I commend this statement to the House.

Mr Speaker: Order. Before I call Sue Ramsey, the Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, I warn all Members that we have quite an exhaustive list this morning. Quite a number of Members from all parties want to make contributions on the statement. That is understandable. However, I expect Members to come to their questions quickly. Let us not have further statements. I call Sue Ramsey. Of course, the Committee Chairperson has some latitude.

Ms S Ramsey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Go raibh maith agat, Mr Speaker. I think that the statement is very useful, but the reality is that there is still a lot of confusion out there among families and, indeed, among those currently in residential homes.

Minister, in your statement, you talk about a fresh start. Is that only in this process of Transforming Your Care? If the board and the trusts got it wrong at this stage, how can we be reassured that they will get it right at other stages of Transforming Your Care?

Also, we have been informed through the media that, according to a relative, Jean Faulkner has been told that her home will not close and that you have given a guarantee. Was that guarantee given, or will it be given, to other residents in other homes?

Finally, Minister, you indicated that you were not informed about this until — I think that you said — last Wednesday. Were any senior officials either on the HSC Board or in your Department informed about it?

Mr Poots: OK. First, I think that we need to deal with this confusion; a lot of people out there wish there to be confusion and wish to keep stirring up confusion and causing concern. The current process has been halted — end of. I believe that the current process got out of kilter with Transforming Your Care, and, as a consequence, I decided that the process needed to be halted.

As regards how we look to the future, we need to stop, take our time and identify the best way forward. In circumstances where better care is provided, people will be made aware of that. Homes that are not admitting new residents will lose numbers relatively quickly over the next two to three years, and, consequently, decisions will have to be taken about those facilities. At this moment, however, none is proposed for closure. Some of them will have considerably fewer numbers in due course, and, consequently, there will be a discussion with the remaining residents in those circumstances to provide them as individuals with the best possible care.

As regards the management of this, I think that we will have to take a closer role in dealing with it than was the case. The fact that this was reported to us by the health and social care trusts as opposed to their asking for our opinion in the first instance was, I think, somewhat unfortunate. Perhaps I will deal with that more at a later point.

Mr Wells: Does the Minister accept that the Health Committee, on many occasions, and the Assembly accepted the broad thrust of 'Transforming Your Care' and that many said privately that it is the best way forward for health and social services in Northern Ireland? That being the case, will he explain where this decision on residential homes now leaves that very important document?

Mr Poots: We are still committed to Transforming Your Care. I note people talking about a U-turn; I can assure the House that there is no U-turn on our policy of Transforming Your Care.

What we want to do is provide better quality care for elderly residents. Some people may wish to have elderly residents cared for in homes in which they have a tiny room and in which six or eight people have to share the same bathroom and toilet facilities. I can tell you this:

I do not want that type of care for any of my family or, indeed, myself. I want a better quality of care. That is what Transforming Your Care is about. There are facilities that have a poor capital infrastructure but which provide excellent personal care because of the individuals who work in them. However, this will inevitably lead to better quality facilities being produced. We want to ensure that the care that goes along with those facilities is sustained and, if possible, enhanced even further.

So, we are absolutely and totally committed to Transforming Your Care, because it is the right way for older people, and we will not be deflected from that policy.

Mr McDevitt: I am sure that the Minister will acknowledge that, for over a year, I have been raising the law of unintended consequences around Transforming Your Care — the stealth privatisation of large parts of our Health and Social Care system. Does the Minister agree that the time has come to bring forward legislation to the House to ensure that what is good about Transforming Your Care goes ahead and that we do not have to return to this place to explain why unelected, unaccountable public servants have taken decisions —

Mr Speaker: Will the Member come to his question?

Mr McDevitt: — that are not consistent with the wishes or will of the House?

10.45 am

Mr Poots: What happened last week is a completely different issue to that of privatisation. Last week, people went about their jobs in such a way as to cause distress to elderly people. I find that unacceptable. All our nursing care for the elderly is provided by the private sector. If the Member wishes us to build new homes, do away with the private sector's provision and employ people in the health service, he is free to make that proposal and identify where the funding will come from.

Only around 25% of residential care for the elderly is provided in the statutory sector, with 75% being in the private sector. People perceive the privatisation of the health service as meaning that they will have to pay for their care. That is not what this is about. We do not want the public to have to pay for care. I have a forthright belief that healthcare should be free at the point of need for all. It is a universal concept, and I will resist any attempt to privatise healthcare in that respect. However, I will use the private sector when it can provide good quality services to the public, and I will not shirk from doing so.

Mr Beggs: The Minister apologised for the unintentional stress that he caused to residents of statutory care homes and for the lack of sensitivity and dignity in the way in which these vulnerable people have been treated. Will he advise us why they were not treated with sensitivity and dignity, and who is accountable for that?

Mr Poots: Mr Beggs's silly remark implies that I personally went in and caused distress in these homes. Let me make it absolutely clear: I got an e-mail on Wednesday informing me of what the Northern Trust intended to do on the Thursday. That was the first time that we knew: it was a heads-up. The Ulster Unionist Party is suffering from a little amnesia, so let me further explain that the current policy on trusts, the establishment of the existing trusts and their authority were established by none other

than the Minister before me: Michael McGimpsey of the Ulster Unionist Party. I have listened to members of the Ulster Unionist Party, particularly the leader, over the past few days, and they clearly do not understand the responsibilities given to the trusts by their Health Minister. If they do not — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Minister must be heard.

Mr Poots: If they do not, it is somewhat embarrassing for that party. Perhaps Mr McGimpsey can give them a lesson on what it actually means.

The steps that I took on Friday were unprecedented because it is the responsibility of the trusts to do what they were doing. I stepped in and used ministerial authority to stop it, but it is very clearly the responsibility of the trusts. They were at liberty to do what they were doing as a result of the way in which they were established by the Ulster Unionist Minister. The Ulster Unionists set up the trusts and established them in this way, so on their own heads be it. I sought to resolve the situation.

Mr McCarthy: Every Member of the House and, indeed, the community at large will agree that last week was harrowing and horrendous for our senior residents in care homes.

Mr Speaker: I hope that that is not a statement that the Member has.

Mr McCarthy: Not at all, Mr Speaker.

It was totally unnecessary, and I welcome the Minister's statement in which he said that he put a halt to the process on Friday. Does the Minister agree or suspect that the three trusts that announced the total closure of our care homes were attempting to torpedo the 'Transforming Your Care' document in their actions last week through the proposal to close those homes?

Mr Poots: I do not want to second-guess what the trusts were about. I believe that had the trusts been able to do what they wanted to do, they would have probably implemented things considerably more quickly because they would have released cash that allowed them to develop facilities more quickly. In the whole process, however, it does not matter how good something is further down the way: if someone is content with where they are and moving causes them distress, that has to be given huge consideration. Whoever in the trusts decided to go ahead with the proposals for 100% closure did not give enough cognisance to that. That is why we need to stop, take our breath and identify how we do this without causing the distress that we saw last week.

I agree with the Member that it is unacceptable to cause the distress that we witnessed to our elderly population. I hope that, this week, people in the media do not seek to cause undue stress to elderly people. I think that there are people who, for their own advantage and benefit, wish to cause stress to others — they should catch themselves on.

Ms P Bradley: I thank the Minister for his statement today. I lend my full support to how the Minister has handled this very emotive issue in the last week. I put on record that I worked in social services until I got this job, and, until three or four years ago, we were being told by the then Health Minister, Mr McGimpsey, not to place people in residential care. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Will the Member come to her question?

Ms P Bradley: I will indeed, Mr Speaker. I ask the Minister — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms P Bradley: What is the financial impact of the revised model of care?

Mr Poots: Let us be absolutely clear: we are ploughing more and more money into elderly care, and I am very happy for that to be the case. Over the past three years, £50 million of additional money has been invested in elderly care. We are putting £3 million of additional funding into reablement. Perhaps, for the benefit of the Ulster Unionist Party, I should explain what reablement means. The rest of Members here probably understand. Reablement means that when someone, for example, has a fall and breaks their femur, instead of them ending up in a care home, we ensure that they get considerably more support, which allows them to return to their own home. If someone ends up in hospital because of an acute episode, and perhaps the easy option would be for them to go into residential care, we give them that support to enable them to do things once again and regain the skills that they have lost. Elderly people want to be in their own home and with their family, so we want to support them to do that.

I am passionate about going ahead with this policy because I know that it is the right policy for our elderly population. We will not be deflected by the nonsense that we have heard over the past few days from some individuals who want to have elderly people in second- or third-rate facilities. I want our older people to be in the best possible facilities with the people whom they love around them.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. It is important that the Minister acknowledges today to the House that the process was a mess and that it completely disregarded the rights of the elderly population. I return to the question asked by the Chair of the Health Committee: were guarantees given to Jean Faulkner? What will that mean for others in care facilities? Can he give an absolute guarantee today that no elderly person will be forced from their home? Will that include the Slievemore nursing home facility in the city of Derry?

Mr Poots: There are a number of issues. What happened last week and how the messages went out fell way short of what we expect in the treatment of our elderly. The consequence of that was the distress caused. I have no problem whatsoever acknowledging that and apologising to our elderly population and those close to them for the distress caused. I make that absolutely clear.

The process has been stopped, so the threat to any residential home of closure in the next six months has gone. We will engage in a process that will identify what facilities are needed in future. We will talk very caringly with the elderly population to identify how we move forward and what options are available to them. It is not a case of forcing people out of their facility. It is matter of people being made aware of what is available to them and, for many, that will mean staying in their current facility. I believe that many of the 330 people will see out their life in the facility that they live in.

The other aspect is that some of those people will have to move from residential care to nursing care, because the residential homes do not serve nursing care needs. We want to move to a model in which residential care and nursing care are provided in one facility so that, in the future, those people do not have to move. I have no control over it when someone loses their ability to stay in a residential care home because they have nursing care needs; I have no ability to support them. We want to eliminate that in the future and we need to identify that in the policy.

The decision that the Slievemore facility could no longer serve its purpose was taken by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA). I do not believe that the Western Trust had an option in that instance.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for his statement. I commend him for his work to date in this difficult role of managing the change in the health service that so many people want. Within five years, it is likely that there will be more people with dementia. How will that be managed in the existing system?

Mr Poots: None of the elderly mentally infirm (EMI) facilities were involved in this. Those facilities will continue to be provided and were not included in TYC or the recent proposals from trusts.

I know that considerably more people with dementia will come forward. We have been successful in keeping people alive longer, and that is one of the consequences. People who live with dementia and their carers will have services provided to them based on assessed need; I think that that is what is most important. If they require care placements, those will be made available to them. The vast majority of those with dementia are placed in the independent sector, and capacity remains in that sector. The secondary sector has a purpose in providing EMI support. That will continue to be the case.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I, too, thank the Minister for his statement. I do not want to be too repetitious, but a question was asked about an assurance being given to Jean Faulkner. Will the Minister tell us whether assurances have been given to other elderly people in other residential homes?

Mr Poots: I will have to be repetitious again. We have said very clearly that the current process has stopped. It is discontinued. If we move to a situation from here on in, a number of the trusts will not admit people to facilities. Therefore, the numbers in those facilities will diminish over time and decisions will be taken on that basis.

I have heard people suggesting that that is a deliberate run-down of those facilities, and that is a reasonable comment. We do not want second- or third-rate facilities. We want our elderly people to be cared for in the best facilities, and some of the older homes could not be refurbished without moving people out of them while we knocked them down and rebuilt them. We will not admit people to substandard facilities. That is a fact. We will seek to ensure that the care that is provided in those facilities while people are still in them is second to none, in spite of the fact that the facilities are not of the quality that we would like.

Mr Byrne: I welcome the Minister's statement. Does he accept that, in some cases, trust officials were crass

and too strong in the way that they communicated this to residents, their families and staff? I witnessed that last Wednesday in Greenfield home in Strabane. Can the Minister reassure people like Mrs Crawford, Mrs McHugh and the Murray brothers that they will not be unduly treated?

Mr Poots: I do not believe that the messages were transmitted with the sensitivity that was required, nor that the dignity that was afforded to our older people was as good as it could have been.

That disappoints me greatly, and that is why I have asked Fionnuala McAndrew to lead the team and Seán Holland, our director of social services, to oversee the work to ensure that all of it is done correctly. I have also asked that we have full consultation with and take advice from the Commissioner for Older People on how we deal with the elderly population in such circumstances.

Change can often cause concern, even change that is for the better. All of that needs to be well explained, and we need to treat older people as intelligent beings, because sometimes people talk down to older people. They are very bright and sharp and have their wits about them. We need to treat older people with respect, dignity, care and compassion. I want to see all those things being applied in my time as Minister.

11.00 am

Mr Nesbitt: I will pick up on the Minister's last answer. Will he report on any conversations he has had with the Commissioner for Older People since Claire Keatinge described the situation as being shameful and identified an abject lack of leadership?

Mr Poots: I have spoken to Claire Keatinge about what her views are. Claire Keatinge and I are largely at one on how we treat our older people. She and I found nothing that we disagreed on, so I was very happy with the conversation that I had with her and with the support that I received from her.

Mr Nesbitt has done a lot of talking in the past few days. I note that he did not call for the resignation of Mr McGimpsey when Seymour House was closed in March 2009; when Grove House was closed in December 2009; when St John's House was closed in October 2010; when Foyleville was closed in June 2010; or when Drumhaw was closed in January 2011. Mr Nesbitt talked about people being thrown onto the streets. That is the sort of language that causes distress to older people, and he would do well to apologise to the older people and to the House for the use of such language. Nobody will be put on the streets. All our elderly people will be treated with care. Mr Nesbitt would do well to hang his head in shame for his behaviour over the past few days in seeking to stir up and cause further anxiety and trauma to older people when others were trying to resolve a difficult situation *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms Brown: I thank the Minister for his statement, and I trust that it will provide some clarity for elderly residents and their families, who are rightly concerned about the situation. Will there still be consultation on the closure of individual care homes?

Mr Poots: That is something that we will have to have and that we will be happy to have if that is the case. Again, it is

something that we need to take our time on. We need to ensure that people are confident about their care needs and where their future care needs are best suited.

One of the problems that I had with the process last week — Ms Bradley will know this very well — is that people who are admitted to residential care facilities are admitted on the basis of individual care needs. That is where the process fell down: it moved away from the individual, and it was decided to do something en bloc. That should never have happened. We need to get back to individual care needs and to ensuring that we treat every one of our elderly people currently in residential care facilities as an individual while we look to a policy that will provide the opportunity for more people to be in their own home or in supported living, where they can have that care and support while having their individuality. If we have people in residential care homes, they should be in good-sized rooms with an en suite and in facilities that give them a degree of independence and privacy. That is not afforded to people to the same extent in many of the facilities currently. Those are good aspirations. The change has to be about dealing with people as individuals and showing them due care and respect.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Chomhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a chuid freagraí go dtí seo. I thank the Minister for his answers to date. At best, this could be described as absolutely confused; at worst, absolutely chaotic. The Minister needs to bring clarity to the process as it goes forward. He has to take the opportunity that he has, to date, failed to take to state that no homes have been given any guarantee that they will not be closed. Can he do that?

Mr Poots: That is the fourth Sinn Féin Member to ask basically the same question. I have been very clear about it. The process that was initiated the week before last to close all the care homes in three trust areas has ended. We will now look at the care needs of our elderly population, at where the supported living opportunities are available and at who would be best suited to that.

Let me tell you of a situation where one elderly person was in a residential care facility, separated from their partner, who could not support them in their own home. They are now both in a supported living facility. That person moved out of a residential care home because they were able to be rejoined with their partner. We did not see their tears on television. They wanted to tell their story on television but did not get the opportunity to tell it, in spite of it being made available. We did not hear their story on television, but that was a couple who shed many tears because of their separation, and because of a good policy they got the opportunity to be in a supported living facility where they received the care and support that they needed and were able to come together once again.

There are lots of really good options out there for older people, including the option of staying in the facility in which they are currently living. Let us discuss it with them and look at how we take things forward with them into the future.

Mr G Robinson: I thank the Minister for his statement and assure him of my full support. Exactly how many residential care homes are likely to close, and where does the excellent Thackeray Place care home in Limavady fit into any future elderly care provision? I know that he is a

very busy man, but I ask him to come down to Thackeray Place at some stage.

Mr Poots: Transforming Your Care, which, I note, all parties in the Chamber supported, recognised that just over 50% of homes would close over the next five years. I do not know which facilities will close and which will stay open. I know that, for example, there are only three residential care facilities in the Belfast Trust area. Quite a number of homes that they previously provided have closed over the years, and there was not a lot of fuss about it because it was done quite well.

As we move forward, where facilities fall short of the standards that we expect, where the numbers decline significantly in those facilities over time and where we can deal with these situations without causing distress to the elderly residents who live there, due consideration will be given to those circumstances.

I will give consideration to Mr Robinson's request to visit Thackeray Place residential home and get back to him.

Mr I McCrea: As other Members have said, the Minister visited Westlands home in Cookstown last week and saw at first hand the impact that the Northern Trust's decision had had on the residents. Will he assure the House and, indeed, the residents and staff of all homes that the way in which they were treated by the trust officials in lining them up and bringing them in one by one to tell them they had six months to find a new home —

Mr Speaker: I encourage the Member to finish.

Mr I McCrea: — will not happen and that he thinks that that way of treating people is absolutely ridiculous?

Mr Poots: I do not think that any trust or individual can look back on the past couple of weeks with any pride about how they dealt with elderly people. I will want to ensure that that is not the case in the future. In doing that, I will work very closely and ensure that trusts work very closely with our Commissioner for Older People to take advice and to ensure that we take all the issues into consideration. We will have oversight of any future proposals from the director of social care to ensure that we treat our elderly people with the respect, dignity, care and compassion that we all want to see.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for the statement. Minister, you opened your statement by focusing primarily on the well-being and treatment of our older people. It is just a pity that the trust did not share your sentiment. Greenfield home in Strabane, as alluded to, was one of the homes on the Western Trust's hit list. Will the Minister confirm to the House what funding will be given to areas such as Strabane for the future long-term provision of elderly care, ensuring that staff are trained in dementia care and that Strabane has adequate provision to deal with capacity, which is not the case at present?

Mr Poots: I know that Sinn Féin supported Transforming Your Care, as did all the other parties. It indicated that over 50% of homes would close over the next five years. I suspect that the Member would like to see investment in Strabane in supported care housing and so forth. That would enable us to have quality facilities for our elderly people in Strabane as they start to feel a little more vulnerable and less secure in their own home and as they want the confidence that they can continue to live

independently while having the support that is needed. That is a discussion that she really should have with the local trust on how we can achieve that as quickly as possible while ensuring that we cause no distress to the individuals who are currently in facilities in Strabane and right across Northern Ireland.

Mr Rogers: I thank the Minister for his statement. The residents and friends of Slieve Roe are listening carefully to what you have to say today. Will the HSC Board now ultimately make the decision on which homes are to be closed?

Mr Poots: The HSC Board will make that decision, yes. We will do it on the basis of the care needs of individuals, what is available in the local area, how we can provide that support and how we can ensure that the quality care and the higher standard of care that we want for the elderly population in the future can be provided without causing distress to the people who are currently in care. They may be in buildings that are not as good as they should be, but they may nonetheless be very content in those buildings because of the care that they receive and because they have built up good relationships with the staff. It is a credit to those staff that, in spite of the facilities that they work in, the elderly people feel so secure in such facilities.

Mr Speaker: I call Mrs Overend.

Mrs Overend: Sorry, Mr Speaker, I did not realise that I was going to be called then.

I thank the Minister for his statement. I concur with the Members who referred to Mrs Faulkner, who is from Mid Ulster. She very aptly portrayed the voices of elderly people across Northern Ireland who are concerned for their future. I remember hearing on 'The Stephen Nolan Show' —

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

Mrs Overend: OK. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Allow the Member to ask her question.

Mrs Overend: I refer the Minister to the decision that was made last week about removing the chief executive of the Northern Trust. Will he tell the House when that decision was made and whether it related to the circumstances of last week? Will he clarify that situation, please?

Mr Poots: The decision on that issue, which is not currently under discussion, was made probably the previous week. A discussion took place with the individual, and we came to a mutual arrangement that will allow us to resolve issues in Antrim hospital, in particular, and in the Northern Trust. That is something that has taken place over a period of time. We have a turnaround team in place. When we got advice from the turnaround team, we acted on it. There was a relatively short period in which we were identifying people who would take up the roles and so forth, but that had absolutely nothing to do with the current issues around care of the elderly.

11.15 am

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Slieve Roe House in Kilkeel is one of the facilities affected. It is disappointing that, on five occasions, a Minister of

this House refused to answer a question. It is in the public interest that he does, because — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms Ruane: It is in the public interest that he does. He has refused to do it. He gives one answer in private and another in public.

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

Ms Ruane: My question is this: does the Minister agree with me that this is a very, very shoddy way of doing governance and very bad for the health service?

Mr Poots: Thankfully, I have not taken my lead from the former Minister of Education. If I did, I would really do things in a shoddy way.

For those who find basic English difficult to understand: the process of TYC continues. The party opposite agreed to and supported that process, which indicated that over 50% of residential care homes would close because we would have identified a different way of providing that care. That process continues. We are not going down the route proposed by three trusts of closing 100% of facilities, some as quickly as in six months. That is not because we want to save the facilities but because we want to save elderly people from distress. If some people want to focus on saving not-fit-for-purpose buildings, that is a matter for them. I am not interested in not-fit-for-purpose buildings; I am interested in the elderly people who we provide care for in them. I am engaged in ensuring that we do not cause any further distress than has already been the case in a number of facilities.

I will take no lectures from Ms Ruane. I opposed her when she closed the I CAN facility, which provided support for disabled children in Ballynahinch — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Poots: When she was Minister, she did not listen to any of the cases that were made by any MLAs.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat. Given the Minister's very public disappointment about the handling of the closure of the residential homes by trust officials, will he tell the House whether any of those officials will be reprimanded?

Mr Poots: We have taken control of the situation. We will ensure that the process is carried out in a way that does not cause the distress that was caused last week. I will look into how things happened, why they happened, why trusts did not see that there would be problems with going down the route that they proposed and why they thought that they could proceed without seeking to indicate to us beforehand that that was their preferred route. Over the next number of weeks and months, we need to enquire about and look into how a lot of things were handled.

Mr Durkan: From listening to the Minister today, I am not so sure that he has stopped this process as much as slowed it down. The Minister has reaffirmed his commitment to 'Transforming Your Care'. That document has been discussed in the House on several occasions, but I do not recall a vote ever having taken place.

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

Mr Durkan: Given his commitment to that document, can the Minister confirm that it is still his intention to close 50% of residential care homes and indicate how that 50% will be identified and when they will be notified and the residents consulted?

Mr Poots: The Member knows 'Transforming Your Care' very well. He sat on the Committee and understands the issues. He knows that we are going down a process of providing a different kind of care model for our elderly population. When I say "a different kind of care model", I am thinking that the House accepted that it was not only different but considerably better.

If Members want to say to me today, "Do not provide better care for the elderly because we want to keep people in substandard conditions in substandard facilities and do not want them to have the best possible care", let them stand up and say that. I will not go down that route. If other Members want to go down that route, let them table a motion and argue their case. As I said, I do not want any member of my family to be in a residential care facility in a cramped room and sharing toilets and bathrooms with quite a number of elderly people. I want them to be in the best possible facilities. That is what I want to provide, and that is what Transforming Your Care is about. It will inevitably lead to a reduction in those kinds of facilities. We need to do that without causing the distress that was caused to elderly people last week.

We need to get back to the issue of how we bring about change for the better without causing hurt to people in the interim. That is the key, and that is where there was a failing. The failing was not in the policy; the policy is right. I am not doing a U-turn on that policy, and I will not be doing so because it will deliver better care for the elderly.

Mrs Dobson: How dare the Minister blame others when he is responsible — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order, order. Allow the Member to ask her question. Order.

Mrs Dobson: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I visited Crozier House in Banbridge last week. One 90-year-old gentleman told me that he felt like a piece of scrap that was being thrown away. His words will live long in my memory. He asked me about his human rights. Will the Minister outline the human rights of the pensioners who are terrified that they will be removed from their homes? In Crozier House last week, they were clear about where the blame firmly lies.

Mr Poots: I did not go down to Crozier House to tell people that they were being put out of their facility. In fact, I was in Crozier House a few weeks ago and did not indicate anything of the kind. So, if distress was caused to people in Crozier House, it was not caused by me. I was there three weeks ago, and nobody complained that I had caused distress to those elderly people. Mrs Dobson might want to reconsider her comments: they are clearly inaccurate.

I was in Grove House in Ballynahinch before it closed. I knew people who were there, and they asked me to come and visit. That closure caused distress to those people. That decision was taken by Minister McGimpsey of the Ulster Unionist Party, and it caused distress to those people. I have stepped in to ensure that people's human rights are properly looked after. We need to do that on the basis of individual care needs. Block closures of a series

of facilities is not the way to do that. We need to look at individual care needs and ensure that they are best met with the consent of the individuals. That work will happen over time.

As I said, many people who are in a residential care home will see out their days in a statutory residential care home. Others may wish, for political reasons or reasons connected to their jobs — for example, those in the media or the press — to continue to scare people. If people genuinely do not want to cause distress to elderly people, they should put out the message that they are hearing today, which is that people should not be concerned or distressed about their future care and well-being because they will have a lot of control over it. We will work very closely with those elderly people to ensure that they get the best care. Those who are exploiting the elderly should be careful about how they do it.

Mr Dallat: I thank the Minister for his statement. I am sure that no Member wants to exploit vulnerable people, but, at the same time, I am sure that the Minister will want to give the House an assurance that never again will those health trusts be allowed out like hound dogs to issue eviction notices to vulnerable people and staff in the disgraceful way that they did last week.

Mr Poots: I would not use the terminology that Mr Dallat used, but I stepped in last week when it was evident that, however it was done, it was causing elderly people distress. That is wrong — we cannot get away from it. That is why I said what I have said over the past number of days and took the decision to stop a process that, as enacted, was causing distress to elderly people, which I find unacceptable.

Mr Allister: On 24 April, the Northern Trust announced 100% closure, and the Minister said nothing and gave no rebuke. Indeed, on 27 April, he was quoted justifying it. It was only in the furore of the following week that the Minister reached for reverse gear. Why was that? Is it not clear from his statement today that, ultimately, he wants to maximise the closure of care homes through stealth by stopping new admissions and continuing not to invest in those homes, leaving those who cannot —

Mr Speaker: I encourage the Member to finish.

Mr Allister: — go to assisted living with nowhere but the private sector to go to? Where does the buck stop in the health service?

Mr Poots: Not for the first time, the Member gets it wrong. Sometimes, he knows when he is getting it wrong but does it nonetheless to try to score a political point.

Let me be absolutely clear: every time I was interviewed, I said that what the trust was doing went beyond Transforming Your Care. I said that it was not a done deal and that I would be very surprised if all these care homes closed. Given the level of distress that was evident, I stepped in to stop the process altogether.

This was never my policy. This was never my proposal. Those who talk about U-turns need to identify a time when I supported the closure of 100% of residential care homes. No such time exists, so I suspect that those who say otherwise are engaged in shoddy politics as opposed to caring for elderly people.

I will seek to ensure that we give confidence to elderly people in residential care and to people considering going into care or getting support of some kind that their future is secure, their views are of merit, they will always be listened to and, as we develop Transforming Your Care, we will develop one of the best care systems for an elderly population anywhere in the world. If Mr Allister wishes to have people in second- or third-rate facilities as opposed to in the best facilities, he should stand up and say that instead of hedging around the issue.

Mr McNarry: The Minister said that he was not at fault and that he was unsighted on the action contemplated by some trusts. Will he tell the House who he believes is at fault? Will he tell us why those at fault deviated from the criteria and understanding of the policy that he announced today?

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for the question. When I first came into the Department, I said that I wanted to be aware of things that had the potential to cause problems before they happened. That is simply because my take on something may be different from that of whoever thought up an idea, so we may go about things differently. This was not highlighted to me, and that is an issue. The trust took a view that it wanted to move ahead very quickly with Transforming Your Care and got ahead of itself to some extent. Although the trust would have been successful in providing high-quality facilities, I do not believe that it took enough cognisance of the distress that would be caused to elderly people who are currently in facilities. Those people are satisfied with the care that they receive, and they know the other elderly people in their care facility and the staff. So the consequence was that this caused them distress because they did not understand the change that was being proposed.

I find that unacceptable, and, over the next number of weeks and months, I will seek to identify how we got to the point that we got to.

11.30 am

Mr Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I want to ask the Minister to add a bit more clarity to this issue. The Committee for Social Development raised the matter of supported housing, which the Minister referred to. The Department for Social Development (DSD) has cut back the special needs management allowance (SNMA) to a number of facilities, and I believe that this recent controversy has led to even more confusion for some of the people who are involved in some of the facilities that provide accommodation for people under supported needs grant aid. Can the Minister assure the House that, as we go forward, the Health Department and DSD will have a joined-up approach to how they manage this process in the time ahead?

Mr Poots: The Member raises a very valid question. It is absolutely essential that DSD and the Health Department work closely together on these issues. DSD provides some excellent supported living facilities, particularly for people who have learning disabilities and mental health needs.

As Departments, we need to work very closely on housing needs for all our vulnerable citizens and ensure that vulnerable citizens receive that high-quality facility home to live in and that degree of independence that allows them to live with a degree of dignity and respect. We need

to ensure that that is done in such a way that they can receive all the support that they need from the medical perspective at all times. It is very important that we work closely together to deliver all that, and I thank the Member for the question.

Mr Copeland: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. There are some indications that many trusts have been operating what is essentially a no-new-admissions policy for over a year. Can the Minister advise what steps he has taken, with other Ministers, to provide additional supported housing? How many such units are in place, how many are planned and where are they?

Mr Poots: The issue of non-admittance goes back considerably further than a year. That has been the case for quite a while, and, indeed, Ms Bradley was very well aware of it while she worked in that sector before becoming an MLA.

There are a considerable number of supported housing facilities, and there will be a considerable number more. That is the course of work that we are going down, and that is the route that we are going down. We can give the Member a list or make it available in the Assembly Library of where these facilities are. Perhaps that will assist Members in their constituency in being able to point in the right direction elderly people who require good care needs and who are considering their future.

Executive Committee Business

Forestry (Felling of Trees) (Calculation of the Area of Land) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): I beg to move

That the draft Forestry (Felling of Trees) (Calculation of the Area of Land) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 be approved.

Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I seek to introduce the aforementioned statutory rule, which, subject to the Assembly's approval, will define the boundaries to be used for calculating an area of woodland to determine if it is 0.2 hectares or more and, therefore, subject to felling licensing legislation. Before I go into the detail of these regulations, I will explain briefly to Members the background and the context.

The Forestry Act was passed by this Assembly in 2010, following extensive interest and debate during the legislative passage of the Forestry Bill. The Act contains a power, at section 15, to license the felling of trees growing on land of 0.2 hectares or more. This will support my Department's general duty to promote afforestation and sustainable forestry in line with the forestry policy. The same section requires my Department to provide for the calculation of the area of such land in regulations and by affirmative resolution; hence, the reason for the regulations before you today.

The actual licensing of felling is covered in parallel legislation — the Forestry (Felling of Trees) Regulations 2013. Those regulations are not subject to affirmative resolution and are, therefore, not before you today. They have received SL1 approval from the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee and await being made simultaneously with the forestry regulations today.

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

Today's debate is purely about the forestry regulations, which prescribe boundaries to be used for the calculation of the area of woodland encompassed for felling-licence consideration. The ultimate purpose of the regulations concerns the calculation of an area of woodland, and how boundaries are to be determined for that purpose.

The regulations recognise that a woodland area may or may not be contained within a physical boundary such as a wall, fence, ditch or river. In the first instance, if such a physical boundary surrounds a woodland or forest, it must be used as a reference for any subsequent calculation of the area of the enclosed woodland. Alternatively, where no such physical boundary exists, the boundary will be taken as the outside of the crowns of the perimeter trees that join canopy, or have the reasonable potential to join canopy, on the land. The boundaries set down in the regulations are the basis for any measurement of the woodland area to determine whether it is 0.2 hectares or more and subject to a felling licence. The legislation does not regulate any specific measurement or calculation methods that must subsequently be used.

My Department consulted comprehensively on the regulations along with the Forestry (Felling of Trees)

Regulations 2013. The regulations in front of you were developed following several meetings with stakeholder groups and three presentations to the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development. Most recently, in December 2012, the regulations were positively received by stakeholders before final consideration by the Committee. That built on a 12-week public consultation exercise undertaken in 2011 that included woodland owners and the timber industry, the Ulster Farmers' Union, and environmental agencies and bodies. Constructive responses were received from 14 representative stakeholder groups. Those responses informed a process of revision so that the regulations before you today are clear, workable and fit for purpose. In particular, stakeholders highlighted the importance of simple, supporting guidance, and we have responded to that.

In consultation with stakeholders, my Department has produced user-friendly guidelines, which will be available online and in hard copy to assist in the implementation of the new felling-licence system, including those aspects of the regulations before you today. In addition, my Department discussed with stakeholders the importance of workable timelines for processing felling applications, and we have committed to setting those out in a customer standards charter.

I strongly reiterate my gratitude for the valuable contributions of our stakeholders and the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee in the regulations' development. I am pleased to say that, when it considered the regulations on 23 April, the Committee indicated that it was content for the regulations to be brought to the Assembly for debate. I am grateful to the Chair and the members of the Committee for their support of the regulations. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr Frew (The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development): I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate on the motion. It seeks to affirm the Forestry (Felling of Trees) (Calculation of the Area of Land) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013. The regulations will define the boundaries to be used in calculating whether an area of woodland is 0.2 hectares or more. All woodland of 0.2 hectares or more will be subject to a felling licence, unless an exemption applies. The regulations will complement the Forestry (Felling of Trees) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013.

Regulations on felling licences will come by negative resolution. The Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development considered those in conjunction with the regulation on the calculation of land. It had a few issues with felling licences, and clarification has been sought. However, the Committee is content that, although the statutory rule is almost a suite of regulations, the issues to do with the felling licence need not hold up the regulations on the calculation of land. The Committee therefore considered this proposal as an SL1 on 9 April 2013 and indicated that it was content with its merits. The Committee further considered the statutory rule on 23 April 2013 and resolved that it be affirmed.

I confirm that the Committee is content that the statutory rule be affirmed by the Assembly.

Mrs Dobson: I wish to make a number of short remarks about the regulations. From the outset, I welcome the fact that a balance was struck in the Forestry Act 2010 that the

felling controls would apply only to areas of 0.2 hectares or more, or, for a clear perspective, in the region of half an acre.

I assume that most storms resulting in occasional windblown trees will still come in below the area specified in today's regulations. Given their unavoidable nature, it would be wrong to penalise landowners every time that one of their trees was blown over. Although my party broadly agreed with the changes made to tree felling in the Forestry Act and the subsequent regulations, any new restrictions or, in today's case, a new layer of bureaucracy, will only ever work if there is appropriate knowledge and buy-in from the industry. For instance, I know that the Minister's officials said that they hoped that the timescale from application to granting the felling licence will be approximately three months. That is important because, although trees may not be just as pressing as animals, I remind the Minister that it will still be extremely frustrating for many landowners who have to wait months on end to get approval from the Department or even know what species they should plant. Obviously, any delays will have an economic impact. I ask the Minister to detail instances in which she would envisage an application taking longer than three months.

I welcome the regulations. The responsibility now lies with the Department to ensure that they are implemented as efficiently as possible.

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Chair of the Committee and Mrs Dobson for their comments. It was a long process, and I know that the Committee sought a lot of assurances about moving forward.

I thank everyone for their support today. We are now moving forward with the legislation. I will make sure that we get the guidance published and get it out there as quickly as possible. I assure Mrs Dobson that there is no intention to delay any process. All applications will be processed in as timely a manner as possible.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the draft Forestry (Felling of Trees) (Calculation of the Area of Land) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 be approved.

Private Members' Business

Primary Schools: Inner South Belfast

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes to propose and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. One amendment has been selected and published on the Marshalled List. The proposer will have 10 minutes to propose the amendment and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Spratt: I beg to move

That this Assembly recognises the need to address underachievement in Protestant working-class areas; acknowledges the vital role of primary school in a child's early education; and calls on the Minister of Education to bring forward plans for a new primary school for inner south Belfast as a matter of urgency.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak on this important subject. I thank the Minister for being in the House to hear and respond to today's debate.

Educational underachievement affects not only south Belfast but many other areas too. However, statistics show that underachievement is more prevalent in the controlled sector, and I will come back to that later. It has been proven that the early years of a child's education are the most formative and, if we are to seriously tackle underachievement, we must examine all the systemic issues that cause it in the first place.

One of the key influences in academic performance is socio-economic background and, with that, there are a number of other factors, such as parental qualifications and the home learning environment. It is interesting to note that in family situations where the mother has a higher standard of education, the children have a better chance of success at school. Parental involvement in their children's education is very important as it helps to build aspirations for the children to work towards.

A number of other factors impact on a child's development, including attendance at school. There are issues around literacy in young males, and there is a perception among young men that literacy skills, such as reading, poetry, etc., are for girls only. There is also a lack of role models for young men.

When Dr Pete Shirlow presented to the Education Committee in 2011, he said:

"A total of 75% of lower than expected schools were in the controlled sector, and most of those were clustered in Belfast. In each of those schools, 50-plus pupils were eligible for free school meals, which is a high sign of social deprivation, and one in five — 20% — were identified as having special educational needs."

That clearly demonstrates that underachievement is a particular problem in Protestant areas. That is why we accept the amendment to today's motion. It was never intended to underestimate other areas of deprivation, so we will not divide the House on it.

11.45 am

Pete Shirlow goes into further detail, stating:

"pupils who receive free school meals in Catholic secondary schools are twice as likely to go to university than pupils who receive free school meals in Protestant secondary schools."

He presented more figures regarding Key Stage 2 maths and English, which, again, showed a clear differential between the maintained and controlled sectors. The same applied to Key Stage 3 English. Further down the line at A level, there is an even larger gap, where around 33% of pupils in maintained non-grammar schools obtained two A levels compared with 17% of students in Protestant secondary schools. Those are shocking statistics, and they cannot be ignored.

Primary-school education is so important, as it provides children with numeracy and literacy skills that will stay with them all their lives. It also gives children a chance to build confidence and become more socialised. However, it is important that parents play a role in their children's education. Just by taking an interest, it shows that the child's education is worthwhile.

To take a step back, for those children who do not have that, I commend the excellent work carried out by the Sure Start programmes. Without those valuable programmes, many children would not have the encouragement and attention that they need in order to succeed.

Special needs provision is also very important in tackling underachievement. In each of the three schools in inner south Belfast, the number of children with special educational needs is alarmingly high: in Donegall Road Primary School, it is 24%; in Fane Street Primary School, it is 42%; and in Blythefield Primary School, it is 51%. Those figures were obtained from Sandy Row Community Forum's Revitalise Education report, which consulted the local community on the way forward for education in the area. If schools and communities worked together and built a stronger connection, it would be of enormous benefit to everyone in the community.

I will turn now to the subject of the new primary school for inner south Belfast, which has been debated for some time. The Revitalise Education report makes note of the perception that all three primary schools would require capital investment and are not visually modern. It acknowledges that a fancy building does not make the school but does send out a positive message to parents and children.

As Members will be aware, the Village area is undergoing major and vast regeneration. Old houses are being replaced with new, and the whole area will be transformed when that is complete. It would not make sense to have three old primary schools in a modernised area. Local children should be able to access primary education in 21st century facilities, with up-to-date technology and resources. The Minister alluded to that when he responded to the Adjournment debate on this very subject in December 2011. He stated:

"I accept the argument that when a community and young people see investment being made in them through new infrastructure and new buildings, it is reflected in the outcomes of those young people's

education.” — [Official Report, Bound Volume 69, p348, col 1].

I remember raising that issue with the previous Minister of Education, and I think that it is highly regrettable that progress on the subject has been so slow.

A site was identified at Belfast City Hospital, which received support from the local community. It would make sense to locate a new primary school roughly halfway between the primary schools at Blythefield and the Donegall Road. However, considerable time has passed since the site at the hospital was identified. Given that the project has not progressed, I understand that the Belfast Trust may require the site for health purposes. That rumour has been going about for a considerable time. However, my colleague Edwin Poots assured me in recent conversations that neither the trust nor the Department of Health has ruled out the potential to use that site for a school and that the ongoing feasibility study is being facilitated by the health estates and the trust.

A full planning application was submitted on 26 September 2012. That requires approval. If the Department of Education and the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) then approve an economic appraisal and make funding available, the site could be acquired and the project proceed to the next stage.

I understand from previous questions to the Minister that he stated that it was the board's responsibility to progress that project. However, given the time that has elapsed and the number of educational opportunities already missed, I call on the Minister of Education to take a personal interest in this new school project and work with ministerial colleagues in the Executive to ensure that it is expedited as quickly as possible.

We will accept the amendment. I reiterate that it was never the intention to disqualify other areas. It was merely about the time that this has taken and the fact that the regeneration of the Village area is now ongoing. Perhaps the Minister will also look at the amount of money that is being spent on remedial work in all three schools by the Belfast Board to try to keep them up to some sort of standard. I believe that a major spend is still ongoing in those areas.

Mr Hazzard: I beg to move the following amendment:

Leave out all after “address” and insert

“educational underachievement in all working-class communities; acknowledges the vital role of primary school in a child’s education; and calls on the Minister of Education and the Belfast Education and Library Board to bring forward plans for a new primary school for inner south Belfast as a matter of urgency.”

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion as amended. Despite agreeing with much of what the previous speaker said, it is important not to assign educational underachievement to one part of our community or another. Undoubtedly, it is important to tackle educational underachievement in Protestant working-class areas, but it is just as important to tackle it in Catholic working-class areas and in any areas of social deprivation where underachievement exists.

Educational underachievement is a socio-economic issue. It is definitely not a religious issue. Whatever way

you dissect the statistics and classify the problem, be it numerically, by gender or community background, there is only one common denominator, which is that the problem of educational underachievement is more prevalent in our socially disadvantaged communities. It is the same throughout the world: social disadvantage breeds educational underachievement. It is not unique to the North of Ireland or, indeed, to parts of south or east Belfast.

In the aftermath of the recent street violence in Belfast, the First Minister, Peter Robinson, said that statistics prove that underachievement is worst among Protestant working-class boys. That is not the case. The latest figures show that 450 Protestant boys entitled to free school meals did not achieve the benchmark of five GCSEs, while 888 Catholic boys entitled to free school meals did not achieve five GCSEs covering the same period. Those are the facts of the matter.

So, there is a need to tackle educational underachievement wherever it exists, be that for Protestants, Catholics or those with no religion. We must not apply sectarian rhetoric to the situation and get mixed up in a process of demanding funding for this or that community. I am happy that that has not happened today.

Wherever there is social disadvantage in educational underachievement, let us work together to eradicate it, regardless of the colour of the uniform, colour of the skin or what church they do or do not go to. I welcome the fact that unionist representatives are taking educational underachievement very seriously. If they are genuine in wanting to tackle underachievement, Sinn Féin is more than happy to work with them to do so. However, many of the unionist politicians calling for action here today criticised Sinn Féin Education Ministers for prioritising social disadvantage criteria in determining the use of education resources. They are the same politicians who opposed the ending of academic selection despite the fact that all the evidence is that the biggest losers in a selective system are those from a socially disadvantaged background.

For too long, we have had to endure the nonsense that grammar schools provide the working class with a route out of poverty. This is simply not the case. In fact, 80% of grammar school places go to children of parents in professional occupations compared with just 20% in manual occupations. Only 8% of grammar school places go to children in the bottom two categories of the Registrar General's scale, and the figure is closer to 1% or 2% in various socially deprived areas across the North. These children simply do not have the same advantage as others when it comes to sitting the unregulated exams, be it because of lack of access to the additional tutoring required or even a lack of the basic family support that many of us take for granted. Moreover, for a large number of young people in socially deprived areas, there can be a multiplicity of pressures in the household that affect their ability to pass the kind of selection test that some schools now practise.

Rather than giving these children additional support, some Ulster Unionist and DUP representatives would prefer to endorse a system that tells them, at the age of 10 or 11, that they are failures. They then wonder why these kids lose faith in education and any sense of hope or aspiration. We need a change of mind when it comes

to this topic. Political unionism needs to progress quickly from pandering to the prejudices of those who regard a grammar school place as a positional good that somehow defines their superior place in society. We need to get on with representing all of the interests of the children and young people who are too often left behind.

Surely, it is time that we acknowledge that the worst start that any child can have in life is to be branded a failure. Surely, it is time that we acknowledge that mixed-ability environments enable all children to flourish and become all that they can be.

It is important to stress that ending academic selection does not mean ending academic excellence. We are in favour of educational excellence for all children, and all the evidence proves that a mixed-ability system is the best way to achieve this because it raises everyone. It challenges, incentivises, and drives all kids to be the best that they can be.

Speaking of the need to tackle the inequalities of British life in the post-war years, Ernest Bevin remarked that the worst poverty of all was the poverty of aspiration. For too long, the educational segregation of our young people has perpetrated a poverty of aspiration among many in disadvantaged communities, such as inner south Belfast. For too long, those opposite have ignored the demands for an equitable response to the problem. Hopefully, today we will start to see a change of direction and an opening up of the space in which to have a sensible debate.

Abolishing academic selection in all its guises is at the core of building any equitable, world-class education system. However, a wide range of policies is also required to address underachievement in working-class areas. I think that the steady increase in attainment during Sinn Féin's time with the Education Ministry shows that we have the right policies in place, but the pace of change needs to be quickened. In 2006, the number of school leavers achieving the recognised benchmark of five good GCSEs was 52%. By 2011, it was 59%, and it increased again to more than 60% in 2012.

In recent years, successive Education Ministers have initiated a broad range of reforms, with an emphasis on ensuring that all young people leave school with the skills and training required to meet the employment demands of a rapidly changing world. For too long, education provision was planned in an unco-ordinated and bottom-up way, through which the market demands of individual institutions triumphed over the educational needs of the pupil and the community. Thankfully, we now see the building blocks of a system that delivers quality learning while guaranteeing an equitable and more relevant curriculum choice.

Central to this evolution in education provision have been the revised curriculum and the entitlement framework, which, in tandem, have developed key skills, increased access and choice for all pupils, and empowered young people to make informed decisions about their future.

Now, academic courses can be integrated with challenging professional and technical courses. These provide a much better base for many future third-level entrants. Increasingly, courses are focused on the requirements of a globalised economy. Moreover, the entitlement framework ensures the capacity to deliver high-quality professional and technical pathways, again accessed by choice and

available through modern organisational flexibility. Above all, it ensures that all our young people enjoy parity of esteem.

However, there are still communities and families throughout the North, including various parts of south Belfast, who no longer feel connected to education. We need to find ways of reconnecting them and encouraging people to, once again, value the tremendous gift that is education. The education awareness campaign that the Minister launched recently aims to do just that: reminding parents and families that education does not start and stop at the school gates and that we should all engage with our children and their learning process as often as we can, be that as simple as a bedtime story or helping them with particular aspects of their learning.

For some, that type of engagement may seem obvious, but, for a variety of reasons, many within socially disadvantaged communities are detached from their children's learning process. It is vital that we break the cycle and offer the type of support that the Minister has outlined. We also need to continue to prioritise resources where they are needed most, and I hope that the other parties will now begin to support us in that process.

12.00 noon

Recently, the Executive announced plans to create 200-plus teaching posts for newly graduated teachers, with particular focus on raising standards and achievement. That will undoubtedly have a positive impact on the socially disadvantaged areas that we have talked about today and which really need that type of investment.

At the heart of this issue is the clear necessity to continue the process of change within education, but we must stop the pandering to a small but influential section of vested interests that has set itself against change in order to protect its own privileged position.

On the specifics of a primary school for inner south Belfast, I am not across every facet of local detail, as some from the area might be. However, given that two of the wards in inner south Belfast, Blackstaff and Shaftesbury, are in the North's top 10% of deprived areas, that child poverty is treble the North's average and, ultimately, that educational attainment is nowhere near the level it should be, it is fair to suggest that all of us need to do a lot more to tackle the outstanding issues. If a new primary school is what local people and the education authorities feel is the best way forward, I am sure that the area planning process may be able to facilitate such a proposal. No doubt the Minister will speak to those points in greater detail later in the debate.

All those who consider themselves to be the political representatives of south Belfast need to step up to the plate and play their role in raising educational awareness and aspirations within that community. That is for every party in the House to take cognisance of.

The educational framework for addressing underachievement is, to a large extent, in place. It includes the school improvement policy, the literacy and numeracy strategy, the revised curriculum, the entitlement framework and the continued promotion of such targeted programmes as Sure Start, amongst many others. However, we need to see a renewed discussion in areas such as south

Belfast on the long-term, devastating effects of academic selection and rejection at age 10 and 11.

I call on Members to support any and all attempts to tackle underachievement in all our local communities. Sinn Féin will work with anybody who seeks to improve the educational outcomes of our children.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is almost up.

Mr Hazzard: We invite any community to engage with us. I call on Members to support the amended motion.

Dr McDonnell: I thank the Members who brought this motion to the Floor. Getting education right, and getting an education system that works for all our most vulnerable children, is one of the biggest challenges facing us today. It is not only about the need. There is a profound responsibility on each and every one of us in the Assembly to address educational underachievement wherever it is found, be it in Belfast or across Northern Ireland.

In my opinion, every child, regardless of their community background, deserves the right to a good education. We owe it to our children to ensure that every one of them can read, write and count well before they leave school at 16. It is something of a scandal that all of them are not able to do that in this day and age.

There is no doubt that there is educational underachievement in Protestant working-class areas, but we must accept that educational underachievement is not a reality in just one community. There is educational underachievement in many nationalist areas as well. It is important that we do not forget those facts.

Even though we have spent the past 20 years trying to put conflict behind us, the residue of the conflict, across Belfast and beyond, has left us with a legacy. The malign grip of paramilitary groups and former paramilitary groups is still strangling far too many of our communities. That malign grip undermines the potential for educational achievement. It makes it much more difficult to run a successful primary school in any neighbourhood that is being strangled.

I have had the privilege and, indeed, the pleasure of working with a number of principals and teaching and support staff in many of our primary schools across my constituency and far beyond. A number of them work in particularly challenging environments. We owe it to them to reduce the barriers and obstacles to their success. Their environments are challenging because some of them operate in schools that are crumbling and in urgent need of refurbishment or, in many cases, a newbuild. Some work with children who, through no fault of their own, come from a difficult background and require particular levels of extra support and attention. I am always amazed by the dedication that those principals and their staff show in going beyond the duties of just being teachers.

The motion is right to point out the important role of primary school in a child's early education. Early years and even preschool are critical points in helping to give children the best possible start in life. There has been much talk of a new amalgamated primary school in inner south Belfast, to which the motion refers, for several years now. Unfortunately, there has been very little or no movement. Teachers and pupils struggle to cope with difficult conditions in the existing primary schools. For the schools on Blythe Street and on the Donegall Road, the

building fabric is very difficult. For Fane Street, although the building fabric is good, many parents feel that the school is not in the best possible location. It is clear that there is a crying need for a newbuild primary school that amalgamates all three primary schools. We reiterate our calls to the Minister to take action on the issue as soon as is humanly possible.

As a representative of South Belfast and, indeed, as a resident, my constituency's needs are always uppermost in my mind. However, when it comes to educational underachievement, which I feel very passionate about, it is an issue for much more than one constituency.

I have long argued for the need for a special education task force to be set up that would tackle, in a deep and detailed way, educational underachievement where it is most acute. I believe that I am failing in my job — indeed, we are all failing in our job — if we allow a single child to go through seven years of schooling only to then leave at 16 years of age unable to read and write adequately. We heard shocking statistics from colleagues earlier.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the Member draw his remarks to a close, please?

Dr McDonnell: I hope that the Minister will respond positively to the motion and demand that officials urgently set the wheels in motion to build a new primary school in inner south Belfast. Furthermore, I hope that the Minister will consider the proposal to set up a special educational task force to help to address what is one of the greatest social injustices in our society today.

Mr McGimpsey: I begin by saying that I welcome the debate, support the motion and have no issues with the amendment. We have been on this project for many years. Indeed, getting the communities in the area to agree that we close three primary schools and amalgamate them into one has taken quite an effort, not only on my part but that of a number of representatives. I must pay tribute to Bob Stoker, a councillor in the Village, for the efforts that he has put in.

The history is quite simple: none of the three primary schools' buildings is fit for purpose, and they need to be amalgamated. Fane Street Primary School is so old that it is now a listed building. The building at Sandy Row's Blythefield Primary School is long past its sell-by date. So, too, is that at Donegall Road Primary School.

We have agreement. One of the key parts of that agreement was the hospital site. When I was Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, I was able to confirm that the site was not crucial to the development of the hospital or the trust. As far as the community is concerned, that is the site that we have earmarked, together with the Belfast Board. As I said, that has taken a long time to come forward.

In response to what Mr Jimmy Spratt said, I say that the Health Minister, Edwin Poots, stated in a letter to me, dated no later than 15 March:

"neither the Trust nor the DHSSPS have ruled out the potential to use the site for a school."

He said that, although he could certainly see merit in a proposed new school for the area, he had been advised that officials from his Department had not had any formal indication from the Department of Education that it wished

to progress the scheme. That is a serious matter for the Minister to address.

Mr Spratt: Will the Member give way?

Mr McGimpsey: I am happy to give way, yes.

Mr Spratt: This has been going on for some considerable time now; in fact, it was going on during your time as Health Minister. Will you, therefore, enlighten the House by saying what you did about it during that period and why you did not progress the issue?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr McGimpsey: As Mr Spratt will be aware, the scheme's progression is a matter for the board and the Department. The issue was that the board wished to go forward with the scheme, but to do so, it needed approval from the Department and Mr O'Dowd's predecessor to spend, as I recall, £16,000 on planning consultants. That approval could not be got from the Department until Mr O'Dowd came in, and that is where it is.

The site is actually zoned in the area plan for non-hospital use. I very much welcome Edwin Poots's letter, because I think that it gives us a lot of comfort. Where we are now is that the board has put in a planning application, and I have no doubt that that will be approved come the summer. We will then have an economic appraisal, after which, there will be a decision.

I am looking for that assurance, bearing in mind what Mr Spratt, Alasdair McDonnell and, indeed, Mr Hazzard said about educational disadvantage, although Mr Hazzard seemed to lose us a wee bit in a long, carefully prepared speech about other issues. Regardless of whether we have a grammar school, and regardless of whether we have the 11-plus, we need to have a primary school in that area. The arguments are overwhelming. Those are seriously disadvantaged communities, and children there are working in the worst conditions. This is an opportunity for the Sinn Féin Minister to step in in a way that his predecessor refused to and give us an assurance that this primary school will go forward.

We appear to have, again, compliance or support from the Health Minister and his Department, and the board wants and has applied for this. It is now down to the Department of Education, and I look forward to it bringing this forward. As Alasdair McDonnell said, there is no bigger thing that you can do for your children than provide them with an education.

The numbers of educationally disadvantaged in that area are huge, and that shames us all. As Mr Hazzard said, we all need to step up to the plate on this, although some of us did so a long time ago. Indeed, Margaret Ritchie, I and others agreed the £100 million redevelopment of the Village, which had the worst concentration of unfit housing anywhere in Northern Ireland, and a key part of that was investment in children's education and, not least, in this primary school.

We have confirmation of the availability of the hospital site. We now require confirmation that the Department is behind the board and that, when the planning permission and the economic appraisal, which I have no doubt will be positive, come through, that will allow us to go forward and provide a simple equality. Sinn Féin is fond of talking about equality and disadvantage in working-class Protestant

areas. Here is their opportunity to put their money where the mouth is and to step up to the plate.

Mr Lunn: I support the motion and the amendment. We would have been happy to support the motion without the amendment, but the amendment gives a fuller description of the problem and recognises the common problem in Catholic and Protestant working-class areas, so we are happy to support it.

Both the motion and the amendment point out the widely acknowledged view that deficiencies in early years continue to affect children right through to secondary level and beyond. Indeed, I was thinking about an example from a couple of years ago when the Education Committee visited Wrightbus in Ballymena. It had set up a programme to improve the literacy and numeracy skills of its immigrant workers, but it was discovered that most of the positions on the programme had been taken up by local workers.

Again, over the past six years, in the Committee, the problem of underachievement among Protestant boys, rather than girls, has been constantly referred to. As Mr Hazzard pointed out, the statistics point to a problem across the board, and they always have done. It is a fact that, at the moment, only 32% of disadvantaged pupils achieve five GCSEs at A* to C.

There is a Programme for Government target of around 50%, but it stands at 32% now.

Mr Hazzard managed to deflect the debate briefly into the area of academic selection. I do not want to go there, but a question worth asking is this: given the geography of these three schools, how many of the pupils end up at Methodist or Inst? I do not know the figure; maybe somebody else does.

12.15 pm

Dr McDonnell: Very few.

Mr Lunn: Well, I knew that.

In moving the motion, Mr Spratt mentioned the perception that literacy and numeracy is just for the girls. That takes you back to the old notion that Protestant boys did not need education because they were going to get a job in the shipyard, at Mackies, at the ropeworks or with some other major industrialist, all of which have now gone. The days of using that excuse are long gone, frankly. It is a couple of generations old now, so we can probably forget about it.

Other Members referred to socio-economic background. However, it is a fact that some schools in deprived areas do very well and some do not, so there may be more to it than that. The parental factor and the home learning environment have also been mentioned. The Committee has been told that, in an ideal scenario, 70% or 80% of all learning is achieved through the home. I have a problem with that statistic, but I do not doubt that it is extremely significant. There is also a lack of male role models, including fathers and perhaps male teachers, as there is a very low percentage of male teachers in primary schools. A school's ethos, truancy rates and the quality of its facilities, which I will come on to when I talk about the new school, are also important.

The Minister has indicated his willingness to look favourably at a development proposal, and there has been a long campaign to amalgamate these schools on one new

site. As he told us again today, Mr McGimpsey indicated in 2010 that there was land on the City Hospital site that was surplus to requirements. An economic appraisal has been commissioned and a planning application has been submitted, but surely the issue of the site is, strictly speaking, something for the Health Minister rather than the Minister of Education? I do not see what the Minister of Education can do about this until the site has been clearly identified and becomes available.

It is a fact that we have three schools that are close together, are over 100 years old and are not fit for purpose. We have 450 pupils — as Mr Spratt said, a high percentage of them have special needs — being taught in substandard conditions. We appear to have ground available in the locality and a Minister who is favourably disposed. I know that money is tight, but I cannot believe that, had the conditions been right, a new school for inner south Belfast would not have been on the list of newbuilds at some stage in the immediate past or immediate future, because it is such a deserving case. The benefits of it —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the Member draw his remarks to a close, please?

Mr Lunn: The House has heard me, before now, talking about the nonsense of spending money for maintenance in schools that will be closed. I could go on, but I absolutely support the amended motion today.

I apologise for the absence of Anna Lo, who wanted to speak to the motion. She has been called away.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Educational underachievement affects every sector of our communities, and I commend the proposer of the motion for acknowledging that in his opening remarks. One thing we all agree on is that more needs to be done to tackle educational underachievement.

It is widely acknowledged that Dawn Purvis's report highlighted underachievement in disadvantaged areas, mainly Protestant areas. That report highlighted the issues that affect educational underachievement, particularly of Protestant boys. We need to take the necessary steps to make the changes needed to tackle underachievement, so that our young people, irrespective of their background — be it Protestant, Catholic, all faiths and none — receive the education that they are entitled to.

Our amendment to the motion aims to address underachievement in all working-class areas. There are multiple deprivation wards across the North, and socio-economic background is a key predictor of academic underachievement. High levels of absenteeism and the parental and home environment are some of the issues that have to be addressed. We need to give more support to families and communities to get involved in shaping educational outcomes for our children. There is much recognised international evidence that shows that high-quality early years education has significant and lasting benefits for children, particularly for those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The Department needs to provide better support to schools in disadvantaged areas that have good, effective leadership and have already moved ahead with the support of the community to identify trans-generational educational issues in their communities, which has thrown open the doors to parents to work alongside their

child, learning together. Some of those parents had bad educational experiences that were never addressed and were left to fester and be passed on to their child or children. The family and schools together (FAST) programme that some of our schools are involved in is a perfect opportunity for schools and communities to work together. Every school should be supported in having a FAST programme. I believe that the programme is run through school budgets. The Department needs to support financially the schools that run those programmes. I am delighted that one of those schools — Barrack Street — is in my area. The learning and bonding that a parent and child get during the programme, which instils confidence in parents and brings joy to children when they see their parent engaging with them in their school environment, is immeasurable.

There are problems in the link between poor educational qualifications and poverty. As was said, family structures change. The lack of role models, particularly male role models, in families is a fundamental problem that the Purvis report highlighted. The conflict has had an impact on both communities and is now having an impact on education. There are high levels of unemployment and family breakdown.

As adults, we have informed our children that their schooldays are the best days of their life. Members outlined significant gaps in achievement, particularly in grammar and non-grammar schools. There is a plethora of information and data that shows significant differences and how, in deprived communities, one community is faring less well in educational terms. I commend the work that the Minister and his Department are doing to close that gap, but we have opportunities now, with post-primary area planning, to put in place much-needed new schools in areas such as south Belfast.

I call on Members to support the amended motion.

Mr McDevitt: It gives me great pleasure to support the motion and the amendment. As colleagues from South Belfast have rightly said in the debate, there is a long-running saga around the provision of primary school education in the Village and Donegall Road areas of south Belfast. It is a complicated situation. I do not think that any of us who represent the area would want to make it any worse by saying something that could be taken out of context.

The situation requires leadership from the Minister and the board. It requires a great deal of investment in community relations in the inner south Belfast community, which could unlock massive opportunities for the children of that part of our constituency and our city. Mr Hazzard, I think, observed that, in and around the Village and the Donegall Road and Donegall Pass areas, there are many of Northern Ireland's finest schools. It is a simple fact, as, I think, Mr Lunn stated, that very few of the children who grow up in those communities will have access to those very fine schools. Although there are complicated policy challenges that we could debate about access and barriers — we probably have debated them at great length in the House — the simple fact remains that we should be agreed that there should be no barriers in their primary education or in the quality, culture and nurturing environment of their primary education and school setting that would prevent them being potential candidates for those schools. Yet, the reality today is that there probably

are more barriers than there should be. In my opinion, it is just a fact that children who attend the three schools in question do not get the same access or opportunities as those attending other schools in this jurisdiction.

We heard in the debate that there is a potential site that, as far as I am aware, enjoys the support of all parties represented in the constituency. The location of the site would be fantastic, and it would give the opportunity for a new school, a new start and a very positive new beginning. I would love to see any outstanding issues with the site resolved so that this becomes simply an educational decision, with no extraneous factors, agencies or bodies able to slow the progress of the development.

Alasdair McDonnell talked about the need to address educational underachievement, and I wholeheartedly agree with him. It is also about understanding that, in our most deprived communities, it is not just about what happens from the moment the bell goes at 9.00 am until it goes again at 2.00 pm or 3.00 pm; it is about the community of learning, the building that is the school and how it can be better utilised, and it is about breakfast clubs. It is also about programmes that give parents who may think that they have little stake in their children's education a genuine stake in it and allowing them to feel part of that educational process. This new school, I think, would create such an environment. In fact, I know that it would because all the other new schools in south Belfast have done so.

We are spending millions regenerating the Village. When it is complete, we will hold it up to the world as a case study in urban regeneration. We should make the same investment in its future and its children, and, therefore, I am happy to support the motion and amendment.

Mrs Dobson: I also welcome the opportunity to speak on the matter. I will focus my remarks on the educational underachievement aspect of the motion because, as we heard earlier, no one in the Chamber can talk more convincingly about the real need for a new primary school in inner south Belfast than my colleague Michael McGimpsey.

The Ulster Unionist Party has long called for underachievement to be addressed across all demographics. That is why we have no difficulty in supporting the motion and the amendment. There is, however, a particular problem with Protestant working-class areas, and, therefore, I welcome the motion's focus on that.

No one can determine into which social, cultural or intellectual group they will be born. Yet, disturbingly, in Northern Ireland, the postcode lottery often has a significant impact on overall educational and life achievements. As we heard, young people born into more economically deprived households are significantly less likely to attain the expected level of qualifications. This should no longer be tolerated in the 21st century. Although these debates are all fine and well when it comes to raising the profile of the problems, unless significant steps are taken following them, no one in the Chamber should be so naive as to believe that these 90 minutes will have achieved anything.

12.30 pm

Minister, I am sure you will agree that the current situation is abhorrent. That is why we need answers today about

what you are doing to tackle it. At the very least, surely even you must recognise the pressing need for a new school in inner south Belfast, so do the right thing and sort it out. The problems facing our education system are huge, but they can be overcome. It would be unthinkable for future generations in Northern Ireland if we in this generation refused to rise to meet the challenge.

No issue has such a long-term, detrimental impact as the fact that far too many young people are not reaching basic standards of literacy and numeracy. The recent Audit Office report found that 9,000 of our young people left education in 2010-11 having failed to meet the required standards. Once again, it identified a strong correlation between underachievement and entitlement to free school meals. The same problem was identified in its 2006 report. I have to ask, "Have the past six years of devolution had any impact on the issue whatsoever?". The Minister may claim that the strategy to tackle literacy and numeracy is having an impact, but it is happening far too slowly.

New ideas are needed, and I will use the debate to call once again for an initiative that my party has long been in support of and which we are pleased to see included as a specific recommendation in the recent Salisbury report — the introduction of a pupil bonus scheme. A pupil bonus scheme similar to the pupil premium in place in England would see schools receive additional money principally on the basis of how many of their children qualified for free school meals. The additional funding, available to all primary schools with one or more free school meals recipients, could then be left at the discretion of the individual principals to spend. After all, they know better than anyone the problems facing their area. Why can the Department not, for once, allow them to do what they know to be right?

Tackling the chronic education inequalities across Northern Ireland will not be easy. I support the motion. I hope that inner south Belfast is given a new primary school and trust that the Minister accepts that, by sticking rigidly to his current course, he is only prolonging the problem rather than rising to the challenge of addressing it once and for all.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately after the lunchtime suspension. I therefore propose, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm. The first item of business will then be Question Time. The debate will continue at 4.00 pm, when the Minister will respond.

The debate stood suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 12.33 pm.

On resuming (Mr Speaker in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Mr Speaker: Questions 14 and 15 have been withdrawn.

Social Investment Fund

1. **Mr Spratt** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the social investment fund. (AQO 3939/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister): Since October 2012, our officials have been working alongside steering groups to ensure that communities across all nine social investment zones are engaged in the process to identify objective needs and potential projects to tackle those needs. Steering groups have submitted final area plans encompassing prioritised projects aimed at addressing the key objectives of the fund. The final plans were received on 28 February and are now subject to a quality assurance review, including the completion of the economic appraisal process for each proposed project. That process is assessing the individual projects in the plans against set criteria to ensure that the most robust projects are recommended to maximise impact on the ground. Following the appraisal process, we will make decisions on the final projects to be funded and the most appropriate delivery mechanism, with a view to projects commencing in communities soon afterwards.

Mr Spratt: I thank the deputy First Minister for his answer. When are we likely to see the money and the projects hitting the ground? That question is being asked in the community.

Mr M McGuinness: We had a process to go through, and there was a responsibility on the steering groups to come forward with their proposals, which they have now done. An assessment is now taking place. I believe that we are very close to announcing when the green light will be given. What is important in all of this is that people are coming forward with robust proposals. All those proposals obviously have to be subject to great scrutiny to ensure that they are projects that, when implemented on the ground, will have maximum benefit for local communities.

Mr Nesbitt: Recently, at the Ards Community Network, community groups met to discuss the capital projects that had been agreed in the south-eastern zonal advisory panel. The expression used, I believe, was that Lisburn had “cleaned up”, on the basis that it had a full list of shovel-ready projects whereas Ards did not. What is the deputy First Minister’s opinion on that? Does he think that that is an appropriate way forward?

Mr M McGuinness: You are dealing with a specific situation in a specific area. The concerns that you raise will now be considered by us. It is important in the context of the steering groups that we ensure that no area is neglected or left out and that those who have responsibility

for making decisions are conscious of the reality that they are not just responsible for making decisions to benefit a particular area of the zone. Their responsibility is to ensure that there is equal treatment and that issues raised in other parts of the zone are given serious consideration. In the final analysis, the First Minister and I will make decisions on the funding of the projects. If we are concerned that unfavourable treatment has been given to any area in a zone, it will be our responsibility to ensure that that never happens again.

Mr Eastwood: Are the deputy First Minister and First Minister concerned at the suggestion that lead organisations represented on the social investment fund (SIF) steering committees could be entitled to a 20% management fee for the implementation of authorised projects? Is he concerned that there is a potential conflict of interest there?

Mr M McGuinness: That issue has not been raised before. Given that the Member has raised it now, it is something that we will need to look at. Obviously, we will need to ensure that spend and all of this is done in a way that brings maximum benefit to local communities. The purpose of this is to put in place a fund that will allow communities to come forward with their own proposals. It is not a top-down situation but a bottom-up situation, where communities have the greatest say about what will be put in place for their benefit. If, in the course of all that, any questions arise around the issue that you have raised, we will undertake to look at it.

EU Funding

2. **Mr Ó hOisín** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on progress in achieving the 20% target set for Departments in relation to drawing down European funding. (AQO 3940/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will ask junior Minister Jennifer McCann to answer this question.

Ms J McCann (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): We continue to make progress towards meeting the 20% target over the four-year Budget period. In 2011-12 — year 1 — we drew down approximately £15.8 million. We expect to have secured around £13.5 million in additional funding in year 2 — 2012-13. Following the late notification of drawdown, we initiated a mid-term revalidation of the figures supplied by all Departments and are taking the opportunity to ensure that they are robust and comprehensive. That exercise is ongoing, and definitive figures are not yet available. However, we anticipate that the 2010-11 baseline will rise and that the total amount of additional funding to be delivered under the target will increase by at least £5 million. The 20% target will stand, and progress against the more challenging commitment will continue to be monitored and validated by the Programme for Government central team and the delivery oversight group chaired by the head of the Civil Service.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. Will the Minister outline how she thinks our SMEs can benefit more positively from programmes such as Horizon 2020?

Ms J McCann: The first thing to say is that there were some problems and difficulties with SMEs in the previous seventh framework programme. In Horizon 2020, one of the key aims of our economic strategy is to get more companies, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises, engaged in research and development. In 2014-2020, there is up to €800 billion for businesses right across Europe for research, innovation and development. We have set a target of securing €50 million from the framework programme 7. We are on track to significantly exceed that amount with Horizon 2020. I believe that it will be a good opportunity for small and medium-sized businesses to be involved more. Hopefully, the process will be less bureaucratic and SMEs will be able to access those funds.

Mr Campbell: In the context of SMEs applying for European funding, does the junior Minister agree with me that there is sometimes a misunderstanding or lack of awareness or knowledge about what European funding is available? Does she further agree with me that the approach that Diane Dodds MEP pursued in trying to make people more aware of European funding is a good one and should be adopted by more?

Ms J McCann: The Member is right: any sort of information that people can access should be made available. However, that information has to be brought forward in a recognisable manner. As I said in my previous answer, a lot of SMEs, in particular, find it quite complex to draw down funding.

You mentioned one MEP. I know that another of our MEPs, Martina Anderson, is organising a conference that will be held in Cavan very soon about EU Youth Employment Initiative funding, and she will give out information. It is not currently available to us in the North, but it is available in the South of Ireland. I know that she is keen to bring that information forward.

Mr A Maginness: Is it not time that the Administration took a root-and-branch approach to making Departments conscious of the need to understand European funding and to pursue that funding energetically? Setting a target of 20% is not necessarily sufficient; you have to have the infrastructure to make that drawdown possible.

Ms J McCann: I take the Member's point. As I said, we are trying to increase the drawdown by 20%, but we could go beyond that. We have targets that we will achieve, but it is a complex area of work. When I sat on the ETI Committee, of which you were Chair, it was brought to our attention that small and medium-sized businesses did not have the time to fill in forms. I hope that Horizon 2020 will help those small and medium-sized businesses more, because some of the bigger companies can take a lot of time to do that. I am hopeful that Departments will work with small and medium-sized businesses in helping to draw that down.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for her answers so far. How will she and her colleague use the G8 summit, which President Barroso will attend, to showcase Northern Ireland for additional European funding?

Ms J McCann: I am hopeful that that will happen. When we look at what the South of Ireland has drawn down compared with the figure for the North of Ireland, we see a big potential for Departments to access more funding. Junior Minister Bell and I chair the Barroso task force. We have been in Brussels several times, where we met

people, networked and held meetings. I hope that that will continue because there are opportunities for the North, particularly with employment schemes for our young people. I got figures today that show that 23% of our young people are not in education, employment or training. We need to draw down more moneys to encourage and help them to get back into jobs, education or training.

Gender Pay Gap

3. **Ms Brown** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the gender pay gap. (AQO 3941/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: Mr Speaker, with your permission, I will ask junior Minister Jennifer McCann to answer the question.

Ms J McCann: The gender pay gap in average weekly earnings has been narrowing. In 1997, for example, average weekly earnings for women were 74% of the corresponding figure for men. By 2012, the female average had increased to 90% of the male average. Although that is narrowing, it is obviously not good enough. We remain committed to eliminating the gender pay gap and achieving equal value for paid work. That is a key action area for our gender equality strategy.

The Equality Commission's revised code of practice on equal pay will be published shortly, having been approved by the First Minister and deputy First Minister and laid in the Assembly. It will provide updated practical guidance to employers and employees on how to facilitate gender equality in pay structures. It will also help to embed the law in practice, securing equality of opportunity and equal treatment for men and women.

The availability of affordable, quality childcare — I know that there is a later question on this — is an important factor in enabling women to join the workforce, work full-time and progress their career through training, study and promotion. Work to develop a childcare strategy is at an advanced stage, and we aim to make an announcement on that in the next few months.

Ms Brown: I thank the junior Minister for her answer. Some Assembly research shows that the gender pay gap widens with each successive child. What initiatives are planned to eradicate that impact?

Ms J McCann: We have to look at the childcare strategy in the round. Although it will be child-centred and concerned with a child's development, we will look at how we can encourage women in particular back into training or the workforce. A key area will be to make childcare affordable. We will soon report to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and will put the Executive's viewpoint. That will give us an opportunity to look at how Departments are faring under the gender equality strategy as a whole.

2.15 pm

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. Will the Minister give an update on the review of the gender equality strategy?

Ms J McCann: As I said, the gender equality strategy has run from 2006 and will run to 2016. We have responsibility for promoting gender equality across government and addressing gender inequalities. We need to constantly

review that strategy to make sure that all Departments carry out its instructions. On matters concerning the strategy, the Department works in close partnership with external gender equality stakeholders and the gender advisory panel. I spoke to some members of that panel, which met recently. There are issues that we still have to solve or challenge. I am convinced that, with that panel and that strategy, we can take that work forward.

Mr Durkan: As OFMDFM is tasked with equality issues, does the junior Minister agree that welfare reform will have a disproportionate impact on women? What measures is OFMDFM considering to alleviate the threat?

Ms J McCann: I agree with the Member that it will have a more serious impact on women and, as a result, on children because it will have an impact on the family. Split payments will have a particularly adverse impact, and we advocate those going to the person who has the general carer role in the family. We need the childcare strategy in place because that will have an impact on women who will now have to look for work and will need affordable, accessible and flexible childcare to do that.

Maze/Long Kesh: Centre of Rural Excellence

4. Mr Irwin asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on discussions they have had with the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society about creating a centre of rural excellence at the Maze/Long Kesh regeneration site. (AQO 3942/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: The Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation launched its vision for the regeneration of Maze/Long Kesh on 24 April. Part of that vision is the creation of a centre of rural excellence on the site. The relocation of the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society plays an important part in achieving that vision. Although this is the 145th year of the Balmoral show, it is a first for MLK and the RUAS, which is in the final stages of preparation for the show, which will be held from 15 to 17 May. It is envisaged that the relocation of the RUAS will attract other agriculture-based employers and industries to the site, particularly those in the agri-food and sustainable technology industries. This is a wonderful sign of progress, and I congratulate the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society on choosing the MLK site.

Mr Irwin: I thank the deputy First Minister for his reply. Does he believe that the establishment of a centre of rural excellence by the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society is an important step in the future development of the Maze site?

Mr M McGuinness: I absolutely agree with the Member. The initial plans include the creation of the new RUAS venue on the site, which comprises permanent and temporary buildings. The venue will be open year-round and provide an array of improved facilities and services, expanding on those offered by the RUAS at the King's Hall complex. Plans also include the development of a large international exhibition facility comprising extensive internal and external exhibition space, a visitor and environmental centre and serviced offices and laboratories. It is estimated that the RUAS plans will support an additional 219 jobs, and the RUAS proposals have the economic potential to facilitate an all-Ireland dimension to the activities. Recently, the First Minister and I were at the site for the unveiling of the development

corporation's plans for the entire site, and, during our visit, we took the opportunity to go on a short tour of the RUAS facility. It is absolutely amazing what it has done in only a few months since last year.

All the people who will travel from all over the island of Ireland to see what has been done will be amazed at the progress that has been made and, more importantly, at the great potential for the future. Beyond any doubt, this will be the premier agricultural show on the island of Ireland. The accessibility of the site is amazing because of its proximity to the M1. If people go there now, as they will do in big numbers in the next number of weeks, they will be pleasantly surprised at how, in a very short time, the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society has turned the situation round. It will give people a fantastic experience when they visit the show, very shortly.

Mr Byrne: I concur with the deputy First Minister about the fantastic work that the RUAS has done. Does he agree that the sooner the legacy project for the Long Kesh site is agreed the better so that the public controversy around that will dissipate?

Mr M McGuinness: Some of the controversy has been contrived controversy. The First Minister and I are absolutely as one in regard to ensuring that work on the peace-building and conflict resolution centre will begin very shortly and will be completed by 2015. We are very focused on and very conscious of the sensitivities and ensuring that the sensitivities of everybody are given great consideration as we move forward with the project.

The First Minister once described the peace-building and conflict resolution centre as a Mecca for tourism: it is also a Mecca for people who have been in conflict in different parts of the world and have come here to listen and, hopefully, learn from our experiences as they go forward with their own peace processes. The First Minister's party, my party and Members from other parties in the Assembly have been very much involved in meeting the requests of negotiators from other parts of the world who seek to lend their experience to the resolution of conflict in places such as Colombia, Burma, Sri Lanka and the Middle East. Only last week, at Magee university in Derry, I spoke at the Colombian peace proposals dialogue that was taking place there. It is hugely heart-warming to see that there are people in far-flung regions of the world who are absolutely and totally knowledgeable about the changes that have happened here and to see their desire to travel here to learn from our experiences. It is our duty and our responsibility, because we have been assisted by people such as those in the African National Congress and the president at that time, Nelson Mandela. All the parties in this Assembly travelled to South Africa at the invitation of President Mandela. The experiences that we learnt on conflict resolution have stood the test of time.

Mr Copeland: I thank Mr Irwin for asking the question and the deputy First Minister for his answers thus far. Without doubt, the development at the Maze is absolutely vital to the economic future of that region and, indeed, possibly all of Northern Ireland. However, regarding the peace centre, which is part of the development, do any business cases exist or are any projections available that indicate at which stage it will become self-sufficient in generating income? Will it be forever dependent for any length of time on subvention?

Mr M McGuinness: The development commission is producing a paper for our consideration on the operation mechanism for the peace-building and conflict resolution centre. On 18 April, the planning application to build the centre was approved by the Minister of the Environment, and the centre will have a key international role in peace-building to help our society move on and to help others on the road from conflict to peace. The project secured something like €20 million from EU Peace funding to help to build the centre by 2015. Of course, there has been extensive stakeholder engagement.

All the empirical evidence tells us that this will not be a drain on our resources but will make something in the region of £1 million per year and bring about the employment of something like 70 people. Given the tremendous progress that the RUAS has made and that the construction of the peace-building and conflict resolution centre will take place shortly, we can say with great authority that this is a fantastic site. It will employ in the region of 5,000 people when it is fully developed, and its integrated nature will lend itself to becoming a major attraction to many people not just on this island but from many parts of the world. They will want to come and see a site that, in many ways, symbolises the transformation of politics in the North of Ireland.

Delivering Social Change: Social Enterprise

5. **Mrs Overend** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many business start-ups and jobs have been created by the social enterprise hubs proposed as part of the signature projects. (AQO 3943/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: Work on the implementation of the six Delivering Social Change signature programmes that were announced by the First Minister and me on 10 October 2012 is progressing. In taking forward this initial phase of work, the Department that leads on each of the programmes is responsible for developing delivery and implementation plans. OFMDFM is responsible for co-ordinating the development, implementation and evaluation of the six programmes. The Department for Social Development is working in conjunction with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment on the signature programme to create 10 social enterprise incubation hubs. The hubs will be established in currently vacant commercial premises and will offer a range of business advice and practical support to social enterprise entrepreneurs. At this stage in the programme, no hub has opened and, therefore, no jobs or businesses have yet been created. Further detail on the specific aspects of the programme should be sought directly from the lead Department, which is the Department for Social Development.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for that answer. Will he give an indication of the targets for job creation across the signature projects? Are we on course to meet those targets?

Mr M McGuinness: This is an important and ambitious programme. Delivering Social Change is the Executive's comprehensive delivery framework to co-ordinate efforts right across Departments to take forward work on priority social policy areas. The framework's initial focus has been on the needs of children and families, to ensure that the most urgent and significant problems in our society

are addressed, problems such as poor educational outcomes, poor physical and mental health, economic inactivity, social exclusion and disadvantage. Initial work aims to deliver the following two outcomes: a sustained reduction in poverty and associated issues across all age groups; and an improvement in the health, well-being and life opportunities of children and young people, thereby breaking the long-term cycle of multigenerational problems.

Childcare Strategy

6. **Ms Boyle** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the childcare strategy. (AQO 3944/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will ask junior Minister McCann to answer the question.

Ms J McCann: The development and delivery of the childcare strategy is a key Programme for Government commitment, and the Executive are determined to deliver a strategy that will make a real and practical difference to the lives of parents and children. Public consultation on the childcare strategy ended on 5 March 2013, and we are pleased to report that the consultation attracted a wide and constructive range of proposals and suggestions. It was particularly welcome to see so many of the key childcare stakeholders undertake their own consultation exercises in parallel to ours. That has greatly added to the depth and diversity of the proposals that we have received. All the consultation responses received are currently being considered and reviewed. Together with the findings of the research that we have commissioned, they will inform the detail of the strategy, including the actions that will support, the timing of those actions and the resources that will be needed to enable the strategy to be implemented. We expect to be able to make an announcement on the strategy shortly.

Ms Boyle: I thank the junior Minister for her response to the question. Will she outline some of the issues emerging from the recent childcare strategy? Go raibh maith agat.

Ms J McCann: A number of issues have arisen, as I said. One was school-age childcare, particularly for the 5-to-11 age group, which was identified as a gap.

We are looking at that. It is particularly important to create a space for young children to learn through play, and it is also important to support parents. Another area where there was a gap was with children with disabilities. Again, we will look at that when we look at the whole process. There were other conclusions, but those two came out time and time again when we looked at the consultation responses.

2.30 pm

Agriculture and Rural Development

Common Agricultural Policy

1. **Mr A Maginness** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on common agricultural

policy negotiations, particularly in relation to seeking regional variation in the best interests of the agriculture industry. (AQO 3954/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The negotiations on CAP reform have progressed significantly. First, we had the European Council agreement on the EU Budget on 8 February, followed by the European Parliament and the Council reaching their positions on CAP reform on 13 March and 19 March respectively. Those developments paved the way for trialogues between the European Commission, the Council and the Parliament. The trialogues commenced on 11 April and are now well under way, with the aim of reaching an overall agreement by the end of June 2013. That timetable is challenging as a number of key differences between the institutions remain, especially on transition towards flat-rate support and market management.

Regional flexibility is an extremely important principle. The Commission's original proposals included some regional flexibility, and that has been added to in the latest agreed presidency text. It is extremely important for my Department that decisions on all options within the direct payments regulation can be taken at regional level. That requires that the overall ceiling of the direct payments regulation can be sub-divided into regional ceilings and that regions can take the decisions on how much to allocate to the various direct payment options in the same way that a member state will do, including any decisions to transfer between pillars. During discussions at the Agriculture Council in March, I pushed a number of our key priorities and objectives, particularly regionalisation, the active farmer definition and the need for a simpler internal convergence mechanism. I also stressed to Minister Simon Coveney the need for regional flexibility. I intend to be present at the May and June EU Agricultural Councils. I will continue to press for a clear and unambiguous outcome on regionalisation that permits us, within our share of the CAP budget, to take all relevant decisions that will ensure that we meet local needs.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for her detailed reply. Given that the stalemate between the Parliament, the Council and the other institutions has been broken, what is the Minister's estimate for reaching agreement before the end of June? In particular, has she undertaken any discussions recently, either with the Tánaiste, the Taoiseach or the Minister for Agriculture in the South, Mr Coveney?

Mrs O'Neill: Obviously, we are working towards the June 2013 deadline, and that will be key for us to be able to implement, design and legislate for a new CAP post 2015. Therefore, we are keenly working towards that date, but there is no doubt that it is a challenging date. The next number of months will be crucial.

With regard to my ongoing discussions with Minister Coveney, I am meeting him again in the morning to further discuss CAP and the movement forward over the next number of months. However, it is key that all pressure is applied to make sure that we get the deal through in June, because that will allow us the time necessary to develop local legislation that will allow us to deliver and implement the new common agricultural policy. The June deadline is still there, and whether or not we achieve that is in the hands of the Commission, the Council and the Parliament.

However, I will make sure that I continue to put pressure on, and I will continue discussions with Simon Coveney in that regard.

Mr Copeland: I thank the Minister for her answer. Given that the European Parliament have seemingly yet to agree the multi-annual financial framework, can she give us her assessment of how damaging to the entire CAP reform process it would be if MEPs could not arrive at final approval of that by June before the presidency is passed over to the seemingly much more reluctant Lithuania?

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Member for his question. As I said, getting the decision in June is absolutely key and will be pivotal for us in moving forward and designing a new scheme. The nature of codecision-making, as we have in Europe, means that we have to get all the players to agree. The Commission, the Parliament and the Council all have to come to an agreement. That has been difficult. We have had some positive progress, and there has been a lot of agreement on some of the major issues. However, a number are still outstanding, so the next two months will be crucial for the CAP negotiations.

I will continue to fight our corner for the regional flexibility that we need here to suit our needs. Since the start of the process, we have consistently argued for a well-funded, flexible, simplified CAP, and that continues to be our position. We have made progress, but the three organisations need to agree on all the key issues. We will not get agreement come June if that is not the case, so we will continue to push for that in the time ahead.

Ms Lo: I understand that there is a strong environmental element in the CAP reform. What discussions has the Minister had with Department of the Environment (DOE) officials?

Mrs O'Neill: Officials continue to engage on an ongoing basis throughout the process, because CAP reform brings very significant environmental benefits. For me, it is about getting a balance. We need to look after the environment, and farmers are rightly the custodians of the countryside and have a pivotal role to play. The Commission is very clear about linking the supports that are paid to farmers to improving the environment. That is something that we support, but there has to be a very flexible approach to that. Those discussions are ongoing, and my officials will continue to engage with DOE officials as the negotiations heat up over the next number of months.

Broadband: Fermanagh

2. **Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the areas of Fermanagh to which she plans to allocate further resources to improve rural broadband coverage. (AQO 3955/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am pleased to announce to the House today that the £5 million that I am committing to the broadband delivery project will be used exclusively to target rural areas of high deprivation across the North that currently have no fixed wire infrastructure to access broadband. I hope that the funding will stimulate companies supplying broadband to get into rural areas and to use the infrastructure to provide access to rural dwellers and businesses to use broadband. I want the investment to stimulate rural businesses and give rural dwellers a wider access to services via broadband.

Regarding Fermanagh, there are some 4,000 premises listed as being rural across 977 postcodes. I want as many of those premises as possible to benefit from our funding. Although areas of high deprivation will initially be funded as a priority, funding will be rolled out across as many of the rural "not spots" as possible. My Department is also involved in some other initiatives to encourage better take-up of broadband, particularly by farmers. All of us need to think seriously about using broadband as a better way to do business.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her answer and for her announcement to the House that this is finally going to be invested in, although I thought that she was going to say that it was going to be exclusively for Fermanagh.

Will the Minister provide the House with an update as to when the initiative will begin and when we can expect to see an improvement on the ground?

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Member for his question. I am sure that he is very glad to hear that the project will benefit all rural dwellers in the North and not just those in Fermanagh. He asked about the timescale and delivery. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) project, which we are engaging with, has already started, and the procurement and implementation on the ground is to start in the summer, so we are very quickly coming up to that date. The intention is that the project will be finished by spring 2015, with many elements in place not long after the project hits the ground. The aim is to get access to as many people as possible, but for some of the more complicated and hard-to-reach areas, the timescale is until spring 2015.

Mr Elliott: Has the Minister held any discussions with service providers of broadband who might provide additional service for the Fermanagh area, given that the G8 is imminent in County Fermanagh? How could we utilise that in the longer term?

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Member for his question. The G8 will be a very important event for Fermanagh, and we want to make sure that all the support systems are in place and that the Executive have a very proactive approach to making sure that the G8 benefits the Fermanagh area.

The DETI communications project will start to roll out the broadband programme this summer, and it will target all areas across the North, not just Fermanagh in particular. I am quite sure that DETI is very mindful that the G8 is coming, and if there are particular needs there, you may want to raise those with DETI.

My meetings with service providers are ongoing. I have met many service providers because I am committed to making sure that we get broadband access into all rural areas. People in rural areas should not be discriminated against, pay more or have no access to services just because of where they live. That is the project that I am committed to taking forward and why I have got involved, particularly to address the needs of rural dwellers.

Mr Campbell: Will the Minister ensure that the DETI people are aware of the considerable black spots around Limavady and Ballykelly, particularly given the imminence of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) relocation to that area?

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Member for his question. I am happy to relay that to DETI, but I am sure that he could take advantage of talking to his party colleague the Minister Arlene Foster as well. Having access to broadband will be a key factor in the DARD headquarters move to Ballykelly, and we will make sure that that is part of the planning process.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as na freagraí go nuige. Is the Minister's Department looking at specific areas, such as the Loughshore area of east Tyrone and down into south Derry, where broadband accessibility for business is proving to be a big problem? We also hear reports at this time of A-level students having difficulties accessing details and material via broadband.

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Member for his question. The examples that he referred to are examples that I would encounter, which is why I got involved in the project and put forward £5 million to target rural broadband provision. I could name plenty of areas in mid-Ulster, such as the Loughshore, Pomeroy and Galbally, that are "not spots" and do not have access to broadband or have slow broadband connections. However, that is the case in many rural areas across the North, which is why we have to have a targeted programme that looks at how we reach those hard-to-reach people. It is frustrating if you live in a rural area and hear people calling for faster speeds when you cannot get even the minimum speed necessary. The project has to be about targeting those "not spots" and reaching those dwellers in rural communities. However, there are also business people and students; coursework and everything else is done online now. They all need to be able to access broadband, which is why I put forward the £5 million to tackle that problem. I look forward to working with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to make sure that that is delivered in the speediest manner possible.

Farmers: Hardship Package

3. **Mr Ó hOisín** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the hardship package for farmers. (AQO 3956/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I have obtained Executive agreement for hardship funding measures to assist farmers worst affected by livestock losses arising from the recent snowstorm.

The first element of those measures is that my Department is paying for the collection and disposal of animals that died as a direct result of the snowstorm. Postcodes of the worst affected areas were identified from calls to the DARD helpline, and all farmers in those areas had their fallen stock collected and disposed of by approved renderers from 2 to 19 April. I also made arrangements in my Department to include in the scheme any farmer calling the DARD helpline from outside the published postcode list who lost livestock arising from the snowstorm. To date, 43,558 sheep and 1,142 cattle have been collected. Of the sheep, just under 72% of losses were lambs.

This week, I intend to bring proposals to the Executive for the second element of the hardship scheme, which is to help to mitigate the livestock losses that were sustained by farmers. The payment will be under the EU de minimis rules and capped at a maximum of €7,500 per farmer, and

it will include collection and disposal costs. Farmers who had livestock losses as a result of the snowstorm and had fallen stock disposed of by the approved renderers will be eligible for the hardship funding. The scheme will be based on information compiled on the nature and extent of losses sustained by farmers who had stock removed and disposed of by the approved renderers. I will release details of the scheme and how to apply as soon as possible.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. What is the timeline for rolling out that scheme?

Mrs O'Neill: When I was out and about and met farmers who experienced such difficulty over the snow period, the one thing they said was that they needed the payment as quickly as possible to assist them because cash flow would be a big problem for them when looking to replace stock. When I announced the hardship scheme, I said that I would try to make it as simple as possible and ensure that we got the payments out as quickly as possible. I will bring the detail of that to the Executive on Thursday. My intention is that farmers will receive a letter in early June and have their payment by the end of June, at which time we expect all farmers to be paid.

2.45 pm

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for her answers so far. Does she agree that many farmers are suffering badly because of the cash flow situation and that immediate cash payments are needed? Is the Minister giving serious consideration to making a minimum payment of £2,000, and how much extra does she hope to get from the Executive at their meeting on Thursday?

Mrs O'Neill: I am sure that the Member can appreciate that, procedurally, it is important that I go to the Executive with the hardship scheme first. He will be aware that I intend to meet the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee directly afterwards to inform it of the outcome of the Executive's discussions.

As I said clearly from the start, this is not a compensation scheme; it is to mitigate the loss that farmers experienced. I said that I would try to make the scheme as simple as possible and that I would get the money out quickly. I believe that I am delivering on that and look forward to the Executive's discussion on Thursday on getting the scheme cleared, putting it to the Assembly and going through the proper process.

I accept that cash flow is a problem, which is why I am hoping that getting the payment out as quickly as possible will assist. We have also been working very hard over the past months to make sure that we can get countryside management and less-favoured area payments out as early as possible, which will help to get money into farmers' pockets as quickly as possible.

I am also ensuring that banks are aware of the situation that farmers are experiencing and making sure that they are sympathetic to their plight. We will continue to do that. There are other practical supports on the ground, such as benchmarking and looking towards business development plans.

We need to do a combination of things, but I am sure that the Member will respect the fact that I need to go to the Executive on Thursday and that I will be happy to talk to

the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee directly afterwards.

Mr Frew: I appreciate the Minister's answers on this matter and the fact that she will have to go to the Executive to get approval for whatever hardship fund is put in place. Given what she has detailed today, I ask her this: if this is about loss and percentage loss to a farmer, what about the livestock that have not been found and could have been lifted by another farmer or through a different collection scheme? How do we measure that?

Mrs O'Neill: This was an extreme weather situation that posed a number of challenges. I wanted to be clear that we had to measure the loss, which is why the fallen animal scheme was the first phase of the process. I also made it clear that I did not want farmers to endanger themselves by going up into dangerous parts or high hills to bring sheep down. We asked farmers to ring us and discuss with officials other ways in which they could prove that they had those sheep.

We can find practical ways around these things, notwithstanding it being difficult, because you have to be able to stand over the loss. I encourage any farmers who are in doubt, or who find themselves in that situation, to come forward and talk to DARD officials if they have not already done so. We have been able to find a way forward for some farmers in that situation. If there is anything in particular that the Member can suggest, I will be very glad to hear from him after Question Time.

Mr Allister: What proposals does the Minister have for farmers whose losses well exceed the de minimis cap? Will those who suffered most proportionately receive the least?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. As I said, I will take the scheme to the Executive on Thursday, and I am happy to provide members of the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee and other Members with more detail after the Executive have agreed it on Thursday.

This is not a compensation scheme: I have been very clear about that from the start. It is a hardship scheme that is aimed at mitigating loss. The scheme will look towards measuring the loss and making a payment based on that loss. Arguments have been made for a flat rate payment, but I do not think that that would stand up to public accounts scrutiny. I am sure that the Member would not propose that as the way to go. The scheme is fair and is aimed at getting money out quickly and mitigating loss. Some farmers' losses were exceptional, and there is quite a range involved, from people who lost single numbers of animals to those who lost hundreds. The hardship payment that people will receive will be proportionate to their loss.

Mrs Dobson: Does the Minister accept, with hindsight, that her language when announcing the package was deeply unfair and unbefitting of a Minister? Minister, why did you completely fail to adequately inform farmers at the beginning that the cost of lifting dead stock would be taken out of their compensation?

Mrs O'Neill: The simple answer is no. From the start of the process, I have been very clear and upfront with farmers about what the scheme is about. It is a hardship scheme; it is not compensation, but it brings in some measures that will assist those in the farming community who have experienced severe difficulty due to the snow. I think that,

from the start, my language has been appropriate, as has the response, particularly the practical measures and the hardship scheme. I have been engaging with the farming unions and the farming sector. The Member can continue to look for criticism, but she will not find it because, by and large, the farming community is content with the approach being taken.

Agri-Food Strategy Board

4. Mr McKay asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the outcomes of the Agri-Food Strategy Board. (AQO 3957/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and I have recently taken receipt of a strategic action plan from the Agri-Food Strategy Board chair, Tony O'Neill. I take this opportunity to place on record my thanks to Tony and his fellow board members for their work to date.

The board has produced an extensive report, the development of which was influenced by significant stakeholder input, with over 80 representatives on 10 sectoral working groups. We are in the process of considering its content, which identifies ambitious growth targets and a series of recommendations across key themes.

I welcome the board's recognition that agrifood is vital to the local economy and as a single supply chain, with each partner treated fairly and working towards the same goal to meet the needs of the marketplace. The board worked as one to agree the report, and it is envisaged that the board will remain in place for a further two years to lead and oversee its implementation. It is vital that the implementation and delivery of any recommendations follow this partnership approach to maximise the benefit to and prosperity of our industry.

We hope to be in a position to share the report's findings next week to tie in with the Balmoral show.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the progress made by the board. Will the Minister outline whether the strategy will operate on an all-island basis to benefit the industry across the island?

Mrs O'Neill: As I said, the report has been published by the board, and the board has been representative of those across the whole supply chain. I think that the fact that all partners in the supply chain have agreed the action plan will be one of its strengths. It is my belief that there are many, many benefits and efficiencies to be achieved by working on an all-Ireland basis, particularly in marketing, safeguarding animal and plant health, sharing best practice and research and development. So we will continue to drive forward with the strategy. I look forward to publishing more details of the report and having more discussion on it. This report has been quite a time in the making, but there are many potential benefits for the agrifood industry to be taken forward as a result. There are natural benefits to all-island working, which will, I am sure, be an element of the report.

Dr McDonnell: The Minister mentioned sharing the report's findings with us next week. Does that mean that the full report will be published next week? Beyond publication, what is the timeline for the strategy's implementation?

Mrs O'Neill: As I said, this was a joint project taken forward by the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and me, and we will meet next week to discuss the next steps. We have just received the report and are looking at over 100 recommendations. I look forward to getting an action plan in place to deliver and implement them. Obviously, we will need time to consider the recommendations and decide on the best steps forward. We will release the report at the Balmoral show, given that this is a significant event for the agrifood industry and the fact that it has moved to a new site. After we launch the report there next week, it will become public. The report will be of significant help in enabling us to consider the next steps, look towards the new rural development programme and look at how we target support for the industry.

Mrs Overend: Minister, it is more or less one year since the appointment of members to the Agri-Food Strategy Board. I note the good work done thus far to prepare the strategic plan, but when will producers begin to see some benefit from the board? Do you believe that all producers — meat, vegetable and horticulture — will benefit?

Mrs O'Neill: The beauty of the board is that everybody has been represented from right across the supply chain. The fact that all the recommendations have been signed off by the whole supply chain, because they are all represented, will be the beauty of the report, as well as being able to design measures and an action plan to take it forward. It has to benefit everybody because, if there is no fairness in the supply chain, there will not be a proper supply chain. As I have always said, the key to the report has always been fairness in the supply chain. I am looking forward to having further consultation on the way forward and talking to the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment about that. Key to that will be fairness in the supply chain; that it benefits everybody; that nobody is disadvantaged; and that we look at future challenges.

As you said, the report has been in the making for almost a year. It was a very large piece of work. We put the board in place for a three-year period. It has taken almost a year to pull together and produce the report. We will publish it next week, as I said. The board is in place for a further two years to see through the implementation. As I said in a previous answer, the rural development programme will be the tool, if you like, to allow us to shape supports towards the industry. The report will show where we need to put in the effort. The rural development programme will be the vehicle that allows us to deliver. The next number of months will be a busy time, when we will ensure that we have proper supports in place and that they meet the challenges that have been thrown up as a result of that major piece of work.

Forests: Recreational and Social Strategy

5. Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the health benefits that would result from the recreational and social strategy for the forest estate. (AQO 3958/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The physical and mental health benefits of outdoor recreation and, specifically, a proximity to trees and woodland are well reported. Forests are a naturally therapeutic environment that can have a positive effect on anxiety and depression by reducing stress and mental

fatigue. Forests offer facilities to improve physical health, including eco-trails, cycle trails, walks and horse-riding opportunities. Increasingly, they are being used for a wide range of activities across all the forests.

The Department has recently secured £4 million over two years under the economy and jobs initiative. I am keen to see partnerships with councils and others that take forward proposals to enhance forest facilities in order to encourage greater use.

Forest Service will continue to engage with a number of organisations and other Departments, including the Health Promotion Agency, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) to share understanding of how forests can be promoted in order to tackle issues such as obesity and mental health. Forest Service continues to encourage partners to further develop that work, including finding ways to measure the societal benefits for physical and mental health. Improving the capability to evaluate such outcomes will help to inform the development of future projects.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I appreciate the Minister's answer. Will she outline any work that she is doing to address mental health issues in rural areas?

Mrs O'Neill: One recent event that we launched was a joint initiative with my ministerial colleagues from DCAL and DHSSPS, along with the Public Health Agency, the GAA and the main sporting bodies for soccer and rugby, to provide help, advice and support to those in rural areas who suffer from poor mental health. That initiative will have a positive impact on those who suffer from poor mental health in rural areas. One issue, about which the Member will be very aware through her role as Chair of the Health Committee, is that we need to tackle stigma. That is what the project and that piece of work is about: saying that it is OK to ask for help. It is important that more and more people from sporting organisations and others come forward and say that. I was delighted to be involved in that piece of work.

The Department is also providing funding for Rural Support, which is a charitable organisation that works with rural dwellers who experience farming and social difficulties, as well as a whole range of other issues. I have also been able to provide support to the Niamh Louise Foundation, which, again, is a charitable organisation that was set up to support those who have been bereaved by suicide across Tyrone and Armagh.

There is positive work going on with regard to mental health. Promoting good mental health is every Department's business, not just that of the Health Department. I am glad to be able to play my role to support that work and ensure that there are proper initiatives on the ground that benefit people.

Mr McDavitt: Thank you very much for squeezing me in, Mr Speaker. The Minister will know that mountain-biking is another increasingly popular recreational activity in forest parks. Maybe she could update the House on recent developments. Given that it has been a year since I last asked her, can she tell us whether she has got round to getting out on a bike herself in a forest park?

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Member for his question. Recently, I opened the Davagh forest trails outside Cookstown. That was a partnership project that we took forward with Cookstown District Council. They are fantastic mountain-biking trails. I was on a tandem in Davagh forest. The Department's policy on social and recreational use of forests is about opening up forests and developing more of those trails.

We now have over 50% of Forest Service land opened up to the public because of agreements with local councils. To me, that is very positive, and I look forward to seeing a lot more of it in the future. I will open up the Castlewella trail in the next number of weeks as well. It is all brilliant work. I know that mountain bike tourism has become very popular, and it will continue to have great tourism potential for us.

3.00 pm

Culture, Arts and Leisure

DCAL: Honours

1. **Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many names of people in the culture, arts and leisure sector have been forwarded to her for nomination for honours. (AQO 3969/11-15)

Ms Ni Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms Ni Chuilín: As I have no role in the honours process, no names have been forwarded to me for nominations.

Mrs Overend: How does the Minister ensure that Olympians, for example, or others in the culture sector are given appropriate consideration for honours?

Ms Ni Chuilín: My permanent secretary is responsible for that. The names that go forward to the permanent secretary for selection are restricted. However, I believe that the broad suite of services provided through the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) are represented in any nominations.

Lord Morrow: Since we are talking about honours, I am sure that the Minister, like everybody else, will be aware that Glentoran won the Irish Cup on Saturday afternoon after defeating Cliftonville, who had just secured the Irish League title, 3-1. Has the Minister any plans to invite Glentoran Football Club up to the Assembly for a reception to honour them for their great achievement?

Ms Ni Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. An invitation was issued to Glentoran this morning. I would like to put on record my congratulations to Cliftonville for the league, Glentoran for the Irish Cup and, indeed, Newington for winning the amateur league.

Mr Frew: Ballymena.

Ms Ni Chuilín: Somebody mentioned some other team.

The Member will perhaps accept an invitation, which is open to every Member, to receive Cliftonville Football Club in Parliament Buildings tonight. I think that the achievements particularly in soccer in recent times are a good reflection on the level of sport.

Mr Allister: Does the Minister accept that sport is brimming with people deserving of honours because of huge achievement? Should we, therefore, put the dearth of recommendations from her Department down to bigotry and bias because the honours are perceived to be British? Is that the truth?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Absolutely not. The Member making accusations of sectarianism, bigotry and bias with absolutely no proof seems to be a consistent feature. As I said to Mrs Overend, the DCAL permanent secretary has made recommendations to the head of the Civil Service that, I believe and understand, are in keeping with the broad DCAL family. I have to say that it is a bit rich for the Member to persist in making these accusations. I think that you either need to put up or shut up.

Ms Lo: I am sure that the Minister is aware that there are not many ethnic minority individuals from the CAL sector getting nominations or honours. Has she any plans to encourage nominations from the sector?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I assure the Member that I will make sure that her comments and concerns are forwarded to my interim permanent secretary, who is due to come into the Department. However, I am sure that the deputy permanent secretary is listening as we speak and will take on board your concerns.

Irish Football Association Clubs: Funding

2. **Mr Elliott** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the funding offered to Irish Football Association clubs over the past two years. (AQO 3970/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI has primary responsibility for the distribution of funding to sport. Over the past two years, it has offered approximately £1.6 million of funding to Irish Football Association (IFA) clubs. Furthermore, I made a bid to the Executive in the last round last year for additional funding towards programmes aimed at promoting equality and tackling poverty and social exclusion through sport. In 2012-13, the IFA received an additional half a million pounds through that programme, and that has benefited football clubs through a range of projects and initiatives.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for that brief summary. Is her Department committed to the £36 million financial package that was addressed in the last Programme for Government? Will there be a commitment on that money in the next CSR period?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I absolutely confirm that I am committed to ensuring that the Programme for Government commitments for this mandate are delivered and those for the next mandate are honoured.

Mr Campbell: The Minister will be aware that the Milk Cup is an exceptionally important youth football tournament and that the finals have not been held in Coleraine for the past few years because of the state of Coleraine Showgrounds. Will she ensure that her support and that of her Department is forthcoming to try to speed up the transition between the showgrounds and a proposed new ground at Rugby Avenue, Coleraine?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I cannot comment on the specifics of the Member's proposal, because I believe that that is what it is — a proposal. However, I am committed to looking at the facilities management plan on subregional stadia that

I hope to receive from the Irish Football Association in the coming months. I met those responsible for the Milk Cup at an event in Derry last week honouring sport and sporting activities. I have huge respect for those involved in the Milk Cup and the Foyle Cup. I believe that what they do is totally essential, and I recognise that there are challenges with facilities, particularly for soccer. So, when I receive that facilities development plan, I am sure that Coleraine and other clubs in the north-west will be included for redevelopment.

Mr Ó hOisín: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht an fhreagra sin. Who have been the major recipients of IFA funding in the past couple of years?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I will detail offers that were made to Irish Football Association clubs certainly in the past two years. If the Member wants specific information about the time before that, I am happy to write to him. In the past two years, Crusaders Football Club, Carrick Rangers Football Club, Moneyslane Football Club, Shankill United Football Club, Crumlin United Football Club and Institute Football Club have all been made offers of funding. As I said, if the Member wants me to go back further than that, I am happy to write to him with those details.

Fishery Offences

3. **Mr Byrne** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what action her Department is taking to tackle and reduce the number of fishery offences. (AQO 3971/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. My officials are undertaking a review of the Department's policy and procedures to ensure that our compliance and enforcement arrangements relating to fishing are appropriate. The review will also consider changes to regulations relating to the practices and permitted methods of fishing on the basis of scientific advice, best practice and the views of stakeholder interests. As the Member is aware, my Department plays an important role in protecting, conserving and enhancing our local fisheries resource. Illegal fishing has a significant negative impact on fishing stocks and their supported habitats, and DCAL adopts a consistent, proportionate and transparent approach to addressing all illegal activity.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for her answer. Does the Minister agree that most responsible members of fishing clubs do not violate the law or catch fish illegally? If possible, will she outline the amount of money that has been collected in fines over the past five years?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I will have to write to the Member with that information, but I will repeat the sentiments: all the stakeholders I have met so far are totally committed to our rivers and waterways. They are the guarantors of the rivers, as I have said before. They help the Department by acting as bailiffs and custodians for our lakes and waterways, and I do not believe that any of them is either involved in illegal fishing or tolerant of it. They have huge respect for our fishing stock and are totally involved in conservation and compliance. I look forward to their involvement in the review, because I believe that their views should be reflected throughout it.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for her work on this. How much time has she put in to working with the police

and bailiffs to make sure that we reach zero tolerance of poaching in our loughs or rivers?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Let me repeat that I have zero tolerance for poaching and zero tolerance for illegal fishing. My Department has been proactive in working with the PSNI, bailiffs and stakeholders, such as angling clubs, across our waterways. My fisheries branch has been very proactive, and I pay tribute to it. From what I have seen, I think it is fairly well respected throughout the angling community. It works very closely with the PSNI and others to make sure that there is a zero tolerance approach to illegal fishing.

Rural Development White Paper: Poverty and Social Exclusion

4. **Mr Boylan** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline how her Department is contributing to the rural development White Paper, particularly relating to her priority of promoting equality and tackling poverty and social exclusion. (AQO 3972/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: DCAL has four actions in the rural White Paper action plan. We will continue, with the support of DARD, to approve detailed action plans for the delivery, for example, of the Sport Matters strategy that will include provision for sport in rural areas and among rural dwellers. We will also work with the Arts Council to ensure a geographic spread across all its programmes. In addition, we will enable a broad and diverse range of the population to participate in culture, arts and leisure activities. We have also worked to disseminate further the development of the Líofo initiative in rural areas. As the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development said earlier in her Question Time, we are working closely with other Ministers and Departments, particularly around health and well-being.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht an fhreagra. I thank the Minister for her answer. Will she outline what her Department is doing to tackle poverty and social exclusion in a strategic manner?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I appreciate that rural-proofing has to be right at the centre of any strategic development to tackle poverty and social exclusion. To that end, I have set DCAL's key priority as tackling poverty and social exclusion. That will be mainstreamed in all our departmental business and in business plans from arm's-length bodies to reflect that in a meaningful way. That joined-up approach will mean that we avoid the risk of paying lip service, particularly to rural dwellers, when talking about tackling disadvantage. That includes a particular focus on collaborative initiatives, such as those recently under way in the Executive's Delivering Social Change framework. Each Department will see outputs in its areas, particularly for rural areas and rural dwellers.

Mrs McKeivitt: In these times of austerity, I would like the Minister to dwell on her plans to target low-income families experiencing social exclusion due to the inaccessibility of sports facilities in their area.

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Member has raised this before. It is something that I experienced even before I came to the Department. Almost 99% of sporting activity is at a voluntary level. Looking at the economic situation that we are in, I see that the cost of public liability insurance, transport and hiring out pitches and halls, particularly when

the facilities are not there, all mounts up. It puts an added pressure on clubs when they just want to get on with sport. I am looking at proposals, particularly for hard-pressed areas, and at ways in which DCAL and the Executive can give further support. At this stage, it is very premature, but I say to the Member that I am very conscious of it. The Member is a member of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure, and the proposals, when finished, will be brought to that Committee for scrutiny.

Mr Gardiner: Will the Minister give a commitment that the eight rural libraries that were closed in October 2011 will remain open, given the importance of those rural communities?

Mr Speaker: Order. I say to the whole House and Members generally that the question must, as far as possible, relate to the original question in the Order Paper. We should move on.

Re-imaging Communities

5. **Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what her Department is doing to help with reimagining communities in working-class areas. (AQO 3973/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Executive's urban and neighbourhood regeneration strategies encompass programmes being taken forward by a number of Departments. DCAL is the sponsor Department for the Arts Council, which is administering the Building Peace through the Arts — Re-Imaging Communities programme.

I recently met the Member at his request. I will have further meetings with a group of artists who highlighted to me changes in the programme and how those impact on them. One of the things that is very clear to me, which I have heard not just from you and the group that you met but from others, is that, although I acknowledge the benefits of an open competition — that is crucial — there is a need to ensure that there is stronger community buy-in. I am happy to have a discussion with the Arts Council and Executive colleagues to make sure that it is a fully inclusive process.

3.15 pm

Mr Easton: I thank the Minister for her answer. Is the Minister able to assure me that her Department and the Arts Council will be able to offer support and guidance for any applications that are made by communities for reimagining?

Ms Ní Chuilín: It is crucial that the Arts Council gives that support. Let us be frank: most of the reimagining that happens in our communities is done by community artists. That is the best way to get buy-in. It is not just about buy-in. You are also supporting the economy and local artists, which, I believe, we need to do more of. We cannot become snuffy because they are mural artists. I am not saying that that is the case, but I am certainly not having that on my watch. There is also better maintenance of murals when there is community buy-in, as schools, churches, clubs and so on become involved in it. That will be the test of how we succeed, not only in changing the face of our communities but in creating better relations and in better improving relations in the long term.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagraí go dtí seo. Will the Minister tell us why additional measures should be

included in a public procurement process to appoint artists in the reimagining programme?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am certainly not saying that we should ignore or try to subvert any procurement process. To be clear: I am not saying that at all. I believe that additional criteria and additional measures need to be added to it.

I will repeat what I said in answer to Mr Alex Easton's question: I believe that, particularly for people who are involved in community art, there needs to be an added element of sustainability. After all, a lot of this is about peace-building and maintaining the peace that has been made. It is crucial that that additional measure is added to the criteria, particularly for artists who are working with and part of a community that has been affected by a mural and wants to change it. As well as that, if this is truly about peace-building and building good relations for the future, it would be foolish for any of us to ignore the opportunity to bring along people who, quite frankly, have been kept at arm's length.

Mr Eastwood: I thank the Minister for her answers so far. Will she elaborate a bit? Does she believe that the Arts Council's Re-imaging Communities project has achieved its goals so far?

Ms Ní Chuilín: It has, but I suppose that the undertone of that question is whether we could do better. I think that we can; collectively, we can. Through the added partners in OFMDFM and in the SEUPB, we need to look at what we have done well so far and what we can improve on and set about making those improvements. Unless you are active about taking on board what people say, making sure that it adds value and benefits the programme and helps to sustain peace and regenerate the local economy, you are really just paying lip service and lashing a programme out to tick a box. I am certainly not about ticking boxes.

Mr McGimpsey: What criteria does the Minister use to determine which images and murals are appropriate for reimagining?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I do not have the criteria here, but it is about the community coming up with plans for murals that they would like to change. It is about what the community wants. It is not about me sitting down with a list and saying, "I will keep that" or "I will remove this". That is not an open and transparent way of doing business. The Member should know. He has been a Minister in this Department. The programme is based on the criteria that the Arts Council has set, and I am happy to send that information to him. It is about making sure that it is a full and inclusive process with full community buy-in. Surely the Member can recognise that, if the community feels that a mural needs to be changed and is responsible for that change and the design, the future sustainability not just of that mural but of other murals in the community will be much enhanced.

Lough Neagh Eel Fishery

6. **Mr Milne** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether a blanket ban on the Lough Neagh eel fishery will take place without adequate and supported scientific evidence. (AQO 3974/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. A draft report presented to the European Parliament's fisheries committee proposed measures to ban commercial eel

fishing in view of the decline in European eel stocks. In view of the threat posed to the Lough Neagh eel fishery and the potential impact on the local community, I acted quickly and decisively to protect the interests of our local fishery. I made it absolutely clear at the time and I reiterate the position that I will not consider any proposals for the recovery of EU eel stocks without appropriate and independent scientific evidence. In addition, I will insist on an equality impact assessment, full consultation with stakeholder interests and appropriate compensation from Europe for eel fishermen affected during any proposed suspension.

Mr Milne: Go raibh maith agat, a Aire. How is the Department providing support for the Lough Neagh eel fishery?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Other questions have been tabled on fishing, but I assure the Member that my fisheries division, along with the Lough Neagh eel fishery partnership in this instance, supports sustainable economic growth and the development of the Lough Neagh fishery. Under the European Fisheries Fund, DCAL has provided financial support for the Lough Neagh Fishermen's Co-operative Society Ltd to purchase elvers for stocking, and it has received almost £750,000 for that purpose. We look forward to working with the co-operative on the future development of the Lough Neagh fishery because this is an activity that has been passed down from generation to generation, as the Member will know as it is in his constituency. There is also a heritage aspect. I do not want people living around the lough to be further disadvantaged by a proposal from a Member in Europe, which looked as though it was trying to impose it on our fisheries. I am certainly not having that.

Mrs D Kelly: I live along the lough shore, Minister, and I welcome your refusal to implement any blanket ban that might be proposed in Europe for eel fishing. How do you plan, with your ministerial colleague in DARD in particular, to improve the stock of Lough Neagh, given the reports about the state of the lough?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am aware of the Member's heritage and her interest in the lough. We continue to meet representatives of the Lough Neagh fisheries. We are talking about Lough Neagh pollan and looking at tourism opportunities with the waterways, and there is a DARD proposal to bring the entire lough into public ownership. My fisheries division and I met fisheries representatives and other anglers on the lough to try to ensure that we do not lose sight of who they are and that we recognise that it is their livelihood. Not only is it their livelihood, but it was their forefathers' livelihood, and it will be their children's and grandchildren's livelihood. I have a responsibility, along with Executive colleagues, to protect and enhance that.

Mr Elliott: The Minister said that she does not want eel fishermen in Lough Neagh to be disadvantaged. Does she accept that the eel fishermen in Lough Erne who have had their licence withdrawn are being disadvantaged, particularly when it has also been handed down from generation to generation?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I met the eel fishermen of Lough Erne, and, unlike Lough Neagh, Lough Erne does not have an eel management plan. I have requested a meeting with the ESB about the hydro-station. I will continue to meet them. I plan to be in Fermanagh soon, with my colleague

Seán Lynch. The people from the eel fishery are certainly on the list, if not for that visit then for future visits. You are comparing apples with spuds here, Tom, and you know it. The eel management plan is the future of any fishing on any lake or waterway. It is not that the Lough Neagh fishermen are protected and those on Lough Erne are not; it is all down to the eel management plan. The stocks were not there for an eel management plan, due to circumstances beyond the control of the fishermen. I understand that.

Arts: East Belfast

7. Mr Douglas asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline how emerging arts groups in East Belfast can access departmental funding when the majority of existing funding is allocated to established organisations in other areas of Belfast. (AQO 3975/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Arts organisations in east Belfast can apply to the Arts Council's project funding, small grants funding and the reimagining, arts and older people, intercultural and support for individual artists programmes. Those grant programmes run throughout the year and are open to new, emerging or existing organisations. The Arts Council requires organisations to have received funding through the programmes mentioned above before they can apply to its annual funding programme. In addition, for community festivals, groups can also avail themselves of the community festivals fund.

Mr Douglas: I thank the Minister for that response. In east Belfast, there are a lot of fledgling arts groups, so would the Minister be prepared to support some sort of development of a strategic plan?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I certainly would. I just want to put it on record that I visited east Belfast recently and was very warmly received. I had the privilege of going to the Strand theatre to see probably one of east Belfast's best known sons, Van Morrison. He did not say a lot, but he sang very well. A lot of arts groups in east Belfast have an impression that they are somewhat beyond the pale. I want to make sure, first, that that perception is diminished and, secondly, that we support local arts groups, artists and individuals. So I am happy to accept an invitation, if that is what the Member is suggesting, to meet some of those groups and individuals.

Mr Copeland: Will the Minister detail what work she is doing, possibly with Belfast City Council and others specifically engaged in the issue, to ensure that existing and established groups do not enjoy anything approaching a monopoly over arts funding, perhaps at the expense of new and emerging groups?

Ms Ní Chuilín: A consultation with the Arts Council is under way. I do not know whether the Member is aware of it, but the Arts Council is developing a five-year strategy for the arts. Part of the consultation on that is about including groups that feel for some reason or other that they have been overlooked. In the consultation, there is, I believe, a place for arts in the community and voluntary sector; it should not be seen as arts for the elite. There are opportunities through the consultation to change current policy, and I look forward to receiving, through the Arts Council, a lot of feedback from that. With Belfast City Council and other local government, I am very keen to ensure that people do not access funding for arts or any

other services from DCAL by postcode. That is the last thing that I want.

Mr Lyttle: I add my congratulations to Glentoran Football Club, which is based in east Belfast, and to Belfast Trojans, an American football club based in east Belfast that has been ranked in the top 30 American football teams in Europe. I thank the Minister for her support of the Strand Arts Centre, as she mentioned in her answer. Is she familiar with the work that Prime Cut Productions has done in east Belfast to include community groups, such as Knocknagoney community group and Dee Street community group, in a theatre production in Templemore Avenue baths? If not, would she be willing to learn more about that community arts production?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I certainly would. I met the Trojans. They are a great bunch of lads, but I am tempted to ask this question: if they are number 30, how many are on the list? I hope that there are not 31 teams and that they are fairly well up the list.

I am very keen to visit groups and have done so. I assume that this is an invitation to meet groups. Prime Cut Productions and other local producers have had excellent relationships with local communities. Such relationships are really important in inspiring young people to get involved not just in television and film production but in many other aspects of the arts, particularly through the creative industries. It is not an either/or situation; it is not a question of television or film. I am happy that they are working with groups, particularly in the Newtownards Road and Templemore Avenue area.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I know that the question relates to east Belfast, but will the Minister tell us who determines how funding for the arts in the North is allocated?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Under the 1995 order, it is the Arts Council. However, what is crucial is that, unlike sport, which has the 10-year Sport Matters strategy, the current policy for arts is going through a consultation process. DCAL gives money to the Arts Council to provide to the arts in the arts sector, but what we really should do is fund a policy that the Arts Council and others can deliver on our behalf. It is critical that we get a policy that everybody can see themselves in, not just the few.

Events in 2013

8. Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what co-ordination has taken place between the organisers of the UK City of Culture 2013, the West Belfast Festival/Féile an Phobail, the World Police and Fire Games 2013 and other events this year to maximise the opportunities afforded by these events. (AQO 3976/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: There has been ongoing liaison between organisations. For example, the director of Féile an Phobail and Féile 25 attended a meeting of the World Police and Fire Games board to give an extensive presentation highlighting the potential of co-operation. Indeed, World Police and Fire Games staff have attended several City of Culture events promoting the games and will continue to do so. Just last week, they were back in Derry again.

There is a great opportunity for the World Police and Fire Games to learn from Derry's City of Culture year in respect of the range of activities and its promotional aspects.

Mr Speaker: I will allow the Member to ask a very short supplementary question.

3.30 pm

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. We saw with an excellent sporting event how the legacy was protected. How will you ensure that all these events have a legacy?

Ms Ní Chuilín: We were in Lisburn with Seb Coe today to look at the legacy of the Olympics and Paralympics. Unless you build in a legacy, it will just go over the heads of the people who live in the Bogside and Creggan in Derry. I want to make sure that, by 1 January 2014, people know what DCAL and the rest of the Executive did and that the legacy goes well beyond the City of Culture year and well beyond 2014.

Education

Dundonald High School

1. **Mr Copeland** asked the Minister of Education for an update on the future of Dundonald High School. (AQO 3983/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Development proposal number 236, which proposes the closure of Dundonald High School, was published by the South Eastern Education and Library Board on 16 April 2013. The statutory two-month consultation period will run until 16 June. That provides the opportunity for anyone who wishes to express an opinion on the proposal to do so directly to my Department. Once the consultation has ended and I have considered the factors involved and comments received, I will make my decision based on what I believe is in the best educational interests of the pupils.

Given my role as decision-maker, it would not be appropriate for me to comment further at this stage. However, as part of the development proposal, I have agreed to visit the school to meet the working group and pupils and hear their views.

Mr Speaker: Question 5 has been withdrawn.

Mr Copeland: I listened to what the Minister said and understand that his room for comment may be somewhat limited. However, will he assure the House that a final decision on Dundonald High School has not been taken? In other words, if the school can prove that it has the support of the community and, perhaps more importantly, that it can achieve results that are satisfactory, is there any chance that it can stay open with the support of his Department?

Mr O'Dowd: I absolutely assure the Member and, indeed, the community served by the school that no decision has been made. A development proposal has been published, and we are going through that process. I will not make any decision until the consultation process has closed and I have met the school and particularly the pupils in that community.

Mr Newton: The Minister is on record as acknowledging the problems of underachievement, particularly in working-class Protestant areas. Dundonald High School is in such an area. Will the Minister consider all the plans that the

school brings forward and give an assurance that closure, which is the theme of the consultation, is not the only option?

Mr O'Dowd: I assure the Member that I will listen to and read carefully the proposals brought forward by the school and the community around it. The debate on education in South Belfast, which will continue after Question Time, included educational underachievement. The Member will be only too acutely aware that there are no quick fixes for any of these matters. Schools have to play a central role, as do the communities. We have to equip the communities around these schools to enable them to tackle educational underachievement. I assure the Member that, before I take any decisions, I will take into consideration any proposals that are imaginative, address the needs of the community served by the school and are serious about tackling educational underachievement.

Mr Lyttle: I seek the assurances of the Minister that he will take into account the high volume of special educational needs that pertain at the school and the response that the school provides to those.

Mr O'Dowd: That will form part of my decision-making process. In the broader context, Members should also be aware that there are many, many schools out there that serve socially deprived communities and achieve excellent educational results in the round. We should not accept social disadvantage as a reason for educational disadvantage. It can be, and is being tackled, by many schools in our society. I will deliberate carefully on the proposals coming forward from Dundonald High School and on whether it has a plan to tackle educational underachievement in that community.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. I understand that the Minister's ability to answer some of these questions may be limited because of his role in the process. However, can he comment on the educational attainment of Dundonald High School and how that will be factored into any decision on the proposal?

Mr O'Dowd: In relation to educational attainment at the school, it has been identified through the inspection process as offering less than satisfactory provision for pupils. It is being supported through the formal intervention process. Dundonald High School is one of only 12 post primaries in formal intervention, and it is the only school to have entered the process twice. That tells the story of Dundonald High School today.

The advocates of the school, the elected representatives in the area and the school itself tell me that they have plans to move forward from that position. That position is not satisfactory, and the school accepts that. If it has plans that can bring us beyond that point, they deserve careful consideration.

Woodlands Language Unit

2. **Mr McCartney** asked the Minister of Education when he will make a decision on the Western Education and Library Board's proposal to relocate the Woodlands Language Unit. (AQO 3984/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The four development proposals relating to the Woodlands speech and language unit were published on 22 January, and the statutory two-month period during

which comments could be sent to me directly ended on 22 March. I also visited the unit during that period.

This is a complex matter, and it is important for me to take time to consider in detail all the information I have received. My decision will centre on the best interests of the children involved, as it is crucial to get the provision right for these educationally vulnerable children. I am, therefore, not yet in a position to announce my decision and can make no further comment on the Woodlands proposals at this time. I assure the Member that I will not unduly delay any decision on the proposals but I must ensure that they are comprehensively assessed and that all pertinent issues are considered.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for his answer and acknowledge the fact that he visited the Woodlands unit and hosted a meeting in the Assembly with the Foyle MLAs. Will he ensure that the consultation process, and his decision-making process, are informed by the fact that the children have always received first-class education provision at the Woodlands unit?

Mr O'Dowd: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhalta as a cheist. I thank the Member for the question. Yes, I can assure him that any decision I make will be centred on the quality of education available to the young people in the unit. I visited the unit and was very impressed by the pupils and the staff and the board of governors' presentation to me. I have since had a delegation from the Foyle MLAs, who have all, as a group or individually, lobbied to maintain the unit. I recently had a visit from MLAs and parents and teachers from the school.

It is a quite complicated proposal, as there are four different development proposals affected by it, which have to be given careful consideration. There is the legislative basis upon which the proposals were brought forward, which I also have to give careful consideration to, but I hope to be in a position very soon to make an announcement.

Mr P Ramsey: I thank the Minister for his response. I was hoping he was going to come with a bit of good news for the MLAs who have been lobbying him. Will he sincerely reflect upon the testimony of the parents who attended the meeting and upon the opinion of the specialists in the area from the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, who are saying fundamentally that the unit is a model of good practice and excellence?

Mr O'Dowd: I thank the Member for his question. Of course I will reflect carefully on the testimony of those parents we have met who, along with yourself and the other MLAs, were part of the delegation and those who were there the day I was at the unit.

I have to take a number of factors into consideration, and that is why there has been a slight delay. I have to balance the legislation against what is currently happening on that site. What is happening on that site is good education, and the young people and their families are benefiting, which, at the end of the day, is the bottom line, but I have to be assured that, if I make a decision to retain the unit, I am not in direct conflict with any legislation and that at some stage down the road, we do not run into more difficulties. There was a famous quote about law, which I cannot repeat in the Chamber. Sometimes you run into that scenario. I have to ensure that we do not run into

unnecessary court cases at a later date, but I am taking all matters into consideration.

Mr Storey: In considering the situation at Woodlands, the Minister made reference to equality of education. Will he also ensure equality of employment when it comes to the way in which those teachers who will be required to work in other sectors are treated so that they do not end up on the dole in two years' time as a result of the discriminatory practices of the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools?

Mr Speaker: Order. Once again, I remind Members that, as far as possible, the question must relate to the question that is on the Order Paper.

Educational Underattainment

3. **Mr Ó hOisín** asked the Minister of Education to outline any additional initiatives to address the high levels of educational underattainment in working-class communities. (AQO 3985/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have earmarked £2 million to be spent in each of the next two years on a new community education initiative to address specifically the high levels of educational underachievement in working-class communities. The programme will join up community-based and school activity in a coherent way. It will promote partnership of voluntary and community organisations and schools to provide educationally focused programmes in communities with particular concentrations of educational disadvantage.

The projects that will be delivered will include initiatives such as high-quality educational after-school programmes, parent education programmes, and GCSE Easter schools and summer schools to support the transition of pupils from primary to post-primary school. My focus is to provide coherent, sustained and effective evidence-based interventions that break the cycle of deprivation and educational underachievement in some working-class communities. High-quality teaching and learning are at the core of tackling educational underachievement, and I have a suite of policies in place to raise standards and tackle educational underachievement in all our schools. However, children's educational performance cannot be divorced from other aspects of their development and what happens to their families and communities. That is why I have brought forward a programme that will share expertise and skills across sectors and organisations to address the learning needs of the children, young people and their families.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht an fhreagra sin. I welcome the initiative. Could the Minister tell us how he intends to target the investment to ensure that it benefits those who are in greatest need?

Mr O'Dowd: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhalta as a cheist. I have been in discussions with the Minister for Social Development, and my officials have been in discussions with the Department for Social Development, about the best way of delivering the finance on the ground in partnership with other delivery bodies. One area that we are keen to explore is the neighbourhood renewal partnerships, which are working in socially disadvantaged communities and putting money on the ground in that way. We are also looking at other community initiatives, particularly with small pockets of social deprivation

that might not fall into neighbourhood renewal projects. Sometimes, those may fall particularly in Protestant working-class loyalist communities, and I want to ensure that a focus is placed on funding being delivered on the ground there as well. Those discussions are ongoing. However, I am keen to get the money out the door and spent, and I think that, rather than reinventing the wheel, the delivery mechanisms that are in place are the best way to do that.

Mr Campbell: All four of my children came from a working-class home in a terraced house and went to a grammar school. Can the Minister ensure that the £2 million that he mentioned each year will narrow the gap and widen the availability of grammar school places so that other working-class children, like thousands before them, can get access to grammar schools rather than pursuing an ideological hatred of the same?

Mr O'Dowd: I learned a long time ago that hatred is a wasted energy. The Member might want to think about and contemplate that. It is a wasted energy, and it corrupts your mindset and thinking. I also suggest that the Member looks at exactly what is happening in education now, because, with the talk about grammar schools and non-grammar schools, the lines are becoming so blurred that they are almost unrecognisable. You do not have to go to grammar school to go to university. You do not have to go to grammar school to have an academic career, and, indeed, through the entitlement framework, many of our young people going through our grammar schools are now following vocational courses. So, I suggest that the Member does a wee bit more research into the current state of our education system.

I do not know the ages of the Member's children, and I will not nose into his personal business, but the education system has changed over the past five or 10 years, and it will change again in the next couple of years because of the implementation of the entitlement framework. Will working-class children benefit from the changes that I have introduced? Yes. Did the previous system benefit working-class communities? Three or four decades ago, that argument might have stood up, but all the independent evidence now says that it does not. I assure the Member that I have no hatred for any sector of our education system. However, if he is going to accuse me of ideological warfare on those groups, will he accuse the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, our local Human Rights Commission, the National Association of Head Teachers, the Irish National Teachers' Organisation, the Ulster Teachers' Union and the Catholic bishops of the same? I just named a few bodies, and they are all opposed to academic selection. It is not just a Sinn Féin rant. Sinn Féin has its opinion on these matters, based on the evidence that has been presented to it, but many other highly respected international organisations share the same view.

3.45 pm

Academic selection is the wrong way forward. It benefited the Member's children, and I am glad about that, but it is not benefiting all children, and that is the problem with it.

Mr Dallat: Last Friday, I witnessed many people learning to read and write for the first time and others achieving outstanding results. They were not in a grammar school or a secondary school; they were in Magilligan jail. Will

the Minister tell the House when that will stop and when people will not have to go to jail to learn to write their own name?

Mr O'Dowd: The Member is right. The people who go through our jail system will, most likely, have come from a socially disadvantaged background, and a high percentage of them will have mental health problems. If society continues to make the same mistakes as it did previously, those people will continue to go through our jail system.

My ministerial predecessors and I have brought forward policies that are beginning to make change in society. Our results are rising and our primary schools are world leaders, and all of that has happened under my tenure and that of my two predecessors.

We are beginning to make changes. There are no quick-fix solutions to any of these matters, but the behaviour of the Members opposite, who refuse even to debate or discuss the issue of academic selection without trading insults and smart comments or giggling among themselves, will not benefit anyone.

Mr Campbell may be interested in another lesson that I learned very early in life, which is that you should never believe your own propaganda. *[Interruption.]* The Members opposite have bought it hook, line and sinker and, I am told, refuse even to debate the matter internally.

Mr Agnew: In an age in which we have school league tables and schools are continually judged on how their highest achievers perform, how can we get a better assessment of schools located in areas that have had generational underachievement in order to show the journey on which they take children? For example, where a school is not getting high GCSE results or high academic selection results, from the former 11-plus, and so on, how will its work in bringing children along their journey be recognised?

Mr O'Dowd: My Department does not publish league tables, and it will not do so at all. Some of our local newspapers publish league tables. That is a matter for them to defend; it is not for me to defend. I do not think that league tables add any value whatsoever to the education debate.

Our Education and Training Inspectorate measures educational attainment by going into schools to look at a whole range of issues that affects a young person's learning, and it judges a school's capabilities in that context.

I will go back to the point that I made in answer to a previous question: there are schools serving socially deprived communities that are achieving excellent results for all their young people and are adding value to those young people. Social disadvantage is a cause of educational underachievement. We should not accept it as a predetermined outcome for anyone who lives in a socially deprived area, nor should we allow any of our schools to do the same.

There are ways around it and ways to do it. I accept that some of it comes down to resources, but not all of it does. It comes down to practices and methodology in the school, and the determination of the school to break the link. It is also about the determination of the community that surrounds the school, including the parents, the board of governors and the elected representatives, to break the link. There are different ways of measuring educational attainment, but I do not measure it with league tables.

Schools: Common Funding Scheme

4. **Mr Ross** asked the Minister of Education what action his Department has taken to implement the recommendations of the review of the common funding scheme for schools. (AQO 3986/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Fundamental change is needed in the way in which delegated budgets are allocated to schools here. I am considering very carefully the recommendations made by the independent panel in that context. The Member will know that the panel also identified a compelling case for change and improvement.

The outcome of that independent review will not be about tinkering at the edges. Reform of the way in which school budgets are determined is needed if we are to support the effective delivery of the curriculum in sustainable schools that put pupils first and that serve, and are supported by, communities that value education.

In the coming weeks, I will make a statement to the Assembly that will set out my response to the report and my proposals for the reform of the common funding scheme.

This will be followed by a full consultation with key stakeholders, including schools. My decisions will be informed by the views of the Education Committee, which have recently been provided to my Department.

Mr Ross: I welcome the fact that the Minister will bring those forward in the next number of weeks. Will he be bringing forward anything specifically to give schools more autonomy over their own finances?

Mr O'Dowd: In the common funding formula review, there is a proposal on autonomy of finances, which I am studying very carefully. When I make my announcement in June, I will set out very carefully my considered response to all the recommendations in the common funding formula review. Changes will be made to the common funding formula, and I want to see those in place from 2014-15 onwards. One way in which we can tackle educational disadvantage and support the working class, as was commented on earlier, is to ensure that funding goes to the schools that are dealing with the biggest difficulties in delivering good education.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. Can the Minister give an assurance that the outworking of the review will ensure that strategically important small schools will be sufficiently funded?

Mr O'Dowd: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhalta as a cheist. I thank the Member for his question. Yes, there are strategically small schools that we need to retain to ensure that educational attainment can be achieved for either isolated rural communities or, in some instances, where there are isolated communities in a broader community. I will ensure that, when I am bringing forward the formula, we protect those schools.

Area planning is another matter that is looking at the small-schools estate, and I have said that there will always be a need for small, strategically placed rural schools in particular, as well as schools serving isolated communities in a broader majority community. I am keen to support those two factors.

Mr Rogers: Considering the importance of primary-school education, Minister, have you any plans to increase the age-weighted pupil unit in primary schools so that the ratio of primary to post-primary compares favourably with England?

Mr O'Dowd: Comparing our funding system with that of England is comparing apples with oranges. They do not automatically match across or read across. You can interpret them to suit whichever argument you bring forward. Through the years, there has been a lobby that primary schools are insufficiently funded. I am of the view that our education system in its totality is insufficiently funded and that it requires more funding. However, if I were to change the age-weighted pupil unit to favour primary schools more, that money would have to come from somewhere. It would come out of the system, either from post-primary, nursery or elsewhere. The Salisbury report touches on this issue. I will consider the recommendation very carefully before I make a final decision.

It is worth noting that somewhere in the region of £43 million is being held in surplus by schools. Much of that is being held by schools for valid reasons as they plan into the future. Some schools say to me that it is for a rainy day, and I reply that it is actually raining and that they need to start dealing with the surplus. The majority of the surplus is held in the primary school sector, so a significant surplus of funds is being held in the primary school sector. Each school will have a justifiable argument for holding it, but, as we move forward with more stringent and tightened budgets, we have to ensure that every penny is being spent wisely. If large reserves are being held, they now need to be brought into action and spending has to start, with the money going back into the education system, instead of being held in reserve.

Mr Cree: The review calls for the introduction of the equivalent to a pupil bonus scheme, which my party called for at its conference last year. Can the Minister detail whether any work has been commissioned in his Department with a view to taking this forward?

Mr O'Dowd: If the Member checks the terms of reference, he will see that one of the reasons why the review was brought forward was to ensure that our policies are in line with our budgets and our financing mechanisms. One of the key areas that we wanted to tackle was social disadvantage. That was a key part of the terms of reference for the Salisbury review. The recommendation has come forward that there should be a weighted contribution towards children from socially deprived backgrounds. Again, I will take that on board along with all the other recommendations. I am of the firm view that if we are to tackle educational disadvantage, we have to equip schools that are dealing with socially disadvantaged young people with the finances to do so. Bob Salisbury has given us a formula to do that.

Mr Speaker: Question 5 has been withdrawn.

Education Bill

6. **Mr Lunn** asked the Minister of Education whether the amendments to resolve the contradictions between the Education Bill and the heads of agreement will be brought forward urgently to allow the Education Bill to proceed. (AQO 3988/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education Bill will deliver the policy commitments in the heads of agreement. In relation to employment, for example, the Bill will establish the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) as the employer of staff in grant-aided schools. It will also provide for boards of governors to take all employment decisions in their schools if they wish. I have considered the Education Committee's report on the Bill and the views expressed by stakeholders. I intend to bring suggested amendments to the Executive for consideration in the very near future.

Mr Lunn: I thank the Minister for his answer and his previous answers on this subject, whereby he has consistently confirmed that there are no contradictions. However, the two documents say opposite things. Does the Minister expect the outcome of this discussion to be that grammar schools will continue to be allowed to be their own employers without reference to ESA?

Mr O'Dowd: No, I do not expect that outcome. I expect the discussions and further stages of the Education Bill to be the outcome of the heads of agreement. In fairness, the Bill does not say the opposite of what is contained in the heads of agreement because those heads of agreement have been transplanted into the Bill. The view has been expressed that the clause, as drafted, is unworkable. If someone were to come forward with a more workable draft or one that they believe brings forward the heads of agreement, I would be happy to explore it further. However, many times, the concern has been expressed to me by employees of the schools estate that they want to be treated in a manner that is fair and equal to all other employees in the school system. The only way to achieve that is to ensure that there is a single employing authority and that powers are delegated to boards of governors.

I have used the following reference previously. Members will remember that, when the institutions were brought back together in 2007, one of the first industrial actions that we faced was from classroom assistants who wanted a fair and equitable pay deal. That was settled; all Members supported that. However, it is not settled yet in the grammar sector, which is not acceptable. As far as I am concerned, if you work in education and you are paid for it through the public purse, you should have the same terms and conditions as everyone else. That is what I strive to achieve.

Mr McEluff: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a ghabháil leis an Aire as ucht a chuid freagraí go dtí an pointe seo. How will the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority assist in improving educational attainment across the various sectors?

Mr O'Dowd: The main objective of bringing ESA forward was to ensure that educational achievement and attainment was its main drive and agenda item. It was not about saving money, although I now have to save £20 million a year out of my budget to meet the budget commitments for ESA. The main focus of the body is to ensure that educational achievement is the main agenda and that it is driven forward. How will that be done? We will have all the bodies around the table in a strategic body. They will not simply look after their own sectors but the well-being of all children in our education system, learning from best practice and international best practice and ensuring that our limited resources are directed into schools rather than towards administration.

Mr Kinahan: Like many Members, I am now completely confused about the heads of agreement. Does the Minister feel that the heads of agreement are workable? Are they being, or have they been, rewritten?

Mr O'Dowd: Your state of confusion never ceases to amaze me, but I do not think that you are as confused as you let on. You are opposed to ESA. As a political manoeuvre, your party has decided to oppose ESA, not because it does not believe it to be the best way forward for education but because it believes that it can use it as a wee battering ram against the DUP. Your decision is political, so the education arguments that I am putting forward will not make sense to you. I am not answering the question that you want to be answered. You are asking a political question about your party's political programme to oppose the DUP on ESA and to act up to the grammar sector that you are more pro-grammar than the DUP. Do you know who loses? The controlled sector loses out. That sector was mentioned only twice in the eight-hour debate about ESA when it was first brought to the House. It was mentioned once by the Chair of the Education Committee and again by the Education Minister. They were the only people who mentioned Protestant working-class communities in the eight-hour debate on ESA that was held in the Chamber. If you want to out-grammar the DUP, you tear on. I will tell you who will be left behind: it will be the ordinary working-class Protestant communities and the controlled sector because, without ESA, there will not be a controlled sector support body. The Member clearly shows his confusion again. He wants to know whether the heads of agreement are being redrafted or rewritten. He will find that they were brought forward by the First Minister and the deputy First Minister. I have no indication that they are being rewritten or that there is any wish to rewrite them. Are they workable? Of course they are workable if people want to work them, and that is the key to it all.

4.00 pm

Mr Speaker: I ask Members to take their ease while we prepare to move to the next item of business.

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

Private Members' Business

Primary Schools: Inner South Belfast

Debate resumed on amendment to motion:

That this Assembly recognises the need to address underachievement in Protestant working-class areas; acknowledges the vital role of primary school in a child's early education; and calls on the Minister of Education to bring forward plans for a new primary school for inner south Belfast as a matter of urgency.
— [Mr Spratt.]

Which amendment was:

Leave out all after "address" and insert

"educational underachievement in all working-class communities; acknowledges the vital role of primary school in a child's education; and calls on the Minister of Education and the Belfast Education and Library Board to bring forward plans for a new primary school for inner south Belfast as a matter of urgency." — [Mr Hazzard.]

Mr Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Thank you for your indulgence in this matter. Briefly, I support the motion and the amendment and commend the proposers of both. As a South Belfast representative, I fully endorse the sentiment behind the motion and the local context in which it is set. I also endorse the general principle of the amendment, which is the need to ensure that all children are served equally, particularly those from a working-class background who have not been served as well as they might have been. I know from my years of experience working directly with people in the Village, Donegall Pass and Sandy Row that great efforts were made by parents, boards of governors and others in the education authorities to try to resolve the issue of a school for inner south Belfast to service that community.

Michael McGimpsey referred to the broader regeneration of the area, and it is important to look at that in a holistic way. Education will help significantly to secure the future of younger people in that community and, therefore, its future families. Therefore, it is important to resolve the issues to ensure that we get a school that combines three schools that are not achieving as well as they might. Again, I thank those who proposed the motion and the amendment. I reiterate my firm support, as a South Belfast representative, for the three schools to be merged and a replacement school provided as soon as possible.

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Cuirim an-fháilte roimh dhíospóireacht an lae inniu, mar ligfidh sí domh m'fhís agus mo chuid iarrachtaí a leagan amach le feabhas a chur ar an chóras oideachais anseo chun tairbhe na bpáistí go léir. I very much welcome today's debate as it allows me to set out my vision, outline my efforts to improve the education system here for the benefit of all children and address education issues in South Belfast.

The motion highlights underachievement in Protestant working-class communities, which is a fair and valid point. However, I welcome the fact that the proposers

of the motion have accepted the amendment because it, I believe, allows for the full story to be told. Members may be interested to know that, in percentage terms, Protestants achieve less well than Catholics, but a higher number of young Catholics leave school without five or more good GCSEs, including English and maths. Between 2010 and 2011, the percentage of Protestant male school leavers on free school meal entitlement who achieved five or more GCSEs or equivalent, including in English and maths, fell by 1.7 percentage points from 20.3 to 18.6. By contrast, the proportion of young Catholic boys entitled to free school meals who did not achieve that level was double that of their Protestant counterparts — 888 compared with 450.

The debate on education here has moved forward. We are all now acutely aware that working-class educational underachievement is the most significant issue facing not only our education system but our society as a whole. Division by class is real and cannot, should not and will not be ignored. As an Assembly, we recognise that there is a pressing need to ensure equality in educational achievement. Closing the gap between those who are least disadvantaged and those who are most disadvantaged is vital for individuals, the economy and society. Breaking the cycle of social disadvantage, educational failure and restricted life chances is a fundamental challenge, but let me be clear: there are no quick fixes.

Mr McDonnell called for a special education task force to tackle educational underachievement and asked for me to take on board that consideration. I view the Department of Education as a special education task force to tackle educational underachievement. At the heart of every policy that I bring forward is how we break the link between social disadvantage and educational underachievement. I will reiterate, however, that high-quality teaching and learning in our schools, supported by strong leadership, community engagement and a focus on pupil needs is at the very heart of tackling social disadvantage and educational underachievement.

The role of additional initiatives and programmes must be to support and reinforce excellence in the classroom, not compensate for any poor practice. I am confident that I have in place a set of coherent policies, based on best practice and designed to raise standards and to improve the quality of teaching and learning in all our schools.

The introduction of the revised curriculum and the entitlement framework has been supported by a robust school improvement policy. That policy includes a formal intervention process, which provides vigorous intervention and support when a school is found to offer less than satisfactory provision. These policies and programmes are working. They are realising improvements for all our young people. International evidence shows, through PIRLS and TIMSS, that our primary-school pupils are performing significantly above the international average in literacy and numeracy.

Just as importantly, the surveys found that the relationship between socio-economic background and performance was weaker in our primary schools than in most other countries. We must be encouraged by that, not only because of overall achievement, but in regard to breaking the cycle of educational underachievement. However, let me be frank: international evidence is clear that education systems with schools that are socially segregated magnify

pre-existing differences. Research has consistently found that high concentrations of disadvantage, seen in many non-selective schools here, produce lower outcomes for pupils.

Mr Hazzard referred to academic selection, and other Members suggested that he had gone off track, and it had nothing to do with the motion; it has everything to do with the motion. The continued use of academic selection by grammar schools to gain entry is a major barrier to addressing underachievement in disadvantaged communities. Unionist politicians and others must ask themselves why our children do not perform as well internationally at 15 as they do at 10. In conjunction with excellence in teaching and learning, I also firmly believe that it is important to address underachievement through additional funding to support targeted initiatives to raise the aspirations and achievement of all our pupils. Additional funding that is well targeted and well spent can make a real difference to vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils. Consequently, I have put in place a number of effective evidence-based interventions to help tackle the cycle of deprivation and underachievement. For instance, the Achieving Belfast and Achieving Derry Bright Futures programmes are long-term, sustained programmes that are embedding the features of best practice in targeting underachievement. The Sure Start and extended schools programmes also serve areas of greatest social disadvantage. The Full Service programmes have been piloted in north and west Belfast. The £12 million Delivering Social Change literacy and numeracy signature project will provide additional support for children at risk of underachievement. In conjunction, I recently announced an additional £1 million to be spent on literacy and numeracy projects in each of the next two years.

I am not satisfied that the current funding formula for schools targets sufficient resources to address social deprivation, as was outlined during Question Time. Therefore, I commissioned the Salisbury review, which recommended significantly increased levels of formula funding for pupils from deprived backgrounds through the introduction of a pupil premium. That review will inform detailed recommendations for a revised scheme, which, as I said, I intend to bring forward in the near future. I want to make sure that funding is directed to those pupils most in need.

Mr Spratt quite rightly referred to the role of families, parents and guardians in the educational achievement of young people. I think that we all realise that children's educational performance cannot be divorced from other aspects of their development and what happens to their families and communities. We need to raise parental aspirations and the value of education within our communities.

That is why I launched the Education Works advertising campaign in September 2012. The campaign is designed to inform and engage all parents, but particularly those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds. We will need to develop a range of interventions to integrate different services, align them, work with the schools and help schools to reach into their communities.

We must share expertise across sectors and organisations to address the learning needs of children and young people, and their families. To kick-start that type of approach, I have earmarked £2 million to be spent in the next two years on a new community education

programme. The programme will join up community-based and school activity in a coherent way. It will promote partnerships of voluntary and community organisations and schools to provide educationally focused programmes in communities, with particular concentration on educational disadvantage.

I hope to be able to provide funding through target projects within the designated neighbourhood renewal areas. I also intend to target other, predominantly Protestant, working-class areas that have very low educational outcomes. It is my profound hope that this innovative programme will begin to address the problems of persistent underachievement and disengagement. Strong, viable and sustainable schools are another essential element for delivering high-quality education, raising standards and tackling educational underachievement.

Turning to the second part of the motion: the amalgamation of three schools in inner south Belfast, particularly the creation of a new amalgamated school, has been raised frequently with me by MLAs and others. I commend the community for its willingness to embrace change to tackle educational underachievement. I also welcome this opportunity to debate the issues involved and to set out my Department's — and my own — roles and responsibilities.

Members will be acutely aware that the management of the controlled school estate in Belfast lies with the Belfast Education and Library Board, not with my Department. The Belfast Board published a draft area plan for primary provision that proposes an amalgamation on a new site in the grounds of the City Hospital.

My Department and I understand that the health trust has not declared the site surplus to requirements. That requires further discussions between the Belfast Board and Minister Poots, all of which I am happy to involve myself with. On listening to Members, I understand the frustration of the community that they are echoing on this matter. This proposal has been discussed for a very long time, and perhaps there has been more discussion than action. I want to see action instead of further discussion.

Several weeks ago, I met the chief executive of the Belfast Education and Library Board to discuss a range of issues. One was the amalgamation of the three schools, how that proposal could be brought forward and how we could move on to the Belfast City Hospital site. I am confident that the board is proactively investigating the matter, and that all actions that can be taken to bring that forward are being taken.

In principle, I am very supportive of this proposal. It ticks all the boxes as far as I am concerned. I have to be careful because, at the end of the day, I will have to sign off on three development proposals, which will have to be carried on their own merits in an amalgamation. I then have to move forward with a proposal from the Belfast Board for a newbuild on the site. I would like that to be the Belfast City Hospital site.

I have a copy of Mr McGimpsey's letter from Minister Poots, which he kindly forwarded to me after the first part of the debate. I will personally follow that up with Minister Poots, because we require clarity on exactly what the status of the hospital site is. If the hospital site can be made surplus to requirements by the Department of Health, I assure Members that the Belfast Board, the

Minister and the Department will be proactive in trying to ensure that it comes under our governorship, and then we will move forward to the next stage of building a new school in the south Belfast area for those communities that have been working towards this proposal and want to see it brought to fruition.

4.15 pm

School amalgamations, school closures and new developments all bring their own different elements and nuances when they are being brought forward. This issue has been overly complicated at times. It requires a dedicated focus from the board, which I think is now in place. I assure Members that I will continue to have a focus on the matter and that I will engage personally with Minister Poots to see how we can move the land issue forward for the betterment of the community.

Sometimes bureaucracy can get in the way of sensible decisions, and that is no fault of those who work in it. There is always a rule book telling you why you should not do something or why you have to delay making a decision. I am in the frame of mind that we have to move forward now and start delivering tangible services to communities, particularly socially deprived communities. Mr Spratt referred to my making a statement that we have to evidence real changes to these communities. Nothing evidences as proof of real change to a community and that those in power are interested in their well-being like a new school building. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The debate so far has been very agreeable, so at this stage, I do not intend to change the tenor of the discussion.

The motion has three separate parts: it deals with underachievement in working-class areas; it outlines the vital role of primary schools in the community; and it calls on the Minister to bring forward urgent plans for a new school.

I listened to Michael McGimpsey's vivid description of the three primary schools in the Village area: Donegall Road Primary School; Fane Street Primary School; and Blythefield Primary School. It is clear from his description that there is a need for at least one new school in that area. I think that that cannot be gainsaid. It is a fact that primary schools are the foundation stone for the future education and learning of our young people. If we fail them at primary level, what hope is there when they move into post-primary level? They are going to be continually playing catch-up and lagging behind.

We all know that there are numerous reasons for underachievement. Parental qualifications is one issue. Evidence shows that, in particular, if a mother has educational qualifications, that is a help to children in their education. The home learning environment is important. Are there books in the house? Are children being encouraged to read? We also know that poor teaching and poor leadership in schools also play a very important role. We know that those factors affect all communities.

When he was making a presentation to the Education Committee, Dr Pete Shirlow from Queen's advanced another reason, which I will read out:

"It is quite clear that de-industrialisation has had a major impact on the Protestant working-class community. That impact is very similar to that seen in

working-class communities in the north of England, which experienced the associated sense of loss of status and significance, and a strong sense of alienation. That was very much a product of generation following generation into established industries that have since gone. The difficulty in such communities is that, as economies turn more towards the service sector and the need for literacy and computer abilities, those communities are left with a redundant set of skills. That is not to undermine that there are also problems in republican and nationalist communities."

I know that Trevor dismissed that reason in his contribution, but I think that we have to be conscious of the intergenerational impact of some of these issues.

Be that as it may, the single biggest predictor of academic performance is socio-economic background. Social background is the single biggest factor impacting on educational attainment here. The evidence shows that disadvantage has a stronger impact than gender or religion. The disadvantaged do less well in the transfer tests, GCSEs and entering third-level education. The question is this: how do we reverse that trend? The Salisbury review on the common funding formula suggests increased funding to pupils from deprived backgrounds through a pupil premium. I know that the Minister has already mentioned that. We also need to raise parental aspirations. That has also been mentioned in the debate. All of us in the House need to assert the value of education, not only for all our children but for communities in general. All of us have a major part to play in that.

The third part of the motion calls on the Minister to bring forward urgent plans. I listened to what the Minister had to say, and I commend him for what he had to say. This is an area in which it certainly appears, on the face of it —

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

Mr Sheehan: — that we need cross-departmental co-operation. I am glad to hear the Minister say that he is prepared to do that, and I hope that the Minister of Health says the same.

Mr Storey: The Member who has just spoken said that he was glad that there had been a degree of unanimity on the issue. I think that the words that he used were that everybody had been in good temper when they had been making their contribution. We will bring that to an end very quickly before the end of the debate, because there are some things that need to be said.

First, I commend my colleague Mr Jimmy Spratt for bringing the motion to the House. I think that we all know that, over the past number of months, Jimmy has had particular challenges and difficulties in his personal health. We are glad that Jimmy is back with us and that he has continued to carry out his work. We are delighted that he is back with us in the Assembly.

He rightly highlighted a particular need in the motion, which I was very happy to be associated with when he tabled it. However, it is very sad that, despite the focus of the motion being on the need to move ahead and have a building provided for the schools mentioned, there are some who have unfortunately used this opportunity, yet again, to create an atmosphere that makes it very difficult for there to be an open discussion around the issues in

education that need to be addressed. It took Mr Hazzard all of two minutes and 22 seconds to get to the point at which, yet again, we had the usual tirade of anti-grammar school rhetoric. The Member knows what I am going to say, and I have to say it: he is somebody who benefited from going to the Red High. It is insulting to those who gave him that education that we have to listen to that repeated tirade around an element of our education system. If the party opposite and those who have ideological hobby horses want to have equality —

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Mr Storey: Yes.

Mr Wells: Does the Member accept that there is hypocrisy from not only Mr Hazzard but from the former Minister for Regional Development Mr Conor Murphy, who sent his daughter to a rather posh grammar school in Newry?

Mr Storey: I think that we could go through other Members. The Member for North Antrim Mr McKay also went to a grammar school. There are probably more. That was the choice that they made. That was the choice that their parents believed was appropriate for them. Therefore, every child should have that opportunity, and every child has that opportunity.

Mr Hazzard: They do not.

Mr Storey: They do. If the Member wants to make an intervention —

Mr Deputy Speaker: I draw Members back to the motion.

Mr Storey: I wish that, when they came to deal with the issue, Mr Deputy Speaker, other Members —

Mr Maskey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Storey: Yes, I will give way.

Mr Maskey: Can the Member explain something to me? I remember having a panel meeting in the Village area during one of the election campaigns. Parents there were, rightly, complaining about their children's underachievement in some schools. I pointed out that their children had to get a bus out of the area and pass a number of very well-known grammar schools, the front walls of which those children would never see the inside of. Can the Member explain to me how that is justifiable, because I cannot?

Mr Storey: We either have a system whereby we set a criterion for admissions to a school on the basis of free school meals, which is a social indicator, or one based on the ability of the child to access that education. The Member and his party want to have it both ways. They want to try to convince the world that, somehow, they are dismantling the class system. The Minister knows that he and I have had this discussion. When they get the children into those schools, what do they do? They set the children tests. Then, of course, what happens is that they dress it all up. They call it "banding" or "streaming". They have all sorts of technical phrases. However, what does that simply do? It determines the aptitude and ability of children and selects them to be in a class with a cohort of equals. Let us dispense with the social myth and nonsense that, somehow, you can socially engineer and, hopefully, at the end, everybody will be the same.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Can I draw the debate back to the subject of a new primary school for south Belfast?

Mr Storey: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. If those who made their contributions earlier in the debate had kept on track, we would not have had to come to this tirade — terrain.

Mr Hazzard: It is not your first tirade.

Mr Storey: If it is what the Member wants, I am quite happy to call it a tirade as well.

The issue is where the focus needs to be in the debate. It is on the failure of successive Education and Health Ministers to deliver for south Belfast. That is the reality. I welcome the fact that the Minister has come to the House today. Now, the situation is that he will have a discussion with the Health Minister, there will be all sorts of talks, and, all of a sudden, we will have progress. Let us look at the timeline that we have had in relation to south Belfast. Let us see the number of Members who, back in 2008, talked about the need for the new primary school in south Belfast. There was unanimity across the parties on the need for the three schools to be brought together. In December 2011, in another debate, the Minister informed Members that planning was at an early stage, although he said that he would like to see an amalgamation without a new school in the meantime. We have had all those discussions. We have had all of the meetings. Yet, today, the Minister still has to come to the House and say, "Well, I will tell you what we will have to do: I am quite happy to talk to Minister Poots and to have other discussions." Why are we still at a stage at which delay on delivery is the Department's stock-in-trade? I will give way to the Minister.

Mr O'Dowd: First, I also meant to say that I am more than happy to meet community representatives and the elected representatives for South Belfast to discuss the matter further. The Member has left one important element out of his timeline from 2008 to 2011. What about the Belfast Board? What about the then chief executive of the Belfast Board, who is currently employed by the Member opposite to advise him on education? Does the former chief executive of the Belfast Board have any questions to answer on why there is no new school in south Belfast?

Mr Storey: The Minister thinks that he is asking me an awkward question. I have no difficulty. If David Cargo, who is the person we are referring to, was responsible for the delay, he should take responsibility for that in the same way that anybody else should. I do not think that that was a smart or quick move on the part of the Minister.

Regardless of whoever was responsible for the delay in ensuring that a decision that had buy-in from the community and, we are told, from the board and the Health Department, and from everybody — it seems as though nobody in the House today was opposed to that process — the simple question that needs to be answered, and which has not been answered, is why we are still talking about something that everybody has agreed should have happened? That is the issue for people in south Belfast. They are really not worried about who delayed that or did not do A, B or C: they want to know when it will happen.

That brings me to the issue of capital and whether a decision should be made on the delivery of this project. How many times have we come to the House and heard that there is to be another review of capital projects? We

have had the compliant, the partially compliant and the non-compliant, and now the Minister has put another set of criteria on the website for determining whether a school moves forward. It changes more often than the Order Papers that come before the Assembly. Very few people in the system understand what the criteria are for determining whether a school will be built. All the principals of the schools affected by the motion want to be convinced that they will see progress. The Minister talks about bureaucracy being overcomplicated. Why has that been the case?

4.30 pm

Mr O'Dowd: Politicians.

Mr Storey: Will the Minister tell us who those politicians are?

Mr O'Dowd: We have to take into account that, every time a report comes out and politicians across these Benches demand that a new procedure be put in place and that services be ring-fenced and gold-plated, we put another layer of bureaucracy in the way of delivering public services. We have to be careful what we wish for. At times, we make regulations that actually delay the delivery of public services.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask the Member to draw his remarks to a close, please.

Mr Storey: The Minister did not answer the question. Is he saying, then, that we should oppose his regulations? Is he trying to tell us that he should have a free hand to be able to direct his finances in some socially engineered way —

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

Mr Storey: — that would further disadvantage working-class Protestant boys and girls in south Belfast?

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

Mr Storey: I think that the House has seen today that it is now time for action. We have had all the words. Let us have action and delivery. I think that that is when the Minister and his party will prove whether they are up for delivering on this very issue.

Question, That the amendment be made, put and agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly recognises the need to address educational underachievement in all working-class communities; acknowledges the vital role of primary school in a child's education; and calls on the Minister of Education and the Belfast Education and Library Board to bring forward plans for a new primary school for inner south Belfast as a matter of urgency.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask Members to take their ease for a few moments while there is a change at the Table.

*(Mr Principal Deputy Speaker
[Mr Mitchel McLaughlin] in the Chair)*

Paediatric Cardiac Surgery

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 to propose the motion and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Swann: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes the publication of the preferred option document by the paediatric congenital cardiac services working group and the related Children's Heartbeat Trust report; calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to reject the recommendation of a Dublin-only service for the future commissioning of regional paediatric cardiac surgery and interventional cardiology; and to select a model which retains primary provision and the ability to operate on emergency admissions in Belfast.

I start today by thanking the Business Committee for allowing today's debate to be changed. As stated in the draft Order Paper, the debate was to have been on the significant drop in farm incomes. Although that is an important issue, the Ulster Unionist Party replaced that motion with today's one on the future of paediatric cardiac surgery in Belfast, following the Health and Social Care Board's recommendation to the Minister that Northern Ireland lose that capability and everything move to Dublin.

It is with regret that I have to move the motion.

It is regrettable that the recommendation to remove paediatric cardiac surgery was even considered, never mind recommended. I hope that the Minister makes it down to the Chamber before I finish my speech.

As I have done previously in the House, I declare an interest as the father of a three-month-old son awaiting cardiac surgery. I thank Members and staff of the Assembly who continue to ask how Evan is. I thank them for their stories and support, including Members who have lost a son or a daughter and the usher who has been where I am now. It is on such occasions that this place transcends party or tribal politics and becomes what it should be: a place that can make a difference to people's lives. We can become what we should be: politicians who do not just want to make a difference to people's lives but actually do make a difference.

I pay tribute to and thank every member of staff of the children's hospital, without whom Evan would not be with us today: the consultants, the surgeons, the doctors, the anaesthetists, the nurses, the PICU team and the auxiliaries. The removal of paediatric cardiac surgery would mean a deskilling of many of these professional groups. Evan went through what I am glad to say was a successful bowel operation on Thursday. If the PICU team or the anaesthetist had not had the necessary experience to operate on a child with a cardiac condition, we do not know whether that surgery could have been performed in Belfast, even though it was non-cardiac.

The Minister has received a recommendation from the Health and Social Care Board that would end paediatric cardiac surgery in Belfast, with everything moving to

Dublin. Through the motion, I want to ensure that the Minister knows the feeling of every Member before he makes that final decision, which is his alone. I call on him to reject the recommendation of the board, accept the concerns listed in the minority report of the Children's Heartbeat Trust and retain paediatric cardiac surgery in Belfast, working in collaboration with Our Lady's Children's Hospital in Dublin, an option also noted in the document on the identification of a preferred option, which I read as meaning that the Minister can make a difference here by doing what is right for Northern Ireland.

Mrs Dobson: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he agree that all Members should, as we have, visit the mummies and daddies huddled around the cots of their infants at the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children? If they did so, I do not think that they would be so quick to support moving the service out of Northern Ireland.

Mr Swann: I thank the Member for her intervention. I also thank the Minister for taking the time last week to come to Clark clinic to visit the parents, children and clinicians there.

Evan William-Robert Swann was born on 8 February at 10.32 am. He was born with a congenital heart defect — one single wee soul who has already been through more than any parent would want their child to go through. He is just that: one soul. He is a son, a brother, a grandson, a nephew, a cousin and a great-grandson. So you can understand the frustration, anger and hurt when commissioners and John Compton use flippant lines such as “It is a numbers game” and “This affects only a small number of children across Northern Ireland”. Liam Clifford has had two operations and one catheterisation. Lexie Callender has had two operations. Odhran Gallagher has had four operations and three catheterisations. Charlie McCombe has had four operations and one balloon septostomy. Riley Ann Moss has had four operations. Shay Smith has had two operations and two catheterisations, one planned and one emergency. Caiden Dalzell has had two operations. Katie O'Neill has had two operations. Nadine McGaffin has had two operations and three catheterisations. None of their parents sees them only as a number, and there are many, many more.

I labour the point on numbers because they are the sole premise on which the recommendation that Belfast has to close is based. Belfast does not reach the magic number of 450 surgeries that is dictated by the Safe and Sustainable review. These standards have not been endorsed by professional organisations such as the Royal College of Surgeons, the Paediatric Intensive Care Society and the British Congenital Cardiac Association. Minister, in your response, will you please clarify once and for all where that number came from? I have heard that it came from the recommendation of experts. How did they come up with that figure? Who were the initial experts? Only 15% of hospitals worldwide with paediatric cardiac services perform that number of surgeries, so are the other 85% unsafe? Have you received evidence that, if that number is not achieved, children will die at surgeons' hands, or do you accept that Belfast is safe? Today, you should say to the House, as you have done before, that paediatric cardiac surgery in Belfast is safe and dispel the myth.

The board has accepted the Safe and Sustainable numbers for Belfast, and so the recommendation is to close it. Will the Minister inform the House whether he has

had any conversation with his Scottish counterpart, who told the Safe and Sustainable review what it could do with its figures? Does he know why the Safe and Sustainable review recommended that it was OK for University Hospital Southampton and a hospital in Newcastle upon Tyne to stay open, both of which do fewer than 250 operations? Minister, if numbers are crucial, why are groups of children being sent elsewhere for surgery that they could safely receive in Belfast?

Independent external experts who recently reviewed the service concluded in all cases that there was not an undue safety issue. Despite that, the restrictions on the operations being performed in Belfast has not been removed. So, it is seen as part of a process of attrition aimed at running down the service to a point of no return, possibly the numbers game that was referred to earlier.

What a piece of propaganda the preferred options document put forward by the Health and Social Care Board is. Even its name shows that it is a document that has the sole *raison d'être* of removing children's heart surgery from Northern Ireland. This is not a preferred option. It is not the preferred option of the parents. It is not the preferred option of the trust. It is not the preferred option of the children. And it is not the preferred option of the vast majority of medical experts. Indeed, in the response to the public consultation, those currently practising in paediatrics, neonatology, paediatric cardiology and other fields stated that their preferred option was to retain provision in Belfast as part of an all-island network. A central point of having such a network is to ensure that emergency interventions, such as those that take place in Belfast, should continue. Removing those to Dublin will increase the likelihood of the death of a critically ill child. Those are the words of Dr Connor Mulholland FRCP FESC.

We were fortunate. We knew from a prenatal 22-week scan that Evan had a congenital heart defect and a number of other complications. From speaking to the families I have encountered who have children with a congenital heart defect, I still maintain that we were fortunate. We knew and were able to plan. The prenatal and neonatal provisions of any Dublin-only option needs detailed review before the Minister accepts it. Evan was the example. He was due to be born on 18 February, and his delivery was planned for 11 February when all the professionals were in place. However, there is a wee thran thing in him, and he was born on 8 February at 10.32, 10 days early. All the professionals were on hand because he was born in Belfast.

I have studied the planned care pathway for Dublin-only, and it is full of potholes, to say the least. Mothers could be moved a week before delivery, but that would not have worked for us. I have heard recently of one hour 30 minutes from Belfast to Dublin being achieved. That is fantastic, but is it repeatable? Was it the fact that it was done at 10.00 pm on a Sunday with clear roads and everybody at hand? There was no congestion, and no waiting for the availability of surgeons or PICU beds.

“The safety of children and adults in Northern Ireland relies on continued congenital heart surgery at the Royal Victoria Hospital. I pledge to ensure that this world-class service continues and that children here can avail of the best surgical services in Belfast,

Dublin and across centres in Britain. I will vote against any move to remove this surgery from Belfast"

Those are not just my words; they are the words of the Children's Heartbeat Trust pledge, which, to date, has been signed by 87 MLAs, including Ministers. That pledge is entwined in and substantive to the motion before us today. It is not up to me to remind other MLAs of their conscience or their individual pledges when they speak and eventually vote on the motion.

From my opening remarks, there are many more questions that still have to be answered. I believe that, until the Minister can answer all these questions to his satisfaction that the decision that he makes will not cause the loss of a single soul, he cannot accept the recommendation of the Health and Social Care Board to end paediatric cardiac surgery and interventional cardiology for the entire population of Northern Ireland and our children by removing it from Belfast.

4.45 pm

Ms S Ramsey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I take the opportunity to commend Robin for getting this motion in front of the House. It is a very real and live issue. It is a live issue for you as a parent, for other parents and for the children. Unfortunately, I only have five minutes, so I will try to cover stuff from the Committee's perspective and then go into some of my own comments.

It is a serious issue. It is something the Committee has looked at, and it will impact on many people. We as a Committee have followed the issue very closely over the last number of months. We visited the Clark clinic on two occasions, and Members will recall that the Health Committee initially brought a motion to the House on 25 September last year. It is an issue that we have been very active on.

At our meeting last Wednesday, we were briefed by the Department and the Health and Social Care Board on the current position. They explained the process that has been worked through to date. The working group assessed eight options against agreed criteria, and the option that it recommended to the board was that surgery should be commissioned primarily from Dublin. The board then approved that option at its meeting on 25 April and has submitted — *[Interruption.]* That is my number one fan. I know that we are not supposed to mention people in the Public Gallery, but it makes me realise — I took the point earlier — that it has been a bad week for the Minister. I recognise that. Vulnerable voices were heard, and I just hope that we take on board the fact that there are other vulnerable voices out there among our children and young people, and they should be heard as well.

I know that the Committee has welcomed the Minister's commitment to keep looking for a solution that has a Belfast dimension, and I welcome that. It is also important that we recognise the fact that one of the options at the start of the process was to move our services to England. That is no longer on the table, from what we have been told by the board and the Minister.

Following the decision last week, I received a number of letters. Robin has touched on some of the points made.

Perhaps the Minister can let us know if he has those letters, because I have been asked to give him a copy if he does not have them. One in particular was from the Children's Heartbeat Trust. It says that, in response to a question from the Committee, the panel stated that no emergency cases were at present being undertaken at the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children. The letter says that that is incorrect and that, in fact, specific emergency procedures have been carried out a number of times in 2013, safely and successfully.

It strikes me that, as we have been told all along, the service is safe. It is important to highlight the fact that it is a safe service. The issue is about sustainability. Last week, I asked representatives from the board and the Department why we do not look outside the box. I am hoping you will do that, Minister. Why do we not send the doctors to get that additional experience and surgery, instead of always focusing on the surgery being removed? We can send doctors to other hospitals. The world is a small place now. We can send doctors to get that.

Mr Swann: Will the Member give way?

Ms S Ramsey: Yes.

Mr Swann: Does the Member also recognise that removing that will also remove the training facility that is in the Royal Victoria Hospital for other doctors coming in?

Ms S Ramsey: Yes.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Ms S Ramsey: Thanks for that extra minute. That is the thing that some of the letters raised.

I also, interestingly, received a copy of a letter that was sent to Dr McCarthy of the working group from a Dr Brian Craig, who is a consultant paediatric cardiologist. It talks about a patient, and I am not going to get into that. In fairness, the letter that I have received does not get into detail. Interestingly, as Robin mentioned in his opening remarks, if the option chosen by the Minister was that there should be no paediatric cardiac surgical presence in Belfast, it would not be possible to carry out any of the balloon procedures in the Belfast Trust without appropriate surgical cover. So there would be a knock-on effect if that decision was made.

I want to take the opportunity to highlight the very positive campaign that parents, aunts, uncles, mothers, fathers and grandparents have been involved in. They have been very vocal and very dedicated in the campaign. They do not want anything above and beyond what is there. I appeal to the Minister in the time that I have left. I know that you have committed to looking at all of this closely, and I know that a number of deadlines have been set. In your remarks, will you outline to us the time frame for when the final decision will be made? Can you outline to us where the thinking of the Health Minister in Dublin is on this? One service on two sites seems to me to be a reasonable solution. As I say, vulnerable voices were heard last week. You listened to them, you took it on the chin, and you have had a bloody nose all week. Let us ensure that the vulnerable voices of those in the next generation, who are our future, are heard and that their parents' voices are heard.

Mr Wells: Sometimes in health there are decisions that require the wisdom of Solomon and the intellect of Einstein. I am sure that the Minister, over the past week, has felt that he needs vast dollops of both qualities. It has been a difficult week. However, I think that we all agree that the present Minister's main focus and aim is always to do what is best and right for vulnerable sections of our society, be they the very elderly or, as in this case, the very young. This is one of those difficult decisions that requires the wisdom of Solomon.

At the outset, let me say that I think that there are a couple of things that we are agreed on. First, everyone is agreed on the quality of the provision that we have in the Clark clinic in the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children. No one, for one minute, would lift a finger to criticise any of what occurred in the past. In fact, the Minister has said frequently, Mr Swann, that the present service is safe. There is no doubt about that. However, it is not sustainable, and that is the difficulty that we face.

Secondly, I think that we would all want to wish Evan Swann all the best in the next few weeks. We are rooting for him. We know that that places the honourable Member for North Antrim in a totally different position to the rest of us. He has walked that walk. He knows exactly what it is like to feel anguish and concern for a very small, vulnerable child. Therefore, it is difficult for those of us who have never faced that to have full empathy and understanding. However, we can all agree that we would love to see Robin's son prosper in the next few months.

At the end of the day, we are not facing an unusual situation. The reality in Northern Ireland, whether we like it or not, is that consultants are becoming more and more specialist by the day. When I go to the numerous healthcare awards, it never ceases to amaze me when these young people walk up and get the award for consultant of the year. To me, a consultant is Sir Lancelot Spratt in the 'Carry On' films with the glasses on the nose and the handlebar moustache and looking about 80. Frankly, I am seeing his grandsons qualify as consultants in Northern Ireland at the moment. It really is quite shocking how young people qualify and immediately go towards specialism. The difficulty is — it is a very unpleasant situation — that we simply do not have enough procedures in Northern Ireland to warrant the continuation of the service that we have had for so long. Indeed, on the island of Ireland as a whole, there are just about enough specialist procedures to warrant the provision of that service. If anyone has any doubt about that, they should look across the water to the rest of the United Kingdom to see the trend there. Exactly the same decisions are being made in parts of England and Wales. The number is insufficient, so the decision is being made to close some units and to concentrate services in a finite number of specialist hospitals.

No longer ago than last Wednesday, the Committee looked at the issue. We all wanted to have some hope that there was a way of retaining the present service. However, I have to say that, after stiff questioning from all Committee members, many of whom have a huge degree of sympathy for the parents groups that are concerned about this, I know in my mind that we are really in a terribly difficult position. I have to say that. I listened with interest to the Heartbeat Trust and to the view that the figure of 400 was far too high and that it should be less than 300. I also

listened to the view that adding older young people who have a congenital heart condition would bring the number up to a sufficient level to enable the surgeons to continue providing a specialist service. I was then told that there are only about 30 such people in Northern Ireland. So, even when you add them in, you still do not have the quantum required to run the service.

The other thing that shocked me was to hear that, since November, all the specialist operations involving children from Northern Ireland are being done in Dublin already. Children are being taken down there. I know that that is not what most people want — they want them to be much closer to home — but I have not received any evidence that any of our children have suffered as a result of that decision.

This is simply a report on the Minister's desk. No final decision has been made on it. I know that he is still considering the issue. We all hope that he can come up with a solution that addresses parents' concerns —

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

Mr Wells: — and makes it sustainable. This is one of those difficult decisions that is not black and white but very much grey.

Mr McDevitt: I will pick up on some of what has already been said. This is not a debate about whether we need to integrate paediatric congenital cardiac services on the island of Ireland: we know that we do. It is not a debate about the fact that the population base needed to support a clinical team of the standard that we want to be able to make Robin's young son and all the other kids better will be all-island in nature: we know that it will. It is a debate about how to go about delivering that service.

There is an obvious route: centralise the service, send it down to the new hospital that will be built on the site of St James's, give the research opportunities to the universities in Dublin and provide a great further training opportunity to established medical schools in Dublin. As sure as hell, a lot of what we need to achieve will be achieved that way. However, that is not the ambitious solution. It is not thinking about the opportunity that is in front of us right here, right now. It is not why we develop North/South co-operation. North/South co-operation is not about the North sending all its difficult issues south. It is and has to be also about the South acknowledging from time to time that there are things that we do very well here.

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Mr McDevitt: Yes.

Mr Wells: That sounds wonderful, Mr McDevitt. However, as we saw last Wednesday when the Southern authorities were asked whether we could have a one-service-on-two-sites model, whereby they would agree to send a significant proportion of their patients north of the border, the answer was very clearly no. It takes two to tango, and the Republic is not prepared to reduce its quantum to a level that would endanger the viability of its service.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr McDevitt: Mr Wells quoted Einstein and someone else earlier, but I did not realise that he was also being prophetic. That is something that I wish to test, because

I am not aware of a policy statement being made by the Southern authorities. However, if that is the way in which the Department of Health sees matters in the Republic of Ireland, it needs to look again. That is not the new Ireland. It is not what we are trying to build on this island, and it is not necessarily in the best interests of children anywhere in Ireland.

Our opportunity is crystal clear. It is to continue to develop Belfast as a training centre. It is to retain Belfast as a surgical centre for children from Northern Ireland and, most likely, from the border counties of the Republic of Ireland. It is to integrate our clinical teams so that, as has been suggested, clinicians move and not children. It is to integrate our training so that clinicians are able to work at the highest possible level because they move, not the children. The promise of the Good Friday Agreement is lived out at times such as this. It is tested when we are confronted by such issues, which have nothing to do with your constitutional position but everything to do with the will of two jurisdictions to work together in the interests of all the people in those jurisdictions.

Ms S Ramsey: Will the Member give way?

Mr McDevitt: In a second.

If the authorities in the Republic are behaving in a way that considers only the interests of the people south of the border, they are not just letting down children across Ireland but wasting their opportunity to develop clinical models that would be held up around the world as models that show the way ahead for expert clinical integrated networks and commissioning.

5.00 pm

Ms S Ramsey: I thank the Member for giving way. I am glad that he touched on that theme. At last week's meeting, I asked the officials whether, if the political will was there and a political directive was made by Minister Reilly and Minister Poots, a decision could be made to have one service on two sites. We were basically told, in a nutshell, "Yes". So, it is not even a clinical issue now.

Mr McDevitt: For me and, I think, for all of us, this is not a clinical issue, because we are not the clinicians: we can only read the reports. However, we know that at least three of the eight options that were considered by the expert working group involved different models of all-island networks, all of which were on the table because they were clinically workable. We also know that, clinically, GB is off the table because it is too risky, not because of some political statement.

The question for this House — all of us together, supporting our Minister — and for colleagues in the Oireachtas is whether we are going to be ambitious, imaginative, innovative and brave. Are we are going to develop models that others, as I said before —

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

Mr McDevitt: — will look to as best practice in the years ahead? I support the motion.

Mr McCarthy: On behalf of the Alliance Party, I fully support the motion and thank Robin Swann for bringing it to the Floor.

I want to express my disgust at the initial findings of the very first report. It stated that paediatric cardiac surgery based at the Royal was safe but that it was not sustainable and could no longer be performed there. It has been suggested that contained in that report were a great many flaws and comparisons, and many questions remain unanswered on how decisions were reached at that time. It seems really strange to me that a first-class service that has performed extremely successfully on the Royal site, with the back-up of the excellent facilities provided at the Clark clinic, for over 30 years has suddenly been thrown into disarray, confusion, uncertainty and possible closure as a result of that report.

We are talking about infants' lives. Do not let us ever forget the many lives that have been saved in the Royal. That has been shown over and over again, particularly recently, when there has been, and continues to be, a massive public campaign by the Children's Heartbeat Trust, parents and young people who have survived due to the Belfast clinic. Our general public have been very supportive of a local life-saving facility remaining here in Belfast.

I also pay tribute to Robin Swann for speaking so eloquently about the life of his young son, which will depend on the cardiac unit in the Royal. That service must remain to save further babies. We wish young Evan a very speedy recovery.

We pay tribute to all the consultants, clinicians, doctors, nurses and everyone who has worked in the children's cardiac unit for saving lives over so many years. I pay particular tribute to Conor Mulholland, who has been mentioned before, for his tremendous service at the unit over so many years and to others there. Mr Mulholland continues to fully lend his support to the facility remaining in Belfast.

The recently published options document can, in parts, be welcomed, but I sincerely hope that we can develop the option not only to have a combined operational facility at Our Lady's hospital in Dublin but for a life-saving facility to remain at the Royal. The Alliance Party fully supports the submissions and analysis made by the Children's Heartbeat Trust. That group is surely best placed to call for the retention of a service in Belfast. They are the people who had the infants and children saved by the Royal's cardiac unit and the Clark Clinic. They have expressed, very succinctly and in minute detail, all the good reasons for its continued existence. I appeal this afternoon to our Health Minister, who has the final say, to say yes and to work with Dr Reilly in Dublin and make combined use of the excellent facilities in Belfast and Dublin. We all want to save lives, and if we were to allow Belfast to be closed, lives would almost certainly be lost. We must not allow that to happen.

The important part of the motion asks our Minister to select a model that retains primary provision and, if humanly possible, the ability to operate on emergency admissions in the Royal in Belfast simply to save lives. I support the motion.

Ms Brown: I rise as a member of the Health Committee to speak on the motion and to support its intention.

We have an opportunity to contribute to a debate that will help to shape the future of paediatric congenital cardiac services, and we have a responsibility to consider what is in the very best interests of each and every vulnerable

child who requires those life-saving services. Since the Assembly last debated the subject in September, when the House called on the Minister to explore an all-island solution, I have been genuinely troubled by the apparent dilemma that this sensitive issue causes to all those with an interest in seeing an effective and safe service for our children. Of course, my dilemma is nothing compared with the anxiety and distress faced by those parents, including Robin Swann, whose children have been and will be directly affected by the outcomes of today's debate. Nevertheless, I am genuinely concerned that we do the right thing by those children. We may disagree on what exactly the right thing is but provided we treat the matter and each other with respect and dignity as we debate and discuss it, I hope that we will at least demonstrate to all those involved, be they parents, children or family members or those in the medical profession, that we are trying to do the right thing. I suspect that it is natural for us all to want the best services professionally delivered with the minimum of inconvenience to a family unit. That is the ideal, but as we are seeing in so many areas of the public service, we can no longer afford or deliver the ideal in every case. It is sometimes simply not possible, which saddens me, but it is the truth and the reality that we face.

The other reality is that being a member of the Health Committee does not, sadly, make me an expert, and I am, therefore, obliged and grateful to the many experts who come before us weekly to advise us and to offer opinions. It is now the case that, for the fourth time, the Health Minister is faced with experts telling him that paediatric congenital cardiac surgery in Belfast, despite being successful and excellent, is not sustainable. Of course I want Belfast to be the centre of excellence. In many senses, I believe that it is, but I have concerns that will probably not be addressed today but only in due course when all the options have been considered and the facts and figures are assessed.

There is a temptation to look at today's motion and to ask oneself what will happen if a child's life is lost because there is no service in Belfast or because a partnership service with Dublin or wherever has failed because of transport difficulties or some other reason. However, what if we do not heed the warnings being given to us and, at some point in the future, a parent asks us why we did not do something about the lack of sustainability in Belfast, why we did not have a plan or why we did not consider other options?

I support today's motion because I want Belfast to be part of the solution. However, I want to finish by saying that my primary concern, over and above where the service is delivered, is that our children will be safe and will receive the very best treatment now and in the future.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: As a number of Members said, this is a highly emotive issue, and we must ensure that the needs of children and young people are paramount in the debate. Each year, as was stressed, around 140 children require this vital surgery in the North of Ireland. It is important to reflect on the fact that the report on the review of the service, which was published in July 2011, did not identify any immediate safety concerns but concluded that the surgical element of the service in Belfast was unsustainable.

The review on which all this was based is, in my opinion, flawed. It did not consider the difference between 1·8

million people living here as opposed to over 60 million across the water. Last week, at the Health Committee meeting, it was confirmed that the sustainable figure of a minimum of 400 surgeries a year is also based on the safe and sustainable English model.

It was also confirmed by the Health Department last week that the Minister makes the final decision and that his decision will be brought to the Floor of the House. That is important because there have been issues around communication with parents and families throughout the entire process.

I welcome the fact that the Minister, in his statement of 25 April, said that he wanted to have further conversations with his counterparts in Dublin before making any decision. However, a number of issues need to be clarified. If, as the July 2011 report indicated, there were no safety issues in the Belfast model, why did all five of the options that contained a Belfast element score zero against the criteria dealing specifically with safety and quality?

Option 4 in the options paper, which suggested a Belfast/Dublin solution, scored 195 points. The paper stated:

"such a model could not meet the agreed commissioning standards on both sites."

What does that mean?

The report goes on to state:

"an all-island model had not however been realised, largely because of challenges in the staffing and sustainability of safe, high quality surgical services".

I suggest to the Minister that these are the real issues behind this debate. Reporting standards have been different, North and South, and already stretched services in Dublin are being asked to do more. Where does that capacity come from?

Are there barriers to the recruitment of cardiac consultants in Belfast? Are there obstacles that prevent surgeons employed in one so-called jurisdiction working in the other? Those are the real issues that need to be addressed in order to enhance and protect this vital life-saving service.

The Centre for Cross Border Studies offered a number of valuable insights in a recent report on unlocking the potential of cross-border hospital planning, and this is where I take issue with Mr Wells. The report shows a higher incidence of paediatric cardiac disease in Ireland and a consistently higher demand for services. It suggests that one of the reasons for that is the large increase in the Twenty-six Counties in the incidence of Down's syndrome, which has a high risk of cardiac disease. The report also indicates that diagnostic capacity has improved, leading to more referrals for surgery.

Belfast has maintained a service with a single surgeon supported by the adult cardiac surgical team and has done it well. The service has been delivered by a locum surgeon, and, as we know, the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust has been trying to recruit a full-time replacement surgeon, but this has proved difficult.

Last year, 560 procedures were conducted in Dublin, and the team there said that it would like to have treated 100 more patients. The figure has increased from 400 three

years ago, so there is a mismatch of expectations. The North would have to buy the service from the Twenty-six Counties, but the capacity does not exist to take in extra patients without a commitment to invest in capacity expansion.

These are the real issues that need to be worked through to ensure that the service is delivered as an all-Ireland model.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Will the Member bring her remarks to a close?

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: I will. As Conall McDevitt said, it is worth looking at this matter in the context of the opportunities that can be provided by the new national hospital in Dublin. If extra capacity can attract support in the North, there is an opportunity to develop an all-Ireland model for this vital life-saving service.

5.15 pm

Mr Dunne: I welcome the opportunity to speak to this motion, which is on a very important matter affecting everyone across Northern Ireland. This issue has been on the agenda for some time, especially for those of us who are on the Health Committee. We all recognise Robin Swann's situation, and, as a parent, I feel for him and wish him and his son well for the future.

I commend the Children's Heartbeat Trust and others who have fought very strong campaigns. At the very first public meeting that I attended in Bangor in my constituency, I immediately was struck by the genuine concern and feeling around this very sensitive issue. It would be remiss of me not to pay tribute to my constituent Maria Kennedy and her family from Bangor. They have been at the forefront of this campaign and have gone through so much with heart surgery from the Clark clinic at the Royal Victoria Hospital. I also put on record our support for the Clark clinic. I visited the clinic with the Committee and saw for myself the excellent life-saving work that was carried out. The many children and young people who are alive today, some of whom have attended events up here, are testimony to the skilled team of clinical care staff at the Clark clinic. Many children and young people continue to go to the Clark clinic for ongoing treatment and surgery and depend on it for further operations or cardiac services. We all realise that the number of operations performed in Belfast is around 90, with around 40 currently going to Dublin and Birmingham.

The skills issue is critical to the standards of surgery and care for the maintenance of a cardiac team at the Royal Victoria Hospital. The argument is made that, at present, we do not have enough operations a year to maintain that skills base in the team. One option is to bring patients into Northern Ireland from other areas of the UK and, indeed, the Republic of Ireland to increase those figures to at least 300 operations a year and thus maintain our skills base. What is important is that any additional service provided in the Republic of Ireland must be to the highest quality standards available and totally compatible with that provided in Northern Ireland. We must have an assurance that the skills base in Dublin is to the highest standard and that hospital provision is adequate in capacity to deal with any additional workload from Northern Ireland.

Mr Swann: Will the Member give way?

Mr Dunne: Yes, I will indeed.

Mr Swann: I want to clarify on the issue of increased workload. On Radio Ulster a week or so ago, Dr Reilly said that they had just cleared their waiting list. Does the Member know how adding all the children from Northern Ireland onto their waiting list will increase it again or have any effect?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Dunne: Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. That is one issue that the Committee is concerned about, and I understand that the Minister is in further discussions on that matter.

From discussions in the Health Committee, I know that there are concerns that Crumlin hospital's provision is being stretched. A brand new replacement hospital is planned but is still several years away. The transfer time for patients, children and parents from Northern Ireland is another area of concern. We are told that the standard time is three to four hours, but this would be a challenge for some areas of Northern Ireland, such as the north-west of the Province. The other option that should be considered is the use of an air ambulance. Helicopter provision may be required for the critical condition of some children, but such discussions are still ongoing, and no assurances have yet been given.

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr Dunne: Yes, I will.

Mr Beggs: Is the Member aware of the considerable vibration in helicopter flight, which could be a distinct problem?

Mr Dunne: I am no expert, but I understand that cardiac services would be available, and it would be an air ambulance that we are talking about.

We have been given assurances that parents and family members will be provided with suitable accommodation at the Dublin hospital and that all such costs will be met by the various trusts. In summary, it is important that, where there is a real life-threatening emergency, where time is against you with ever-increasing risk, a cardiac service is available in Belfast for critically ill babies. I urge the Minister to treat this matter sensitively and ensure that an adequate quality service is in place for the children of Northern Ireland.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I, too, am a member of the Health Committee. At this stage of the debate, everything has more or less been said. There are maybe just a couple of things.

Throughout this, the Minister has stated that his key priority is to ensure the delivery of a safe and sustainable service for these vulnerable children. In so doing, he wishes to ensure that he has fully explored every possibility for addressing the concerns that have been raised with him by parents and consultants. I commend the Children's Heartbeat Trust and other groups for the lobbying that they have done.

Mr Wells talked about the wisdom of Solomon. I actually think the Minister probably has to take a harder decision than Solomon's, because more complex issues are involved. Travel time from Belfast to Dublin has been mentioned. I live in Newry, and it is easy to say that the travel time is probably about 50 or 55 minutes. Robin Swann said that the minimum travel time would be one

hour and 55 minutes or two hours — something like that. However, he made a very important point. We sympathise with him, his family and his son, and we wish them all the best. He made the point that, in their case, it was not feasible. I am sure that he will correct me if I am wrong or I misheard him. In that particular case, it simply would not have been possible to travel and have the operation done.

I endorse what my colleagues, Sue Ramsey and Maeve McLaughlin, have said. At the Committee last week, the Chairperson asked officials whether, if there was the political will, we could have one service at two sites. I am sure that that is something that the Minister can consider. Ultimately, what is important in all this is that the best service is provided for those children. People have talked about walking in the shoes of Robin Swann, but I do not think any of us can do that until we have experienced that particular situation. I am sure that other parents would agree. This is something that does not stop. It is ongoing. The issue has also been raised of children who have congenital heart problems, who will sometimes continue to need surgery into their late teens and even into adulthood. So it is essential that that service is sustained and maintained.

Robin Swann also made the point that doctors could go to other venues for training. I am not sure that that is not a possibility or why it should not be considered. Presumably, all surgeons have to keep up with training. If some of them can get it on site, that is fine; if they cannot, I do not think that it would be unreasonable for them to travel to other sites. One of the issues that have come out of the recommendations and the options is that children will no longer have to travel to England. However, I know that in many cases, where there are particular issues involved, children have to travel to Birmingham because it is a centre of expertise.

So the Minister has to take a big decision. He has heard enough today. I am sure that he will make an informed decision, but it is a difficult one. I know that it will not be affected by budget, money or anything else. The decision has to be taken in the knowledge that these children are vulnerable and they have to be looked after in the best possible way. They must have the best possible service provided. I am sure that, at the of the day, that is what everyone wants.

Dr McDonnell: I am very glad that this motion is being debated and that we have an opportunity of discussing this very contentious issue. It is listed here as the preferred option document by the paediatric congenital cardiac services working group. It is a mouthful.

The report is useful. It gives a lot of information and will no doubt be the subject of debates. The debate will not end here today. However, I am delighted, and I feel that I should congratulate colleagues around the Chamber and across the House for the sober and sensible approach that they have taken to this very serious issue.

It is important that we take the issue seriously and that the best possible answer emerges. On that point, it would be remiss of me not to echo Jim Wells, if I might — if I am allowed — and commend the Minister for trying to do the honest thing. He has the humility to recognise that, when he is on the wrong road, he should change course. Having had many conversations with the Minister on these issues and on this in particular, I know that he is intent on doing

the honest thing and on getting the best solution for the affected children and their parents.

We have talked a bit about the service at the Royal being safe. I believe that it is safe. I know that it is safe, and a lot of the parents there have told me that they feel that it is safe. However, going forward, “safe” may not be enough, because people want “safer” and even the “safest possible”. That is where the difficulty lies. Although some of my colleagues around the Chamber talked about sending a consultant here, a registrar-in-training there or a senior registrar somewhere else, we are talking about human beings. Sometimes they have families, and sometimes it is not easy to shove somebody here or somebody else there. One of the solutions that I would like to see explored at some stage is having some sort of team in Belfast that is integrated with what is happening in Dublin and in the UK.

Mr Beggs: I thank the Member for giving way. Is he aware of successful two-site working elsewhere in the world, such as in Toronto and Ottawa and in San Francisco and Sacramento?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Dr McDonnell: Indeed, I am obliged to the Member for East Antrim for reminding me of that. Having visited Toronto a number of times, I am aware of the comprehensive working arrangements there. Sometimes the arrangements are with not just Ottawa but Thunder Bay and Sioux Lookout and all sorts of strange places on the periphery. It is possible to have that, but it requires a system of contractual arrangements. Before the person takes up the consultancy job, the job specification has to be right.

For many of us — indeed, I think for all of us across the House — the debate is about maintaining the maximum service locally for the children who require such surgery. It is also about ensuring that, where infants and parents have to travel, they have the option of minimal disruption while ensuring maximum safety from a health perspective. It is worth mentioning that, aside from the factual and clinical aspects, there is so much emotion, worry and anxiety for the parents and the extended family of a child with a congenital heart problem. From my perspective, I urge the Minister to maximise whatever service can be retained in Belfast within the realms of staff availability and safety. As others outlined, I ask the Minister to explore mechanisms for sharing key staff, whether they are surgeons, anaesthetists or the whole team of support staff. This is not about one surgeon operating on his or her own; paediatric surgery for congenital cardiac disease requires a very significant team. Can we be ingenious about finding new ways of working with Dublin, Birmingham and wherever else to use whatever resources we have to the maximum benefit?

I will mention again the option of a shared training programme, where, as others suggested, we retain a maximum outpost. However, the anxieties in the report fall into the criterion that was used. I could not disagree with the specification. I am not sure about the weighting at times —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Will the Member bring his remarks to a close, please?

Dr McDonnell: — and the elements in it. Worried parents need to be convinced that as much as possible of the pre-operative assessment and the post-operative care can be done as close to home as possible. They need to be convinced that everything that can be done in Belfast will be done there.

5.30 pm

Mr Gardiner: The health service is always at risk from any exercise involving change. I understand the need for change, but the problem with change in a service that is as complex as the health service is that, when you unpick one aspect of it, unintended consequences follow.

I have an underlying concern that the level of cardiac emergency care for children that exists in Belfast under the present arrangements will disappear under any Dublin-only arrangement. Given that a 24/7 emergency service is cited as a requirement for a safe and quality service, we need to ask whether Northern Ireland healthcare may be damaged by the total loss of the local surgical service in Belfast. That would be an unintended consequence that I am sure the Minister, along with the rest of us, would not want to happen.

In addition to my concern about the accessibility of emergency cover, I have concerns about transport. The official target is to get treatment within three hours and in no more than four hours. The problem with that is that Dublin is 100 miles away from Belfast and is further from other parts of Northern Ireland. Only the Southern part of the route is served by a motorway. In many circumstances, the children involved are too unwell to fly. That means that children will have to spend up to two hours in an ambulance before even getting through the doors of a Dublin hospital. That is two hours or more of the maximum of four hours acceptable for treatment used up before the doctors even get to work. I also believe that, before we propose a 24/7 emergency and urgent transport service, we must test it.

There is also the issue of newly born babies. They appear to have slipped through the net because no emergency transport service is proposed for them. Yet, that is a time of maximum danger. All those concerns spell out one word for sick children, and that word is “danger”. I have concerns that bureaucrats are running ahead of health policy on many fronts, proposing cost-effective cuts without due regard for care, and care is what the health service is really about. I support the Minister in saying that we need to retain that care in Northern Ireland.

Ms P Bradley: I thank Robin Swann for bringing the motion to the House. It shows that we are human beings in the Chamber. We all have families, and we all have things going on in our families. I want to give my heartfelt best wishes to Robin and his family.

Healthcare provision will always be an emotive issue, as we have experienced over the past week. That is especially true when we discuss serious and life-threatening conditions in children and babies. The main criterion that I will always work to when being involved in influencing fundamental decisions, such as the one before us today, is what will provide the safest outcome for those undergoing complex procedures.

We have heard evidence that the retention of surgery in Belfast for cardiac conditions in children is not at a

dangerous level; rather, it is the issue of sustainability that has prompted concern. It is right, therefore, that the Minister has been proactive in exploring other options. The commissioning of the working group that consulted those directly affected by any change was evidence of the Minister's commitment to explore every option in this sensitive matter. It is my view, based on evidence from reports and from talking to the families affected, that the best move forward is that a two-centred approach between Belfast and Dublin will provide a safe and sustainable option in future years for children and babies who need the service, not only as infants but throughout their life.

I appreciate that having to travel for surgery is not ideal. As a mother, I also know that I would travel to the ends of the earth to give my child the best chance of a positive outcome. That is what the families want: a positive outcome for their child. However, the added pressure of being away from their support network of family and friends and the uncertainty of the fragility of their child's life must be almost unbearable. At best, a two-centre approach would alleviate the unnecessary anxiety being placed on parents. The additional stress of having to travel for surgery would also be minimised and substantially outweighed by the fact that the surgery would be safer and more sustainable, should their child be one of the 10% who require future surgery.

It is anticipated that, through this change, work will be continued to develop the skill in identifying issues prior to birth to allow for support and planning to be in place and to reduce the number of emergency cases. Thankfully, we in Northern Ireland have low numbers of children requiring heart surgery, though that has led to this review being necessary. It is that low number that means that the service is not sustainable and is likely to become unsafe. Through partnership in a two-centre approach, keeping services here in Belfast, we can ensure that, for families that need to access the services, we offer the best possible option. I support the motion.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I have to call the Minister at 5.40 pm.

Mrs D Kelly: I welcome the opportunity to participate in an important debate. The subject is close to many hearts, not least that of Mr Robin Swann, who proposed the motion. I commend him for doing so.

At this stage, there is not much to add except to ask the Minister to acknowledge that the concerns of the Children's Heartbeat Trust are about not only the retention of services in Belfast but the removal of cardiac services and the threat that that would then place on other service users. I understand that 70 families currently travel down to Belfast for interventions during the year. The removal of the service from Belfast would put that service at risk.

There is also evidence from elsewhere of the potential for the deskilling of other professionals. For example, once a centre loses its surgical element, the continued provision of medical and diagnostic paediatric cardiac services greatly deteriorates. That is evident in that children's cardiology centres in Manchester, Edinburgh and Cardiff no longer perform standard diagnostic catheterisations and are reporting difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff. Training opportunities in Belfast are unlikely to be attractive or even available, as demonstrated from a recent meeting of paediatric cardiology trainees in the UK,

where it was agreed that a paediatric cardiology trainee should not spend more than six months of a five-year training programme at a non-surgical centre. The resultant deskilling will directly affect the cardiology unit and will indirectly diminish other specialties in the children's hospital, which will gain much less experience of working with patients with CHD, for example in anaesthesia and intensive care. There are also concerns about the availability of paediatric intensive care beds.

I hope that the Minister will come to the right decision that meets all the concerns expressed by parents, families and professionals.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I will dispense with the speech that was given to me.

Mr McDevitt: That could be dangerous. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Poots: The Member is right: it is somewhat dangerous but nonetheless.

I want to respond, first of all, to the issues raised. In our previous discussion of health issues today, there may have been accusations of people playing politics and so forth. That cannot be said of this debate. This is how debates should take place: reasoned, measured and with people putting their case. People, especially Robin, have spoken from the heart, and we all appreciate that.

I hope that, as I respond, Members will also understand the difficult circumstances that I find myself in in arriving at the right decision on the issue and doing the right thing for the children. That is what it is about: children.

Mr Swann raised a number of issues, including where the figure 400 came from; why Scotland has not adhered to Safe and Sustainable numbers; why — I cannot make out the writing — the South is operational with 250 procedures; and why various royal colleges do not endorse Safe and Sustainable?

The specific standard required by the HSCB drew on those developed by the Safe and Sustainable process, but they have been amended to reflect the specific needs of the Northern Ireland population. They are based on the need for surgeons to have a sufficient caseload to maintain their skills, which is generally accepted as being around 100 cases a year. In addition, there needs to be a robust 24/7 rota to provide that service, which normally takes at least three surgeons. Scotland provides a service with a 24/7 rota, which is provided by three surgeons for over 300 cases a year.

As regards the Heartbeat Trust and the assertion that the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust contrived to undertake emergency PCS procedures, which Sue Ramsey commented on, the Belfast Trust has confirmed that, from December 2012 to April 2013, no paediatric cardiac surgical procedures were undertaken in Belfast and emergency cases travelled to Dublin, where surgery was undertaken on the children who required it. Ms Ramsey also raised the issue —

Ms S Ramsey: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Poots: Yes, sure.

Ms S Ramsey: I said to the Minister that I was quoting from a letter from the Children's Heartbeat Trust and from

a letter from a consultant in the Royal. I will pass them on to the Minister because they are direct quotes.

Mr Poots: I will be happy to receive them. You also asked whether we could outline a time frame for the final decision and what was Minister Reilly's thinking. I am meeting Minister Reilly about the issue tomorrow, so, to that extent, the debate is timely.

The Health Service Executive in the ROI informed the HSCB that it does not believe that it would be feasible to deliver a two-centre model on an all-Ireland basis. I am meeting Minister Reilly to explore the possibilities. I do not accept that that is the case, but that is the view of the Health Service Executive. I wish to challenge it on that.

Conall McDevitt referred to the need for integration of the all-Ireland service and the need for true North/South co-operation.

There is a recommendation to maintain and strengthen the cardiology service in Belfast, with the option to care for children from outside Northern Ireland wherever the surgery is performed and to ensure close networking between the cardiologists and surgeons caring for children from Northern Ireland. I welcomed two elements of the report: the enhancement of the cardiology service and taking that service to Altnagelvin, the South West Acute Hospital and Craigavon Area Hospital; and the movement away from transferring children to England for elective surgery except for complex cases that require such support. We can build on those positive things that were presented to us.

Kieran McCarthy raised the issue of the safety of the current services. Recent reports show that there are systemic safety concerns. Sir Ian Kennedy said that it would be high-risk to continue to provide surgery in Belfast. Mr McCarthy also referred to services suddenly being thrown into disarray. We have known for many years that PCS services in Belfast were vulnerable, with changing clinical standards and higher patient and parent expectations, and it has been recognised that maintaining such a small volume service would be exceptionally difficult. Sir Ian Kennedy's report provided the expert view, confirming that systemic concerns exist in the current service.

Maeve McLaughlin raised the issue of Dublin undertaking around 550 procedures last year. The validated data from the central cardiac audit database (CCAD) states that, in 2011-12, there were 426 procedures. So, the total volume of activity in the ROI and Northern Ireland was approximately 536 procedures. The argument is slightly more difficult when it comes to the two-centre model because Dublin has said that it does not want to dilute the service that it provides in order to support and sustain a two-centre model that would include Belfast.

5.45 pm

Maeve McLaughlin asked why the Belfast options scored zero for safety and quality. The options were scored against criteria agreed by the working group for safety and quality, and they included standards for surgical and nursing staff. The working group felt that those standards could not be met in Belfast in the foreseeable future. So that is the working group's recommendation, not mine. She also asked whether there was a barrier to recruiting a paediatric cardiac surgeon for Belfast. The view of the

working group is that there are insufficient numbers to recruit.

Gordon Dunne raised the issue of emergency transfer. The majority of cases being transferred will travel by road as opposed to air ambulance, although there is the potential for that. Recently, one case took 90 minutes. I will discuss that later, when I outline what my thoughts are.

Maeve McLaughlin asked whether there were restrictions on doctors working across countries. Doctors need to be registered with the General Medical Council to work in the UK and with the Medical Council to work in the Republic of Ireland. So it is possible for doctors to register with both councils and work in both countries.

Sam Gardiner was concerned about Belfast losing 24/7 cover. At present, Belfast is not able to provide 24/7 emergency surgical cover. That is currently done with the support of Dublin. He also raised the issue of cost. In fact, the preferred option and the model being produced by the board is a more expensive model than the current one, so no one need think that this is a cost-saving exercise.

There is no easy solution to all of this. I hear from one side that, if you take a decision to remove services from Belfast and have surgical services provided outside Belfast, children will lose their life. I hear people from the other side say that, given the complexity of paediatric congenital cardiac surgery, children will lose their life if the service is not on a site on which the full range of expertise is available 24/7. You would need the wisdom of Solomon and a whole lot more to get this right. It is hugely challenging, and it is definitely not easy to square this circle.

I also hear about safety and sustainability. As it stands, the service has consistently been recognised as being safe. It is important to identify that and to acknowledge that we have not been putting children's lives at risk through the service provided.

The provision of a service in which one surgeon is supported by a retired surgeon is not sustainable. The question is this: how would we make a service in Belfast sustainable? I need to have that discussion with my counterparts in Dublin. For a service in Belfast to be sustainable, I would need more procedures. If I am to have more procedures, going down the route of Mr McDevitt's true North/South co-operation, would the South give them to us? Take children in the border counties, for example. If we provide an enhanced cardiology service with facilities available in Altnagelvin, the south-west and Craigavon, the achievement of which requires high-quality telepresence and telemonitoring, could we also provide a surgical service to children based in border counties? That is a decision for the HSE and Minister Reilly. My suspicion is that people in Donegal would prefer to travel to Belfast than to Dublin, and there may be other parts of the border counties for which that would be more suitable.

In that instance, could we get the number of procedures that would allow us to go out and go after another surgeon? Even if there were a two-surgeon model — it has worked in other places, but is not particularly common across the UK or, indeed, in Ireland — in place, we would have to engage in a discussion with Dublin that would allow those surgeons to practice there on occasions in order to allow them to maintain and expand their expertise. Surgeons would expect that. They would want to deliver

the best for children in Belfast. In order to do that, we would need that co-operation.

We also have only two anaesthetists in Belfast who are qualified to deliver that service. One imagines that if one anaesthetist was on holiday and the other was carrying out his service in an operation, a paediatric congenital cardiac emergency would put a strain on the service as well. So, it is not just an issue of having more surgeons; we need to look at the issue of anaesthetists and, indeed, an entire team. I need to have that discussion with my colleagues in the Republic of Ireland. If we are truly talking about North/South co-operation on the issue, that is the type that I need to be able to get. I do not know whether I can get it. I do not wish to raise false expectations before the House today, particularly for the parents of those children. They have come through too much for me to go down a route that gives them false hope. I say to the House today that I do not want to go down the route that is recommended by the board. I want to go down the route that I outlined to you today, but I need the co-operation of colleagues in the Republic of Ireland to do that. I will make the case for that very strongly.

Last week, I visited the hospital. It was a private visit. I was invited by a couple of parents to come to see their children. I have got to know a couple of parents over the period. As I went through the door of the hospital, I bumped into a family from Dungiven whose little girl was there. She was running about and in great form, which was absolutely super to see. They were very keen that surgery would remain in Belfast because they, of course, have an additional hour-plus to travel from Dungiven to Belfast in the first instance. Then, I met a father who was getting something to eat. His child had been in Birmingham for an operation. He was very clear that Birmingham was the right place for the operation. He said that it was too complex for Dublin to deal with and that his child had got the right care in Birmingham. I met another family whose child had had an operation carried out in Dublin. The child's mother said that, actually, the right surgeon for her child is in Dublin. So, there is a range of options for parents, but the one that many parents want to see is surgical care being provided in Belfast. I cannot stand before the House and say honestly that I can deliver that, but I will stand before the House and say honestly that I will certainly give it my best shot. I will come back to the House, and if I cannot deliver surgical care in Belfast, I will tell you that I cannot deliver it. We will have to take those decisions when we arrive at them.

As things stand, that is my view on what we should try to do. I know the recommendation that was put to me by the board. I beg to differ with it on the issue because I think that we can truly test whether Dublin is the safer option only when that is actually carried out. If it is not the safer option, it would be impossible to reverse. Therefore, I want to try to look at other options first.

Mr Beggs: Robin Swann spoke very movingly about his son who has recently undergone cardiac surgery in the paediatric unit in Belfast. We all cannot help but feel for him. I am sure that he will have appreciated the good wishes that Members across the House expressed.

He questioned the figure of 450 that has been set. He highlighted that 15% of the hospitals in the world that carry out those types of operations do not meet it. Certainly, we all need to reflect on that: the numbers game and how

that is set. In particular, Robin questioned the so-called preferred option. He said that parents did not prefer it and that there is an indication that the vast majority of clinicians in Belfast do not prefer it either. So, clearly, the health commissioners are not carrying the vital players in this area with them. They are failing to properly engage with them and to convince them of their argument.

Perhaps one of the most striking things that Robin said was that despite the best of planning, with his wife to be in hospital a week early, young Evan decided to come even earlier than that. There is a great deal of uncertainty as to what the outcome might have been had surgery not been available in Belfast. No one can fail to be moved by that very practical example.

We have to welcome the aspects of the review of paediatric cardiac surgery that will bring about improvements. For instance, I suspect that the issue of a paediatric MRI scanner would not have been progressed as fast if that had not been highlighted in the report. So, as a result of the report, there will be increased investment in modern technology, which will mean fewer risks when diagnosing what may be wrong with a young child. However, that does not mean to say that we have to agree with everything in the report and to follow it blindly.

As a member of the Health Committee, I was concerned about the fact that — Sue Ramsey raised this — the Department and the trust advised us that no emergency operations were happening in Belfast, when certainly the Children's Heartbeat Trust advised us that there had been a number of operations in recent months. Indeed, we are aware of a letter from a consultant who indicated that there had been an emergency balloon atrial septostomy, and that had that type of operation not been carried out, the child would not have been stable, and the outcomes would have been very uncertain if there had been undue delays or travel in such an unstable condition. We were also made aware that some of these conditions cannot be detected. In fact, only 90% of some of the conditions are found at birth, and a relatively low number are detected at an earlier stage.

I think that there is wide agreement in the House that having a Belfast-Dublin network, with emergency services remaining in Belfast, is the preferred option and should be explored further. I have concerns that the Health and Social Care Board was advised by its Dublin counterparts that it would not be feasible for children living in the Republic of Ireland to be referred to Belfast or for clinical staff from the centre to support 24/7 cover on two sites. I ask why not: why can we not adapt our services, whether they are in Belfast or Dublin, to produce the best for all our children? There are certainly a considerable number of operations occurring in Belfast — 110 was mentioned — as well as additional operations for young adults. On top of that, there are about 40 catheterisations each year. Of course, if there is no surgical back-up, that will not happen in Belfast either because of the associated risk. The potential for cardiology services as a whole to start unravelling then comes into play. A number of Members mentioned the problem of training future cardiologists if there is no surgery present. So, there are difficulties there.

However, there are also opportunities. The Minister himself indicated that if there is a will — he needs support and co-operation from his counterparts in Dublin to perhaps bring in some other operations that are presently referred from

border counties to the Dublin centre. However, surely it would be much better for someone living in Donegal if they could be treated more locally, because there would be less trauma for the parents and faster access to emergency services if those were continued in Belfast. So, there are opportunities if there is a willingness to do that.

Conall McDevitt specifically highlighted the need to integrate services in Belfast and Dublin. I heard no voices disagreeing with that approach. I wish the Minister well in his discussions tomorrow with Minister O'Reilly. I hope that the Department of Health in the Republic of Ireland will be more open to change and flexibility. If the health authority is not willing to be flexible, I hope that the Minister will be able to convince his counterpart to increase that degree of flexibility and to look imaginatively at how we can provide the best service for everyone in Northern Ireland.

6.00 pm

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Mr Beggs: Yes.

Mr Wells: I think that everyone in the House is agreed that the best option is as the Member said, which is to have one service at two sites: one in Dublin and one in Belfast. However, the problem is that we cannot compel the Irish authorities to co-operate. It is incumbent on Members such as Mr McDevitt and Ms McLaughlin, who have the ear of the authorities in the Republic at a political level, to put a bit of pressure on Minister O'Reilly to co-operate and to try to assist us in this by urging him to do as he suggested.

Mr Beggs: I fully support that. There needs to be co-operation for everybody's benefit, whether they are in Northern Ireland or on the island of Ireland. I have no difficulty in saying that.

Kieran McCarthy highlighted that the Royal was safe, but he has not understand why it is deemed to be unsustainable. I do not think that the vast majority of parents have fully understood that, and, if that is the case, there clearly needs to be greater engagement. An explanation needs to be given.

There is a danger of professional institutions driving changes that suit their members, with standards that have good outcomes for patients when they reach those super-centres of excellence. There is one question that I have not heard answered and that a number of Members posed. What of those vulnerable children who have to travel? What of those who need immediate surgery? I am not convinced that, by simply ruling them out and creating difficulties from them, there is the greater good. So, I think that there is an onus on us all to try to provide a service in Belfast. We must provide it there, because lives could be lost otherwise.

There is also the risk of de-skilling, which a number of Members mentioned. The full regional children's services could unravel. There is paediatric cardiology to consider, as well as paediatric anaesthetists, who are involved in a very specialist area. What will happen to them? Will we lose that critical mass? So, if that surgery is lost, greater uncertainty will arise.

Pam Brown indicated that, sometimes, it is not possible to do everything. That is true, but we have to look at where we know there will be fatal outcomes. That is a huge warning. Before we end services, we need to look very

carefully at where we know there will definitely be fatal outcomes.

A number of Members talked about the flawed report and aspects of it. Maeve McLaughlin highlighted the scoring mechanism. Gordon Dunne said that it was impossible to monitor the skills base in Northern Ireland. He wanted an assurance that the services in Dublin were of the necessary quality. I think that, in the first instance, we want to try to maintain the service locally in Belfast. I always listen to a doctor in an instance such as this; Alasdair McDonnell thought that two-site working would be possible if contracts were set. I hope that such contracts will be set.

I think that the Minister has the Assembly's best wishes for his discussion tomorrow with his counterparts. I hope that flexibility, as well as an interest in the people of Northern Ireland and the children of the future, will be shown. We wish you well in your discussions. We hope that that two-site model will emerge.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes the publication of the preferred option document by the paediatric congenital cardiac services working group and the related Children's Heartbeat Trust report; calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to reject the recommendation of a Dublin-only service for the future commissioning of regional paediatric cardiac surgery and interventional cardiology; and to select a model which retains primary provision and the ability to operate on emergency admissions in Belfast.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I ask the House to take its ease before we move to the next item of business.

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

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. —
[Mr Deputy Speaker.]

Adjournment

Primary Schools: South Belfast

Mr Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes. The Minister will have 10 minutes in which to respond. All other Members who are called to speak will have approximately seven minutes.

Dr McDonnell: I am very glad to be able to make a few points in this Adjournment debate about the excessive demand that there is for primary school places generally in south Belfast.

Starting school is one of the great milestones in a child's life. It is also one of the great stress points for parents, and all the parents whom I know want to be able to access comfortably a local primary school that meets their expectations and their child's needs. That is particularly so when a vulnerable four- or five-year-old has extra problems with health or other issues.

The oversubscription for primary school places and, for that matter, accessible nursery school places is unfortunately no stranger in south Belfast. Every year, many of the distressed parents of vulnerable four- and five-year-olds knock on my door to seek a degree of reassurance, comfort and support, and I am sure that colleagues have also experienced that. They are concerned that their child will have to travel a significant distance — indeed, what many perceive to be an intolerable distance — to get into a suitable nursery school or to secure a place in an acceptable primary school. In all those cases, the child has often been rejected by one, two or three nurseries or primary schools closer to home that would and should have been physically, mentally and emotionally much more convenient for the parents and the child.

This year, one of the most acute problems was experienced by parents applying to enrol their children in P1 in the new St Ita's Primary School in the Newtownbreda area. The school is a newbuild that opened in March 2006, and we were told that it would provide more than enough places for years to come. This year again, my office and I were inundated with parents who were very distressed and stressed to be informed by the Department of Education that their child was being denied their first-preference place in St Ita's. To add to the stress that that placed on parents, they were also informed that St Joseph's Primary School in Carryduff and St Bernard's Primary School at Wynchurch, adjacent Catholic or maintained schools, were not options as all their places had been filled. That left parents who wished to choose the maintained sector or a Catholic education with a severely restricted choice, and having to contemplate sending a P1 child — a five-year-old — on a journey of some miles to the nearest accessible school. Places were on offer in Sunnyside Street, which, for some, was two to three miles away, depending on where they lived.

After much lobbying by affected parents — I put on record my congratulations to them for their determination and all their hard work — and after some correspondence with the Minister and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), the Minister announced that he had finally approved a development proposal to increase capacity in St Ita's Primary School. The proposal will see an increase in the school's capacity from 525 places to 574, which will mean an increase in the admission number from 75 to 82. I understand that there is a flexibility option that could see that figure go up to 87. I congratulate the Minister and thank him for that. It is a welcome move, but it is a short-term approach to what has been a consistent problem over a number of years in St Ita's and other schools across south Belfast: excessive demand in pockets, although I appreciate that it is in pockets.

The Newtownbreda area of south Belfast, in which St Ita's is situated, is an expanding area of rapid population growth, particularly of young families. New and large housing developments have recently sprung up in Brooke Hall and Bracken Hill, and the potential development of the former Woodlawn garden centre site could result in up to 400 additional new homes in that area. That is not speculative, because homes in nearby Bracken Hill are being built and are selling, despite the downturn and all the rest. In other words, it is a very desirable neighbourhood for young couples and families to live in. In addition to those 400 new homes, there is the potential, though not immediate, for 700 new homes in Carryduff down the road in the medium term. All that growth will have a significant knock-on effect on the demand for nursery and primary school places in that neighbourhood.

Yet, despite the reasonably well-documented development and demographic changes in the area as Belfast expands southwards, despite the preponderance of young families with nursery and P1-aged children in that change, and despite the fact that, within that population change, there is a very strong parental demand for school places in the maintained sector or the Catholic-ethos sector — that demand is not always for religious reasons, I must add, but is often driven by the high-quality education. St Ita's has achieved sky-high success in the seven years that it has operated. So much so that demand is now coming from beyond the traditional catchment in the Catholic area. There are a number of pupils in the intake who are Protestant and a number who are neither Catholic nor Protestant. Despite all that, CCMS and the Department of Education appear to continue to fail to respond in a strategic or long-term way. While that failure is allowed to continue, oversubscription and excessive demand for school places will be an even bigger problem year on year in south Belfast.

I will give you a simple example: last year, 2012, St Ita's had a demand for 112 nursery places; only 52 could be accepted. That demand for 112 nursery places last year translated this year into 105 P1 applications that were on time and a number that were not. In other words, there were some 110 or 112 children — roughly similar to the demand for nursery places last year. In other words, nursery demand last year gives you a fair reflection of what this year's P1 demand will be, and this year's nursery demand will give you a fair reflection of what the P1 demand will be next year. We know that this year there was a demand for 122 nursery places, and only 52 can be accepted. That suggests, even at a conservative estimate

— if we cut the 122 a bit — that there will be at least 112 to 115 P1 places sought next year. That is roughly an increase of 10 from this year, and, again, that is being very conservative. I believe that in 2014, there will be another 10, and in 2015, there will probably be another 10.

The point that is being missed here is that there is a sense that the downturn in housing has arrested or frozen all housing development. There is extra good-quality family housing being built at Brooke Hall and Bracken Hill. My understanding is — I have not actually counted them, but people living there have told me — that 120 houses have opened up there in the past 12 to 18 months. That will only increase demand even further.

We have a degree of crisis on our hands, and I appeal to the Minister, CCMS and all interested parties. I fully recognise the changes that have been made in recent times to allow St Ita's to expand, but the crisis that I see coming will not be met unless radical action is taken. All the schools in that area, even the likes of Cairnshill, which does have one or two vacancies, will, to my mind, be swamped in the years ahead. My appeal is that we should take a strategic, long-term approach.

6.15 pm

Our expectation was that, if anything, there would be a downturn in demand for school places. While that may be happening in the inner city, it is not happening in the outer city. When there is a bit of a surge like this, we sometimes feel that it is a bulge that will come today and fade next week or next year. However, my sense is that, because of the family-friendly nature of the Newtownbreda and Carryduff areas, the demand will be sustained. We have to make some effort to ensure that children aged four and five are facilitated.

It may be reasonable to expect a child in a rural area to travel two, three or four miles, given school buses and everything else. However, given the heavy traffic and everything else in urban areas, we need to ensure that children there can easily access a primary school near home. That is particularly significant when a child falls ill or when a parent has to be sent for to take the child home from school.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I do not want to take up any more time as I have made my point. Thank you for your indulgence.

Mr Spratt: I thank Dr McDonnell for bringing forward the Adjournment debate. Dr McDonnell covered many of the areas of concern, but I want to say a few things.

I can confirm that there is considerable growth in the Newtownbreda and Carryduff area. As Dr McDonnell stated very clearly, additional housing is due to go up in the area plan, which will increase the numbers going to schools — all schools, hopefully — in the area.

During my year as Mayor of Castlereagh, I had the pleasure of working with St Joseph's and St Ita's. Both those schools have been very successful, and I have always had a good relationship with them. Parents have raised issues with me in relation to not being able to get their child into their school of first choice.

This has been a day of excesses. This morning, we talked about the excesses of amalgamation and the possible amalgamation of three primary schools in the inner south

Belfast area. Now, we are talking about this problem in the outer area.

One of the major issues about which, I think, all our offices get most complaints is not being able to get nursery places. That goes right across the board, including the controlled sector. It is a very frustrating issue for parents, particularly those who want their children to go to that school in the future. The issue of nursery school places needs to be tackled. As Alasdair McDonnell said, applications for nursery school places are a key indicator of the numbers that will apply for P1 places at those schools. They provide an excellent planning method.

There is demand for both of these schools. From this side of the House, I urge the Minister to look at the issue very seriously. There are some places in other schools. Newtownbreda primary school was closed, which created a problem in the area with children being displaced. Children do not now have the opportunity to go there. Cairnshill is pretty well full. It has probably a few places but, as indicated by the unmet need, not a real number.

Children from all faiths are welcome in the controlled sector, and, in many cases, parents choose that option. However, that opportunity is not there either: there are no available places because some other schools have closed. So, there is an issue in that area that needs to be addressed, and the Department needs to look at it again seriously. Progress has been made on nursery places, but that area needs to be looked at so that children can get to the primary school of their choice, particularly if they have brothers or sisters in the school. I urge the Minister to look at that.

I support Dr McDonnell's comments.

Mr Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I also thank Alasdair McDonnell for securing this Adjournment debate. I join the two Members who have spoken in commending the parents and the school, St Ita's in this case, for campaigning well in recent times, particularly the past couple of years, to have the school expanded to take in the increased demand for pupil places. In particular, I thank the parents who have made it very clear to locally elected representatives that there is a growing demand for this sector. This school meets all the criteria that most parents look for when searching for a school for their children.

Like the two Members who have spoken, I welcome the fact that this school has been granted the ability to expand, which will enable extra pupils to be educated in it. Alasdair McDonnell outlined that there are a number of schools in the area at which some parents, particularly in the Catholic community, want to have their children educated. The only opportunity is for expansion at St Ita's. I firmly welcome the fact that that development proposal has been passed.

From speaking to parents recently and over the past two years, I can safely say that a number of people have been trying to get their children placed in schools. For a number of reasons, there has been more of a focus on St Ita's. However, from speaking to parents, CCMS and others recently, it is clear to me that we have not been doing enough forward planning. The planning process has not been as effective as it needs to be. We heard that part of the reason for the growing demand is an increase in the number of houses in the area. The demographics in the

area also continue to change, year on year. Those are key factors that need to be taken into consideration.

As the proposer made clear from the outset, probably one of the most important times in a child's life is being placed in their first class in their first school. For parents, that can be stressful because their child is going to school for the first time and they are trying to get them placed, usually in the school that is closest to home and which has a good reputation.

One school not having as good a reputation as others is another day's discussion. That should not be permissible either. We need to deal with the fact that every school might not be as good as it should be. The Minister is clear in his mind and in his policies that that should not be the case and that every school should be a good school, because that is another way of alleviating the stress that families have to endure when they are looking at schools for their children and are trying to make judgements about which is best for their child's needs.

I am very encouraged by the intention of the Minister and the Department to make sure that every school is a good school because that would take a lot of stress away from parents and families in general and from people in schools such as teachers, principals, boards of governors and other education bodies. Everybody sighed with relief when we heard about the development proposal that advocated expansion for St Ita's. People were grateful that the Minister was able to give approval to that development proposal. I hope and expect that, this year, that will address the needs of a number of parents to have their children placed in St Ita's and, therefore, in that sector in this constituency. However, I ask the Minister and all other education bodies to ensure that we have processes in place that will allow us to plan in a more effective way than happened in this case.

Mr McGimpsey: Like other Members, I thank Alasdair McDonnell for securing the debate. I have absolutely no problem with supporting the proposition that, where possible, parents should be able to send children to the school of their choice. The choice of primary school when your youngest children are starting P1 is a very important one for families, and a lot of anxiety can go with that if there is competition for places. It seems logical, sensible and necessary that the Department respond to the demand and that the schools should be allowed to expand as required to meet it.

As Jimmy Spratt said, this is a juxtaposition with this morning's debate on inner south Belfast, where none of the three primary schools is sustainable in its current building. All have empty desks, so we are looking at an amalgamation of three into one in the controlled sector. That is partly due to population drift. As people move from inner south Belfast to outer south Belfast, that is reflected in the demand for schools, but it is also because of the division of our education system into sectors. As mentioned, four years ago, Newtownbreda Primary School was shut because of a lack of numbers, yet primary schools a mile or two up the road are bursting at the seams and need expansion. It does not stop there. Look at what happened recently in the secondary sector in south Belfast, with schools such as Dunmurry High School, Balmoral High School on Blacks Road and Lisnasharragh High School closing. Orangefield High School has a question mark over it, there is now a big question mark

over Knockbreda High School, and a number of schools are closing in the state sector.

Rationalisation is clearly required. We should look to meet the demand and, as far as possible, to fulfil the choice that parents make for their children, because that is their right. However, because of the cost involved, we cannot go on closing schools in one sector and opening schools in another. We need some sort of rationalisation, and it is a matter for the Department to determine where we are going. It could be that the next generation, in addressing a new shortage, may seek to reopen schools that we have closed. Newtownbreda Primary School, for example, was closed four years ago, but the building is still there. Is reopening it an option? In the integrated sector, newbuilds are going up, and we know that they attract pupils because we have seen that in Finaghy, Taughmonagh and outer south Belfast, and it is happening at St Ita's and St Joseph's. However, I understand that there is space at Cairnshill Primary School. There is not a lot of space, but it has some capacity, and I understand that the same applies to Carryduff Primary School in the controlled sector. I am sure that the Minister will know the details of that better than I do.

It seems to me that there is a wider question. Yes, we need to meet the immediate demand and provide choice for parents and families, but we also need to look at this in a more holistic way. What is happening in South Belfast could be repeated in a number of constituencies throughout Northern Ireland that have such a mismatch. When one sector of the population moves, that education sector decreases, and, at the same time, we are investing to build up another sector in order to meet the demand created by that shift in population. Clearly, that is not sustainable. Therefore, I am happy to support the motion, but the Minister and the Department have serious issues to address. I have no doubt that the Minister will need the wisdom of Solomon to address those issues in the years to come.

6.30 pm

Ms Lo: I thank Dr McDonnell for bringing this important issue to the House.

A number of constituents have contacted me for assistance with regard to the allocation of places at St Ita's Primary School. Parents were concerned about the prospect of being unsuccessful in getting a place in their first-choice school because of oversubscription in popular schools in south Belfast. It is no wonder that they are concerned; an article in the 'Belfast Telegraph' on 20 April claimed that almost 1,000 four-year-olds across Northern Ireland have missed out on their choice of primary school because of oversubscription. That also means that hundreds of pupils now face having to bypass their local schools. Obviously, another problem for parents is that collecting children for after-school childcare will be a big problem if they are going to be miles away from their home.

In schools such as St Ita's, even though it has increased its intake in recent years to accommodate increasing interest, oversubscription continues to grow and the school is unable to meet demand, year-on-year. I wrote to Minister O'Dowd to support a development proposal that would enable St Ita's to expand and accommodate rising enrolment, and I tabled questions for written answer,

asking the Minister to outline what action his Department intends to take to address the deficit in primary school places for children who are entering P1 in the Carryduff and Drumbo parish areas. The response that I received stated that the Department and relevant boards will work with parents to ensure that all children are allocated a place. It is not just a place that parents want; it is the school of their choice that they want, perhaps because it is close to their home or because they are attracted by its good reputation.

The CCMS response to my query about the problem with capacity at St Ita's was that, under open enrolment regulations, access to first preference schools is not guaranteed, but I am glad to learn that CCMS has commissioned further work to identify future trends in the parish and the wider area, which includes the potential to provide some additional accommodation.

There is an argument that, perhaps, part of the problem is that integrated schools have not been allowed to grow in the way that they should and that they are still being held back. I believe that Catholic parents might have opted to send their children to an integrated school had places been available. I recently heard from a couple in a mixed marriage that they were mightily disappointed that they could not get a place for their son in two integrated schools in Belfast because of oversubscription.

Recent surveys have clearly indicated that there is an increase in demand for integrated education and that there is still too much of a focus on established schools. The debate earlier today, as other Members said, highlighted how we have allowed three established schools to dwindle in another part of south Belfast to the point of necessary amalgamation. Would the solution not be that there should be more integrated schools to cater for all sections of our community?

Another problem is the lack of flexibility in the short term. Every once in a while there will be a spike in birth rates that will increase applications to schools, particularly the popular ones such as St Ita's. How does the Minister aim to ensure better flexibility in the future?

We talk about parental choice all the time. I can understand why parents feel aggrieved when they are being forced to accept schools that they have not chosen, because it has an impact on the type of education that they want for their children. If the Department of Education paid more attention to developing trends in parental choice rather than sustaining the status quo, the benefits would be that choice is met and that schools could be rationalised in an organic way. There is a need for better forward planning and a bit more vision. There will be anomalies in numbers, but there appears to be a steady increase in applications to schools such as St Ita's. The Department needs to plan for that. I am very pleased to hear that St Ita's development proposal was accepted, but many are not.

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): I welcome the opportunity for the debate on provision in south Belfast. A number of Members covered points that I hope to address during my response. Many of the issues that Dr McDonnell raised are the very reason why I introduced area planning and primary school area planning. A number of Members, including Mr Maskey, touched on the need to plan going into the future and the need to take into account population

growth and trends in these matters. That is why I have commissioned the Catholic Commission and the boards to bring forward plans that look into the future on how we provide primary school provision.

A number of Members referred to nursery school places. The Programme for Government commitment is to provide a preschool place, not necessarily a nursery school place. The community and voluntary sector and, indeed, the private sector provide the same curriculum in this area as nursery schools. People argue that parents want to get their children into a nursery school because that allows them to attend the primary school, but primary schools should not be using that as admissions criteria. That should not be the case. Members may well argue that we should increase nursery school provision at one school or another, but I then put it to Members: which of your community and voluntary groups that will no longer be able to provide preschool places would you like me to close down? Those are the alternatives in these matters. I am not aware of a specific issue in south Belfast in regard to the provision of nursery school places, but I will ask my officials to continue to investigate whether there is a particular hotspot of preschool places that we need to investigate further.

Clearly, an issue has arisen this year regarding primary-school placement in the area around the demand for places at St Ita's. The primary school draft area plans said that CCMS was making a development proposal, which it did in February 2012. I acted positively to that development proposal and approved it, and that has helped to alleviate some of the pressures in the area. I am not saying that any of the schools in the immediate vicinity of St Ita's are automatically suitable for the children who wish to attend St Ita's, but I will give Members an idea of the provision in that wider area. Within three to four miles of St Ita's, there are five Catholic maintained primary schools. There is provision for 1,726 pupils at those schools, and there are 181 empty places. If I were to increase and continue to increase primary school provision in St Ita's, I would have to assure myself that other schools would not unduly suffer. We have to ensure that St Joseph's and St Bernard's, for instance, remain viable going into the future. Beyond that, within a three-to-four-mile radius, we have to ensure that St Michael's, Holy Rosary and St Bride's schools remain viable going onto the future. Therefore, it is not as simple as an equation of saying that we will increase provision at the school that is in front of me now and forget about everything else. We have to take into account the entire provision in the area.

Many Members referred to parental choice. The legislation actually refers to parental preference in this regard. Parents are asked to put down preferences on the application form. I can understand parents' desire to obtain a place in a school that may be their favourite school, and we do everything in our powers to facilitate them, but I am not aware of any public service where someone can be guaranteed access to a stated public service of their choice. Unfortunately, we cannot run public services in that way. I encourage the Members who are present to respond to the area planning process, particularly that for the South Belfast area, because that is the way forward in determining future educational provision in that area.

I have received correspondence from Dr McDonnell and Mr Maskey, who sought meetings with me to discuss future

educational provision in the South Belfast area. I am happy to confirm that, as part of my deliberations on how we should move forward, I have had those meetings and have had discussions with elected representatives from the area. I will also say to Members that they should respond to the ongoing area planning process for that area.

There is little more to be said. Members have made known their views that there is an issue of particular concern in South Belfast, that there may not be enough primary school provision in that constituency and that it may be in the wrong place. Those matters will have to be resolved. We have reacted to the development proposal, which is a medium-term plan for St Ita's. However, it may require redrafting once the area plans have been finalised.

I will say this to Members: when one school is lobbying you about increasing its enrolment numbers, ask yourselves what the effects of that may be on the other schools in the constituency. Take the judgement on that in the round. If it is the right thing to have one or two schools as a priority, so be it. However, every action has a reaction. When planning school numbers, if you react to the demands of one school, it may have a detrimental impact on another.

I hope that area planning will answer our concerns. We have certainly posed all those questions; we now have to establish the answers. Thank you very much.

Adjourned at 6.42 pm.

Written Ministerial Statements

The content of these written ministerial statements is as received at the time from the Ministers. It has not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process.

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Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service: Further Allegations

Published at 4.30 pm on Tuesday 16 April 2013

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I wish to make a statement to the Assembly to update members on the outcome of the investigation into further allegations made against the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS).

In my statement of 1 November 2012 I advised members that I had received a number of further allegations about potential fraud, theft or other irregularities in NIFRS and that I had tasked the Departmental Accounting Officer with the responsibility of ensuring a satisfactory and independent investigation of the material specific allegations that have been made. These allegations were in addition to those included within the reports published by my Department on 16 October 2012.

The Department of Social Development's Corporate Investigations Unit investigated the majority of the material allegations. Allegations relating to the World Police and Fire Games were investigated by the Department of Culture Arts and Leisure. Other allegations, which related to operational or HR issues and which fell outside the expertise of the DSD Corporate Investigations Unit, have been forwarded to the NIFRS for the consideration of its recently appointed Director of Human Resources.

I am today placing the DSD Corporate Investigation Unit's Report on my Department's website.

None of the allegations investigated to date have been substantiated and I will advise you should ongoing work change that position.

I know that members had expressed particular concern about the allegations relating to the supply of woodchip to Orange Halls. The DSD team has considered the correlation of the amounts of woodchip purchased by the NIFRS against the likely amounts used in confirmed burns. While this cannot be an exact science, it has found no clear evidence to suggest any theft of woodchip material.

Similarly it has found no evidence of unauthorised use of NIFRS vehicles to transport woodchip.

The DSD investigation has, however, highlighted shortcomings with NIFRS internal control systems and

identified the need for additional capacity within its Internal Audit Team. These areas have previously been identified in other reviews: stock control in the second Whistle blowing Report which I published on 16 October 2012 and the capacity of Internal Audit in the Comptroller and Auditor General's report published on 8 April 2013.

I have, therefore, asked the NIFRS interim Chief Executive to urgently consider the recommendations in this report and develop an action plan to address the issues raised. I have also asked him for a report on how he intends to progress the ongoing internal review of the NIFRS Internal Audit function.

The Report also recommends that the Department should make clear to the NIFRS Board and Audit Committee the extent and nature of their responsibilities with regard to the oversight of the NIFRS Internal Audit Function and I have again tasked the Departmental Accounting Officer to ensure that the roles and responsibilities of NIFRS Board and committee members are clearly explained.

The DSD team also considered whether the Department had been made aware of concerns about the Fire Authority management dating back to February 2002. It found that two of the issues had been referred to the then Minister on 26 February 2003 as part of supporting information about ongoing performance issues; that the Department appeared to have focused on those issues and that there did not appear to have been a specific investigation of the allegations.

The Report again draws attention to management failures which the NIFRS should already be addressing. None of this reflects on the courageous team of firefighters who continue to protect the whole community. I know, however, that as the public face of the organisation their morale may have been affected by the ongoing criticisms of the corporate governance arrangements within NIFRS. I know all Members would support me, therefore, in supporting and applauding our firefighters and the dedicated work that they do.

The Report is published on the Department's website today. I am very grateful to the Department of Social Development's Corporate Investigations Unit for its commitment in working through these allegations.

As I have said previously, I fully support anyone who has issues of concern to raise them through their line management or through whistleblowing procedures. This investigation has not substantiated the allegations but it is also consistent with previous reviews in identifying a number of shortcomings in corporate governance.

In that respect, following the PAC hearing on 24 April, it is vital that the organisation is able to move on and address the recommendations made, and thereby improve the effectiveness and efficiency of NIFRS HQ. I believe that the senior management team and the Board are committed to doing so and my Department will give them every support in this challenging agenda.

Environment

Local Government Reform Programme: Transfer of Functions from Central to Local Government

Published at 7.00 pm on Wednesday 17 April 2013

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): As you are all aware, I am managing local government reform in line with the 2015 timetable proposed in the Executive's Programme for Government 2011-15. I have continued to push hard on local government reform matters and the Programme is progressing steadily. The recent announcement on the provision of a funding package, the ongoing consultation on councillor severance, the imminent appointment of a Councillor Remuneration Panel, the draft Local Government Bill now in circulation among Ministers and the forthcoming regulations on Statutory Transition Committees are all moving the process on.

The Regional Transition Committee and Regional Transition Operational Board have continued to meet regularly. The Political Reference Group has also met, having held its inaugural meeting in December, and will meet again shortly. Momentum therefore continues to build, with progress being made at these meetings. I have also visited all 11 Voluntary Transition Committees at their cluster locations to see at first hand how they are approaching the considerable work they need to undertake and to listen to their issues and concerns. I continue to emphasise that we are well past the point of no return on local government reform.

Functions to Transfer

A key and significant element of local government reform is the issue of which responsibilities and functions should transfer from central government to local councils. Discussions regarding which functions should transfer have been ongoing for a number of months and following the Executive Committee's decision on 11th April 2013, I am now able to bring some certainty to the process.

The Executive has decided that the following functions should transfer on 1st April 2015:

- Planning
 - Local development plan functions
 - Development control and enforcement.
- Roads
 - Off street parking (except Park and Ride)
 - Urban regeneration and community development:
 - Functions associated with physical development (e.g. environmental improvement schemes)
 - Area based regeneration (such as Neighbourhood Renewal)
 - Some community development programmes for the voluntary and community sectors.
- Housing:
 - Registration of houses in multiple occupation
 - Housing unfitness responsibilities, including repair and demolition notices

- Local Economic Development (transfer from Invest NI);
 - Start a Business Programme and Enterprise Shows
 - Youth Entrepreneurship (such as Prince's Trust and Shell Livewire)
 - Social Entrepreneurship
 - Investing for Women
 - Neighbourhood Renewal funding relating to enterprises initiatives.
- Local Tourism:
- Small scale tourism accommodation development
 - 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.
- Other
- Delivery of the EU Rural Development Programme;
 - Authority to Spot List to enable Councils to add a building to the statutory list on a temporary basis, subject to ratification by the DOE;
 - Authority to draw up local lists of buildings that are of architectural and/or historic interest;
 - Armagh County Museum;
 - local water recreational facilities;
 - local sports (greater involvement of local government in local sports decisions);
 - Donaghadee Harbour

It is also intended to introduce a statute-based system of council-led community planning. Community planning is a process whereby councils, statutory bodies and the community and voluntary sectors work together to develop and implement a shared vision for promoting the well-being of their area and pave the way for the most efficient use of scarce resources.

Funding and Staffing

Now that the package of functions is agreed, it is important that we move swiftly to confirm the number of staff transferring and the quantum of funding. In confirming these details, Ministers will have regard to the principle agreed by the previous Executive. That is: functions which are to transfer from central to local government should be fit for purpose, sufficiently funded and cost neutral to the ratepayer at the point of transfer. This will require the transfer of resources from central to local government when the functions transfer. There will also be a requirement for Departments to commit adequate resources preparing for the functions to transfer.

Ministerial colleagues have agreed to provide me with this information by 31st May 2013. This will enable Departments to provide certainty to staff and to draw up firm transfer plans to ensure that all functions are fit for purpose and properly financed. It will also enable councils to begin to plan new organisational structures and arrangements.

Future Functions for Transfer

The previous Executive agreed a vision for local Government in March 2008. That vision is one of a strong, dynamic local government creating communities that are vibrant, healthy, prosperous, safe and sustainable, and which have the needs of all people at their core. Central to the vision is the provision of high quality, efficient services that respond to the needs of people and continuously improve over time.

There was a clear view that, in order to deliver this vision, the functions to be transferred should be cohesive and that there was a critical mass or "family of functions" needed. I believe that the functions that we will transfer in 2015 form the bedrock from which to build such a critical mass. Transferring planning and regeneration powers will allow locally elected leaders to begin to shape the places they live in. The other transferring functions, coupled with new community planning powers, will allow local councils to become effective local champions, responding to the aspirations and concerns of their communities and guiding, in partnership with others, the future development of their area.

However, I think it is important that we recognise that the Transfer of Functions from Central to Local Government should be a process, rather than an event. There are potentially other functions which would be better delivered at local level. Therefore, the Executive Committee has also agreed that in April 2016, one year after the initial transfer, the transfer package should be reviewed, with a view to augmenting the package.

Conclusion

I am pleased that this important issue has now been settled and will continue to work in partnership with local government to deliver the Executive's vision.

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 19 April 2013

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Gender Equality Strategy

Mr McMullan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the gender equality strategy.
(AQO 3557/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): A review of the Gender Equality Strategy and its associated cross departmental Action Plans is currently underway. The review, which is scheduled to be completed in April, will consider how effectively the Strategy has performed against its objectives; assess the effectiveness of the Action Plans; and make recommendations for the aims, objectives and delivery of the Strategy and Action Plans in the years remaining – 2013-16.

Delivering Social Change

Mr Moutray asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what plans they have to bring forward additional signature projects under Delivering Social Change.
(AQO 3705/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The early work being taken forward under the Delivering Social Change framework is focusing on the needs of children and families in order to ensure that the most urgent and significant problems in our society are addressed – problems such as poor educational outcomes, poor physical and mental health, economic activity, social exclusion and disadvantage.

In line with this initial focus, we have agreed a 'Children and Young Persons Early Action Document' which identifies key priorities to be taken forward over the coming years. The initial six Signature Programmes we announced on 10 October 2012 were designed, therefore, to address some of the key priorities identified within the Early Action Document.

However, you will be aware that the Delivering Social Change framework is seeking to reduce poverty and associated issues across all ages, and so whilst this initial focus is on the needs of our children and young people, its longer term objective is to lay the basis for sustained social improvement for all our vulnerable groups.

We are therefore keen that further programmes are identified as a rolling programme of new initiatives, and we are currently giving consideration to a number of possible future signature programmes for a second phase of work to be taken forward.

However we believe that the greatest influence that Delivering Social Change can have is to change the culture and the core spending within departments. If we can get departments to refocus some of their core budgets then we believe that we can seriously tackle the issues of poverty and deprivation.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Ms Fearon asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on their input to the report to the Committee of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.
(AQO 3707/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UK State Party Report is due to be submitted to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child by 14 January 2014 as part of the Periodic Review.

The Department for Education in England leads the process and officials within OFMDFM have been co-ordinating work across the Executive to provide our input, which will include how we have addressed the Concluding Observations from the previous Periodic Review in 2008.

The exercise provides us with an opportunity to take a critical look at the state of children's lives, using the Child Rights Indicator Framework which we are developing with the UNESCO Centre. The Framework will provide an evidence base not

just for the report but also for assessing progress on the Executive's 10 year Strategy for Children and Young People and for informing policy development in relation to children and young people over the longer term.

The sector has been closely involved in the development of the framework and we will seek to maintain that collaborative approach to identify gaps in delivery and to address the issues facing children.

We also recognise the importance of the voice of children in the report and will be consulting with children through a range of fora over the next few months.

We recognise that providing input to the report is not an end in itself. Its real benefits lie in the opportunity it provides to re-examine the extent to which children's rights are met and to reinvigorate our efforts to improve the lives of our children and young people.

Social Investment Fund

Mr Buchanan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the progress of the Social Investment Fund in the nine designated zones.

(AQO 3712/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Steering groups from across the nine designated zones have now completed the area planning process and submitted final area plans.

The plans, which were received on 28 February, contain a broad range of projects aimed at addressing critical needs in those zones such as education underachievement, unemployment, health issues and physical regeneration.

The plans and projects are now the subject of a quality assurance review. This process will assess the individual projects against set criteria to ensure the most robust projects are recommended, to maximise impact on the ground.

Following appraisal, we will take decisions on the final projects to be funded and the most appropriate delivery mechanism, with a view to projects commencing in communities soon afterwards.

Strategic Investment Board: OFMDFM Assets

Mr D Bradley asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 17631/11-15, to detail the nature of the £0.20m in assets that their Department has identified to the Asset Management Unit of the Strategic Investment Board, broken down by year.

(AQW 21458/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The £0.20m in assets scheduled for disposal in 2014/15 relates to the former Regional Government Headquarters Building and associated land in Ballymena. The projected value is based on a valuation undertaken by Land and Property Services in early 2012 and will be reviewed before the property is offered for sale to take account of the prevailing market conditions at the time.

Translation Services: OFMDFM

Mr Craig asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how much their Department spent on translation services for visiting foreign nationals in each of the last five years.

(AQW 21524/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Our Department has not incurred any expenditure on such translation services in the last five years.

Historical Institutional Abuse

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what progress has been made on the establishment of an advocacy service for victims and survivors of historical institutional abuse.

(AQW 21626/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: OFMDFM listened to victims' concerns about the need for support services for victims and survivors and as a result ensured that, in January 2012, arrangements were put in place for victims and survivors of historical institutional abuse to make full use of the counselling support services provided by Lifeline.

Lifeline operates a free, in confidence telephone line which can be contacted 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Lifeline will provide up to 6 full counselling sessions with victims and survivors depending on their individual needs. This can be extended further in exceptional circumstances.

Victims and survivors are also provided with the contact details for the Nexus Institute, which provides free counselling and support services to people who have experienced sexual abuse.

In October 2012, at the request of Survivors and Victims of Institutional Abuse (SAVIA), OFMDFM funded the WAVE Trauma Centre to provide a drop in and counselling facility for victims and survivors in Derry/Londonderry. The meeting place is available from 10am-12pm every Friday morning and a qualified Trauma counsellor is on hand.

A similar meeting place had been provided in Belfast City Centre, but as it was not used, it was discontinued at the end of January 2013.

OFMDFM invited tenders for a broader service for victims and survivors with a closing date of 24 January 2013. Work on this is ongoing.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

TV, Radio and Newspaper Advertising Campaigns: DARD Spend

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail her Department's TV, radio and newspaper advertising campaigns, in each of the last three years; and the spend on each campaign.

(AQW 21064/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development):

2009/10

CAFRE	CAFRE recruitment – newspapers, trade press and cinema advertising	£60,969.00
Disease Prevention and Management	Brucellosis awareness – newspaper advertising	£5,444.26
Rural Development Programme	Rural Development Programme – newspaper advertising	£18,000.00
	Total	£84,413.26

2010/11

CAFRE	CAFRE recruitment – newspapers, trade press and cinema advertising	£47,908.00
Disease Prevention and Management	Brucellosis awareness – newspaper advertising	£6,366.58
	Total	£54,274.58

2011/12

CAFRE	CAFRE recruitment – newspapers, trade press and cinema advertising	£52,481.17
	Total	£52,481.17

Single Farm Payments

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action she has taken to assure farmers residing in areas subjected to the recent severe snowstorms, that they will receive their outstanding Single Farm Payments.

(AQW 21374/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am pleased to say that 2012 Single Farm Payments have already been made to 95% of farmers in the affected areas as a result of actions I took previously to accelerate the processing of inspections in 2012.

EU rules only permit Single Farm Payments (SFP) to be paid when all verification checks have been completed and the correct amount due has been calculated. I am assured that the small number of cases in these areas that have not yet been paid solely because of the need to apply inspection findings to claims will be completed by the end of May. The Department engages on an ongoing basis with individual farmers concerned about their payments and gives them an indication as to when they might expect their payment to be finalised.

A small number of claims each year cannot be paid for reasons beyond the control of my Department. A payment may not be due in all remaining cases because of ineligibility or the application of penalties under scheme rules.

Farmers who require information about the estimated timing of payments on SFP claims which have not yet been finalised should contact my Department's Single Farm Payment Branch on Telephone 0300 200 8848.

Rural Schools

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what plans she has to visit rural schools that are earmarked for closure.

(AQW 21376/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I have no plans to visit schools earmarked for closure. Decisions around school closures are a matter for the Minister of Education taking account of the educational needs of our children and ensuring that they have access to high quality education regardless of where they live.

Rural Schools

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what discussions she has had to date with the Minister of Education on the issue of school closures in rural areas.

(AQW 21377/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I have previously written to the Minister of Education on a number of occasions regarding the future of rural schools highlighting the important role they play in helping to sustain rural communities. The Minister of Education has responded reaffirming his commitment to sustaining rural communities and outlining his Department's Sustainable Schools Policy.

He has also confirmed that the Sustainable Schools Policy was rural proofed prior to its publication in 2009 and that any decision to close or amalgamate a rural school is subject to an assessment using the criteria set out in the policy, covering a number of factors, not just the number of pupils. He also reaffirmed that it is the quality of education which is his over-riding consideration.

Extreme Weather Conditions: Livestock Loss in Craigtlet Hills

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether there have been any claims from farmers for loss of livestock due to the snow in the Craigtlet Hills area of North Down.

(AQW 21381/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Claims are recorded by the Postcode area of the farm. Records to date show one claim received from the BT23 area, which includes the Craigtlet Hills, and one from the BT25 area. In that case the animals were grazed in the Craigtlet hills.

Extreme Weather Conditions: Cost of Helicopter Supplies Drops

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether her Department paid for the use of helicopters to drop supplies to farmers stranded by snow.

(AQW 21384/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In line with standard procedure and Treasury protocols, the Ministry of Defence expects to be reimbursed when it provides support to the civil authorities throughout Britain and the north of Ireland. The detail of the actual costs for the use of helicopters to drop supplies to farmers are still being worked out and have not yet been presented to the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

The Irish Air Corps have indicated that there would be no charge for the aerial support provided by them to get supplies of fodder to livestock.

Extreme Weather Conditions

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many farmers have been affected by the recent snowstorms.

(AQW 21385/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The affect of the adverse weather on farmers continues to unfold. At the 11 April fallen stock had been collected from 660 farms. 94 farmers have had feed moved to livestock by soft tracks and there have been 46 air drops. 373 calls have also been received relating to other adverse weather issues such as requests for fodder and structural damage.

Extreme Weather Conditions: Financial Assistance to Farmers

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether her Department can provide financial assistance to farmers whose outbuildings were damaged during the recent heavy snow.

(AQW 21394/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am very aware of and fully sympathise with the very difficult situation our farmers find themselves in at this time due to circumstances outside their control, not least in the context of the recent snow storm.

No funding is planned for structural damage to outbuildings that were damaged during the snow storm. It is expected that such damage would be an insurance matter. I have obtained Executive agreement to hardship funding measures to assist

farmers worst affected by livestock losses arising from the recent snow storm. The first element of this is that my Department will pay for the costs of collection and disposal of fallen stock from those farmers most severely affected. This relieves those farmers of a potential cost to their business and protects both the environment and animal health by encouraging the proper disposal of fallen stock.

I also intend to bring to the Executive proposals for a hardship scheme, which will be the second element of the hardship measures. The hardship scheme will help to mitigate the costs of the livestock losses that have been sustained by farmers arising from the snow storm. This will be under the EU de minimis rules and capped at a maximum of 7,500 euro per farmer, including the collection and disposal costs of the fallen animals. Farmers, who have fallen stock disposed of during the period 2 April – 19 April 2013 by approved renderers, will be eligible for the hardship funding. The scheme will be framed in light of the information gathered on the extent and nature of losses, which we will build as farmers have stock removed and disposed of by the approved renderers. The hardship payment will be specifically for livestock losses. I hope to release details of the scheme and how to apply as soon as possible.

Ash Dieback: Carrickfergus

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what urgent actions are being implemented by her Department, in conjunction with other agencies, in relation to the outbreak of ash dieback disease in Carrickfergus. (AQW 21403/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Following confirmation of infection by ash dieback at Whitehead Diamond Jubilee Wood, DARD issued a statutory notice on Friday 5 April 2012 requiring removal and destruction of all the recently planted ash at the site. The Department is in ongoing communication with officials in Carrickfergus Borough Council on the implementation of the required measures including appropriate biosecurity.

Investigations, including further sampling, have been ongoing at a further site at Bashfordsland Wood where a positive result for the pathogen has also been obtained.

Extreme Weather Conditions: DARD Helpline

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many calls have been made to the hotline established to help farmers during the recent extreme weather conditions. (AQW 21411/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: At the 14 April 902 calls, relating to the adverse weather conditions, had been received by the DARD helpline.

Animal Welfare Officers

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) the total number of Animal Welfare Officers operating in the Belfast area; (ii) their total open case load; and (iii) the number of prosecutions (a) secured; and (b) pending. (AQW 21469/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

- (i) There is currently one Animal Welfare Officer based in the Belfast City Council area. However, the 5 Councils which implement the powers in the Welfare of Animals Act 2011, in respect of non-farmed animals, on behalf of the 26 Councils have adopted a flexible approach which allows any of their Animal Welfare Officers to work in any Council area across the north as the volume of cases demand.
- (ii) Belfast City Council currently has 71 open cases. This includes new cases; cases requiring a second visit to check that the recommended action has been taken; cases being considered for prosecution; and cases where prosecution is pending.
- (iii) The provisions in the 2011 Act which enables Councils to investigate animal welfare complaints in respect of non-farmed animals were only commenced on 2 April 2012. This was to honour a commitment given by my predecessor to allow Councils 12 months to prepare for implementation of their new powers. To date, no cases in Belfast City Council area have reached the Courts. However, 5 prosecutions are pending.

Horse Microchips and Passports

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) the total number of horses that have been microchipped and have valid passports; (ii) the total number that have not been microchipped or have a valid passport; (iii) the current enforcement policy; and (iv) the total number of prosecutions secured in the last five years for horses that have not been microchipped nor have a valid passport. (AQW 21569/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

- (i) At 2 July 2012, (the most recent figures available from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs), 19,430 passports had been issued by horse Passport Issuing Organisations in the north. My Department does not hold detail on numbers of horses that have been microchipped.
- (ii) My Department does not hold details of the numbers of horses that have not been microchipped nor have a valid passport.
- (iii) In order to protect the human food chain, the Horse Passports Regulations (NI) 2010 are enforced at point of slaughter and at import / export at ports in the north. A limited number of targeted checks are also carried out at horse sales.
- (iv) No prosecutions have been secured in the last five years for horses that have not been microchipped nor have a valid passport. However, as with any scheme from time to time, complaints/concerns may be raised. Any such queries received are fully investigated by my Department.

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Visit to the Sperrins

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in relation to her visit to the Sperrins on 5 April 2013, which MLAs from the constituencies of (i) West Tyrone; and (ii) East Londonderry were notified (a) in writing; and (b) orally, regarding the visit.

(AQW 21579/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: When I am visiting a constituency, Private Office staff will notify all MLA's within that constituency - normally via email.

On 5 April 2013, I visited Plumbridge in West Tyrone. An email advising of this visit was issued to Barry McElduff MLA, Declan McAleer MLA, Michaela Boyle MLA, Joe Byrne MLA, Thomas Buchanan MLA and Ross Hussey MLA.

Ash Dieback: Jubilee Wood, Whitehead

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what plans there are to replace the trees lost to Ash Dieback Disease in Jubilee Wood, Whitehead.

(AQW 21590/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: As Jubilee Wood belongs to Carrickfergus Borough Council, replanting of trees will be their responsibility. Forest Service will provide advice and guidance on the options available in managing the woodland including selection of alternative species for planting, if required.

Extreme Weather Conditions: Livestock Loss in Craigantlet Hills

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether there has been any claims for deceased animals, due to the recent bad weather, from the Craigantlet Hills area of North Down.

(AQW 21598/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: There has been one claim for eligibility from the Craigantlet Hills area of North Down and this was approved on 09 April 2013.

Rural Development Programme

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the delivery of the current Rural Development Programme.

(AQO 3764/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Implementation and delivery across each Axis and Funding Measure of the Rural Development Programme 2007-13 continues to make good progress and I want to see a Rural Development Programme that delivers the greatest benefit for everyone living or working in our rural areas. There have been many successes to date and these include:-

- Focus Farms Programme, which has enabled 13,800 farmers to learn, share experiences and solve common problems;
- Farm Family Options Programme, which has encouraged 3,000 farm family members to increase their skills and awareness, with financial benchmarking support provided on almost 1,800 farming enterprises;
- Farm Modernisation Programme, where over 2,900 farmers have benefited, with letters of support to a further 2,500 farmers being issued under Tranche 3;
- Agricultural and Forestry Processing and Marketing Grant Scheme, where some £18 million has been invested in 78 agri-food businesses;
- Less Favoured Area Compensatory Allowance, which is claimed annually by some 13,500 farm businesses, resulting in another £25m entering the rural economy;
- Agri-environment schemes, where on average £25 million has been provided each year enabling 12,000 farmers to undertake positive environmental actions to enhance our countryside;
- The Woodland Grant Scheme provides £8.9m of support;

- Axis 3 of the Programme, which makes a positive contribution to raising the quality of life in rural areas. Over 1,300 projects have been supported with grant aid of £30m. This has assisted 294 farm businesses to diversify, supported 238 micro-enterprises in our countryside, supported 89 tourism actions and created 319 new jobs.

I want to build on these notable successes and will continue to monitor and review with my officials, Programme Stakeholders and Delivery Bodies ways to keep expenditure on track. As at 31 December 2012, approximately £324 million of NIRDSP spend has been declared to the European Commission.

Single Farm Payments: Trees and Hedgerows

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the guidelines on the existence of large trees and hedgerows with regard to the entitlement to Single Farm Payment.

(AQO 3767/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has published guidelines on Land Eligibility to help farmers determine whether or not land is eligible for Single Farm Payment (SFP) when making a claim on their Single Application Form. The SFP Scheme is an area-based scheme and farmers may only claim for land which is in agricultural use. Hedges and trees are valuable landscape and wildlife features and hedges are eligible for payment provided they are not wider than two metres from the centre of the hedge.

The guidelines also make it clear that hedges which exceed two metres wide, at the base, are not eligible for payment and that these features must be deducted from the claimed field area. This is because this land is not considered to be in agricultural use.

In a similar way, land beneath trees that are in a single line, or in a small clump, which have grazing available underneath right up to the trunk, is considered eligible for Single Farm Payment. However if there is bare ground or mulch under the trees, a deduction should be made in the claim to take this ineligible area into account.

I would encourage all farmers who are making a claim to check their maps and verify the eligibility of their hedgerows, and the land beneath large trees, when making their 2013 claim.

Dogs Destroyed

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the numbers of dogs destroyed as a percentage of dogs licensed across council areas.

(AQO 3768/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: While Councils provide my Department with statistical information regarding their enforcement of the Dogs Order 1983, there is not a direct read across from the numbers of dogs destroyed to the numbers of dogs licensed. For example, while in 2012 there were 123,034 dogs licensed in the north of Ireland there is no direct correlation between the 1,664 dogs which were humanely destroyed. This is because most stray dogs that are humanely destroyed by Councils are unlicensed. Licensed dogs are more easily traced back to their owners and are therefore less likely to be destroyed. I believe that a better comparison to make is the number of dogs destroyed as a percentage of dogs impounded. For example, in 2012 of the 8,676 stray and unwanted dogs that were impounded by Councils, 19%, that is 1,664 dogs, which could not be rehomed, were humanely destroyed.

The Dogs (Amendment) Act 2011 introduced compulsory microchipping here in April 2012 to help promote responsible dog ownership. Having a microchip means that stray dogs can be reunited quickly with their owners and will reduce the number of dogs that are destroyed each year.

Culvert Drainage

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what process the Rivers Agency uses to advise farmers on how to size pipes for the drainage of culverts.

(AQO 3769/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Anyone, including farmers, seeking to culvert a watercourse must apply to Rivers Agency for consent under Schedule 6 of the Drainage (NI) Order 1973. On receipt of the application, Rivers Agency will provide advice regarding the appropriate pipe size. It is worth noting that the applicant is responsible for ensuring that all other approvals are in place.

Agrienvironmental Scheme

Mr Irwin asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the agrienvironmental scheme that is currently in operation.

(AQO 3770/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department currently delivers a number of agri-environment schemes and there are 12,000 farmers in these schemes and 450,000 hectares of agricultural land is being managed for environmental benefit. This equates to almost a third of farmers in schemes and over 43% of the agricultural land area under agreement. The schemes are funded from the Rural Development Programme and since it began in 2007, participants have received some £159 million in funding, which is, on average, £25 million each year being provided to the local rural economy.

In 2011, CAFRE students carried out a survey of scheme participants on behalf of DARD. The results indicated that 86 per cent of respondents were satisfied with their scheme and over half of the respondents stated that they had noticed an improvement in wildlife on their farmland. Further environmental success was reported recently by the RSPB, indicating that yellowhammer populations were higher on farms under Countryside Management Scheme agreement when compared to those that are not under agreement. This shows that agri-environment schemes are making a positive difference to wildlife.

More recently farmers have been less willing to take up new agreements under NICMS. I have instructed officials to take the reasons for this into account during development of a new agri-environment provision for the next RDP. A key design aim for any new scheme will be to strike a balance between the provision of sustainable environmental benefits, making the new scheme simpler and easier for farmers to implement, and ensuring that DARD can administer and control the scheme effectively in line with EU Regulations.

Agrifood Strategy

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the progress being made in developing an agrifood strategy.

(AQO 3771/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Agri-Food Strategy Board has met regularly since it was established last year and it has also engaged extensively with a wide range of stakeholders.

The Board established nine sectoral sub-groups, each chaired by a Board member to consider specific challenges, opportunities and priorities for each of our key sub-sectors. These sub-groups comprised over 80 stakeholders drawn from industry and related government departments/agencies and their reports have been considered by the main Board.

In parallel to this, the Board engaged with the wider stakeholder base through a public Call for Evidence and received almost 40 responses from a range of interests, including farming, food, forestry, environmental, academic and public body representatives. In addition, the Board has had separate meetings with Minister Attwood on planning and regulation, Minister Farry on skills and innovation, Minister Wilson on finance and the CEOs of the NIEA and NITB. The Board also held a workshop on "Growing Sustainably" with a number of environmental interest groups.

All of this work has informed development of the Board's over-arching report to Ministers and I met with the Chair last month to discuss the key themes emerging. Not surprisingly, these included issues around focussed marketing, an increased emphasis on innovation and skills, and the need to ensure planned growth of the sector is sustainable, both economically and environmentally.

I am pleased to see that the Board's work is well advanced and I look forward to receiving its report to the DETI Minister and myself in the very near future.

Ash Dieback: Carrickfergus

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on ash dieback disease in Carrickfergus.

(AQO 3772/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Ash Dieback has been detected at two woodland sites in Carrickfergus. Following inspections and testing in March 2013, presence of the disease has been confirmed in recently planted ash trees at Whitehead Diamond Jubilee Wood. A statutory notice requiring the removal and destruction of the ash at the site has been issued, and this work should finish by the end of April. A further single ash tree has tested positive for the disease at another site – Bashfordsland Wood. Further investigations are ongoing to establish the source of this infection and decide on appropriate action at the site.

Bovine Viral Diarrhoea

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what departmental support is available to assist the farming industry with bovine viral diarrhoea.

(AQO 3773/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: At farm level, production diseases such as BVD can have a significant impact on productivity. Such diseases are not subject to national control programmes and because their impacts are mainly at farm level, it is the responsibility of industry to take the lead in tackling them.

Industry has therefore set up Animal Health and Welfare NI (AHWNI), a not-for-profit organisation that will lead on the development and promotion of initiatives to tackle production diseases such as BVD. AHWNI has already initiated a voluntary BVD programme of 'tag and testing', which began in January this year.

In support of this industry-led initiative, I recently announced start-up funding of up to £125,497 to help AHWNI deliver the BVD eradication programme. The funding will provide much of the infrastructure for the BVD eradication programme and also help industry develop a Johnes's Disease control programme.

In addition, and in conjunction with AHWNI, my Department is also delivering a programme through the Rural Development Programme to raise awareness about BVD and how to tackle it, and the economic and welfare advantages of doing so.

Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework

Ms Brown asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the tackling rural poverty and social isolation framework.

(AQO 3774/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am very pleased with the progress that has been achieved in relation to the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework which is on course to meet its specific Programme for Government Target including spend of £4m in the 2012/13 financial year. A range of initiatives under the framework are well advanced and are providing valuable assistance in addressing rural poverty and isolation issues. This includes: the Assisted Rural Travel Scheme; support for the Rural Support charity; support for Rural Community Development work; the Maximising Access in Rural Areas (MARA) Project; the Farm Family Health Checks Programme; the Connecting Elderly Rural Isolated project; the Rural Borewells Scheme; a Youth Employability Programme and a Young Entrepreneur's Project; and Fuel Poverty energy efficiency work.

I am particularly pleased that the Rural Borewells Scheme is well underway with work on site at 27 locations and that offers of support under the Rural Challenge Programme have commenced.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

World Police and Fire Games: Sponsorship

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what sponsorship deals have been secured for the World Police and Fire Games 2013.

(AQO 3787/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): 2013 World Police and Fire Games Limited has secured agreement for £1.2M of benefit in kind and £408,000 in cash sponsorship which has exceeded the target of £1M of benefit in kind and £400,000 in cash sponsorship.

The range of sponsors includes major international companies such as Fujitsu, Diageo, Kukri Sports, Deloitte, Danske Bank and Coca Cola. Also many local companies have come on board to provide support for the Games including Translink, Tayto, Donnelly Brothers Limited, Chain Reaction, the Ramada Hotel and Fonacab.

A full list of the sponsors, can be found on the 2013 World Police and Fire Games web site at www.2013wpfg.com

Whilst the target in relation to sponsorship has been achieved World Police and Fire Games Ltd are continuing to discuss sponsorship opportunities with private sector companies.

Stadia Development Project: Legal Challenge

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what short and long term impacts the recent legal challenge in respect of EU Regulations around grant aid may have on the stadia development project.

(AQO 3780/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have been advised that Crusaders FC have recently lodged an application seeking leave to apply for a judicial review.

I will not speculate further on the specific matter, as it is subject to legal proceedings.

World Police and Fire Games: Local Participation

Ms P Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what efforts her Department is making to encourage participation in the World Police and Fire Games 2013 by local communities in areas where events will be held.

(AQO 3781/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: World Police and Fire Games Ltd has engaged with all local councils to identify opportunities for them to organise or host events related to the Games. These engagements have highlighted opportunities for volunteering, accommodation and local businesses.

The Company has also conducted a volunteer recruitment campaign and particularly targeted local communities to encourage people to get actively involved in the Games. 393 volunteers from neighbourhood renewal areas have signed up.

The Company's Education Programme encourages schools to participate in activities surrounding the Games and the Young Ambassadors Programme will be rolled out in schools across the north.

The Company will also be implementing a marketing plan to highlight to people the opportunity to attend the sporting events themselves and there will be road shows at various events across the north, and promotion at a range of public venues including shopping centres, libraries and leisure centres.

Furthermore, my Department is developing a complementary cultural programme for the Games which will offer a rich cultural experience to local people as well as to visitors for the Games.

Líofa: Unionist Communities

Ms McGahan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on Líofa initiatives in unionist communities.
(AQO 3782/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Líofa initiative is about making Irish accessible to people of every background. I firmly believe that the Irish language belongs to everyone and forms a vital part of our shared cultural heritage. It should be something that unites us rather than divides us.

My Department through Foras na Gaeilge funds the Irish Language Officer post in East Belfast Mission. Irish language lessons are held regularly in East Belfast and the first ever dianchúrsa (intensive course) took place in the East Belfast Mission last month. Such developments indicate an increasing interest in the language among those from Protestant and Unionist backgrounds. I have asked my Department's Líofa Development Officer to meet with East Belfast Mission to discuss how my Department can assist their work and provide practical support.

Líofa recently took part in a major cross-community event in Derry organised by the Grand Orange Lodge and the GAA to bring together young people from Protestant and Catholic schools to explore our cultural richness through sharing and learning. Such events provide a good opportunity to promote Líofa to all communities.

Sports Clubs: South Antrim

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure which sports clubs in the South Antrim constituency have applied for funding from her Department in the past twelve months.
(AQO 3783/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI, which is the primary funder of sport in the north of Ireland, has advised that no sports clubs in the South Antrim constituency have applied for funding in the past twelve months. Prior to that, in the three financial years to March 2012, Sport NI provided over £1.46m of exchequer and Lottery funding to support sporting development in South Antrim. Furthermore, since 2009, Sport NI has awarded Antrim Borough Council and Newtownabbey Borough Council over £950k of Lottery funding through the Active Communities Programme to encourage greater participation in sport in areas including South Antrim.

Strabane Canal

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what discussions she has had about the opening of the Strabane Canal.
(AQO 3784/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have visited the Strabane Canal but I have not had any formal discussions about the opening of the canal. I have, however, instructed my officials to contact the Strategic Investment Board to explore any assistance which could be provided in this matter.

It would be desirable to bring all navigable waterways across the island under the umbrella of Waterways Ireland (WI).

However, at the NSMC Plenary meeting in June 2012, Ministers endorsed the recommendation that no further action is taken at this time to extend the remit of Waterways Ireland. I have, however, instructed my Officials to keep this matter under review.

The Member will wish to note that during my visit to the Strabane area I visited Moor Lough and discussed with local Councillors their plans for the redevelopment of the Lough. I am pleased to confirm that my officials are currently taking forward work to improve the facilities for anglers at Moor Lough as part of my Departments contribution to the Council's wider proposals for the redevelopment of the Lough. I have committed some £15K to date and it is estimated that the works will be finished by the end of May 2013.

First World War Commemorations

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much funding her Department is providing towards commemorations of the First World War.
(AQO 3785/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The First World War is one of several major anniversaries from the 1912 – 1922 period. Organisations and programmes already funded by my Department will play a key role in telling the stories and different interpretations behind these events.

A diverse range of activity is being developed from within existing budgets and will extend across libraries, museums and PRONI. The Arts Council also provides support to eligible projects which fall within the remit of each funding programme. To date no applications have been received in relation to commemorating the First World War.

Via the Community Festivals Fund my Department allocates a total of £450,000 annually to local councils, who match and administer the fund. Events remembering the past can be supported if in keeping with the Fund's guidelines which include inclusive approaches to commemoration.

NI Screen is supporting three productions so far, with combined funding of £335,000, that tie-in with World War One. These will include a factual drama serial, a feature film and a documentary.

I have also offered the Somme Heritage Centre £90k, across three years, to develop an educational programme linked to the First World War and the Battle of the Somme. This will increase knowledge of these key events and help to build relationships and inclusive approaches to remembering the past.

St Patrick's Day Spring Carnival

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for her assessment of the Saint Patrick's Day spring carnival which attracted 15,000 spectators.

(AQO 3786/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department had no role in the organisation or funding of this event.

The Carnival was included in the City of Culture programme as a significant event taking place in the City but was not funded by the Culture Company. As it is an ongoing local council initiative, no financial assistance was requested from the Culture Company for the Carnival.

However, it is very encouraging to see such well attended events taking place in Derry City of Culture in what will be a fantastic year for the City in 2013.

Gaelscéal

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure why the Irish language newspaper Gaelsceal is no longer in circulation.

(AQO 3788/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: At a meeting of the board of Foras na Gaeilge on the 25th of January 2013 it was decided to end the contract with the company Torann na dTonn to publish the newspaper Gaelscéal. The funding contract, worth €400,000 per year, was awarded to Torann na dTonn in 2010. The company was given two months notice before the funding ended.

This decision by the Foras na Gaeilge board was taken in the context of value for money. In 2012 the newspaper had average sales of 1,314 copies per week. Despite efforts made by Torann na dTonn since the company was founded in 2010 it never reached a sales level satisfactory to either Torann na dTonn or Foras na Gaeilge.

The board of Foras na Gaeilge recognise that providing a readable news service in Irish to the public is important and plans are being made to cater for this need in the near future.

Department of Education

Education and Skills Authority Headquarters

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many staff will be employed at the Education and Skills Authority headquarters.

(AQW 20891/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): It is expected that ESA will have a small central office to support the ESA Chair, ESA Board members and the Chief Executive. No decisions have been made as to the staff complement that will be required within the central office.

Southern Education and Library Board: Long-term Absence

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Education what was average time taken within the Southern Education and Library Board to (i) phase return to work; or (ii) dismiss teaching staff with long-term absence, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 21338/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Southern Education and Library Board has provided the information outlined in the table below.

Year	From first day of absence until a Phased Return to Work	From first day of absence until Teacher was granted Ill Health Retirement
2008	27	51
2009	26	43
2010	29	65
2011	34	53
2012	44	71

Southern Education and Library Board: Age Profile of Teaching Staff

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Education to detail the age profile of the teaching staff in primary schools in the Southern Education and Library Board area.

(AQW 21340/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information is contained in the table below.

Number of teachers working in primary(1) schools in the Southern Education and Library Board Area by age, 2011/12

Age group	No. of teachers
24 and under	31
25-29	220
30-34	298
35-39	366
40-44	427
45-49	277
50-54	233
55-59	186
60 and above	32
Total	2,070

Source: Teacher Payroll and Pensions Administration System

Note:

1 Includes preparatory departments of grammar schools.

Early Years Capital Funding Scheme

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of applications received to the early years capital funding scheme to date, broken down by council area.

(AQW 21342/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The following table summarises the total number of applications to the Early Years Capital fund received by the Childcare Partnerships, per council area.

Council Area	Number
Antrim	1
Ards	1
Armagh	3
Ballymena	3
Ballymoney	3
Carrickfergus	3
Cookstown	4
Coleraine	3
Down	2
Derry	5
Dungannon	3
Fermanagh	9
Larne	1
Limavady	4
Newry & Mourne	3
Omagh	6

Council Area	Number
Magherafelt	5
Moyle	1
Strabane	3
Total	63

Curriculum Reserve Fund

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education how much funding each Education and Library Board has allocated from its curriculum reserve fund in each of the last three years, broken down by sector.

(AQW 21395/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Details of how much each Education and Library Board has allocated from its Curriculum Reserve Fund in each of the last three years, broken down by sector, is detailed in the table below.

Funding Allocated to Schools From Curriculum Reserve by Each of the ELBs in the Last Three Financial Years

		BELB £'000	NEEELB £'000	SEELB £'000	SELB £'000	WELB £'000	Total £'000
2010-11	Controlled	36	108	144	97	-	385
	Maintained	190	24	75	95	-	384
	Irish Medium	12	-	-	-	-	12
	Total (2010-11)	238	132	219	192	-	781

		BELB £'000	NEEELB £'000	SEELB £'000	SELB £'000	WELB £'000	Total £'000
2011-12	Controlled	216	75	156	125	-	572
	Maintained	288	15	198	70	-	571
	Irish Medium	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Total (2011-12)	504	90	354	195	-	1,143

		BELB £'000	NEEELB £'000	SEELB £'000	SELB £'000	WELB £'000	Total £'000
2012-13*	Controlled	380	-	67	41	-	488
	Maintained	582	-	77	108	-	767
	Irish Medium	50	-	-	-	-	50
	Total (2012-13)	1,012	-	144	149	-	1,305
Overall Total		1,754	222	717	536	-	3,229

* The 2012-13 figures are unaudited and are therefore subject to change.

Student Teacher Numbers

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education what is the timetable for the notification of student teacher numbers for 2013/2014 to colleges and higher education establishments.

(AQW 21501/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am giving careful consideration to the 2013/14 intake numbers for initial education courses and will ensure the Higher Education Institutions are notified of their intakes as soon as a final decision is made.

Education and Library Boards: Redundancy Proposals

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to outline the approval process for redundancy proposals made by the Education and Library Boards during the last three years.

(AQW 21505/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department has no approval role in determining which posts to make redundant. It is the responsibility of the Board of Governors, as the employer, to determine which teaching posts to declare redundant, following the application of open and transparent redundancy criteria, based on the particular needs of the school concerned.

However I have set aside funding to assist employing authorities to make cost reductions at the school level through redundancies in the 3 years up to 31 August 2013. My officials have put in place a process and determined criteria, which employers must follow, in order to secure approval for the related redundancy costs and access to available funding. These processes have evolved over time.

The current process is that each Employing Authority having assured itself that the payback period is clearly demonstrated (no more than 2 years for teaching staff and 3.25 years for non-teaching staff) and that there is a reduction in full time equivalent (FTE) staff numbers, is required to submit to the Department a pro forma demonstrating cost savings within the appropriate payback period and provide an assurance statement from the Accounting Officer confirming same.

To ensure a clear accountability trail, employers are also required to have individual schools sign an assurance statement confirming that their redundancies are bona fide and that they will not increase FTE staff numbers without prior approval.

Following review and confirmation of compliance with requirements my officials confirm budget cover for the required cost accordingly.

Translation Services: DE

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Education how much his Department spent on translation services for visiting foreign nationals in each of the last five years.

(AQW 21528/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

2007/2008	NIL
2008/2009	NIL
2009/2010	NIL
2010/2011	£261.00
2011/2012	NIL

Nurture Units

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education what plans he has for expanding the work of the nurture units in the future.

(AQW 21545/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The findings of the planned evaluation of nurture provision, including the 20 new nurture units being created under the Delivering Social Change Signature Project, will inform a policy position on this type of intervention, including the targeting of any future expansion.

Primary Schools: Nurturing Projects

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education what use will be made of the experience gained by primary schools in nurturing projects when they no longer receive funding.

(AQW 21546/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: An evaluation of nurture provision is planned which will inform the future policy position of this form of intervention. The Department is mindful of the experience that has been gained by schools with nurturing projects which no longer receive funding. Some of these schools have already written to the Department and identified issues which will be factored into consideration as the research and evaluation model is developed.

Education and Library Boards: Redundancy Proposals

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to outline the criteria used by his Department to approve redundancy proposals from Education and Library Boards.

(AQW 21556/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department has no approval role in determining which posts to make redundant. It is the responsibility of the Board of Governors, as the employer, to determine which teaching posts to declare redundant, following the application of open and transparent redundancy criteria, based on the particular needs of the school concerned.

However I have set aside funding to assist employing authorities to make cost reductions at the school level through redundancies in the 3 years up to 31 August 2013. My officials have put in place a process and determined criteria, which employers must follow, in order to secure approval for the related redundancy costs and access to available funding. These processes have evolved over time.

The current process is that each Employing Authority having assured itself that the payback period is clearly demonstrated (no more than 2 years for teaching staff and 3.25 years for non-teaching staff) and that there is a reduction in full time equivalent (FTE) staff numbers, is required to submit to the Department a pro forma demonstrating cost savings within the appropriate payback period and provide an assurance statement from the Accounting Officer confirming same.

To ensure a clear accountability trail, employers are also required to have individual schools sign an assurance statement confirming that their redundancies are bona fide and that they will not increase FTE staff numbers without prior approval.

Following review and confirmation of compliance with requirements my officials confirm budget cover for the required cost accordingly.

Education and Skills Authority: Careers Advice

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education what arrangements exist within the Education and Skills Authority for the provision of careers advice, given that such provision within the Education and Library Boards is being reduced.
(AQW 21587/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Skills Authority (ESA) will deliver all of the functions of the organisations that it will replace, including careers advice. As with other services, the transformation to a single, streamlined organisation will ensure that this key service is delivered more efficiently and effectively. Decisions on the organisational arrangements for the delivery of the service have not yet been taken.

Area Planning: Omagh

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Education to outline the plans envisaged as a result of the area education planning process under the auspices of the Omagh Learning Community.
(AQW 21655/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Western Education and Library Board (WELB) draft post-primary area plan reflects the commitment to the development of the Lisanelly Shared Education Campus (LSEC). Lisanelly is a flagship infrastructure project within the Programme for Government and future capital funding for the development of the post-primary sector in the Omagh area will be directed toward the Lisanelly Shared Education Campus.

I am moving ahead with plans to provide new accommodation for Arvalee School & Resource Centre at Lisanelly as soon as possible.

The Western Education and Library Board (WELB) draft post-primary area plan also reflects the intention to progress proposals arising from the NI Commission for Catholic Education (NICCE) review of post-primary provision. However no school specific proposals arising from this work have as yet been submitted to or agreed by the Department.

The full detail of the proposals can be viewed on the WELB website (www.welbni.org).

Belmont House School and Foyleview School Merger

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Education to outline the plans for merging Belmont House School and Foyleview School in Derry.
(AQW 21688/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am aware that the Western Education and Library Board (WELB) has been in discussion with the Board of Governors of both Belmont House and Foyleview Schools regarding a proposal for a merger.

At the present time the Board is following the statutory process leading to the publication of a Development Proposal to support this intent. However, until a Development Proposal is published, the issues concerned are entirely a matter for the WELB to consider.

Nursery School Places

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Education how many children in the Derry City Council area did not receive their first preference nursery school place for the 2013/14 academic year in the first round of places awarded; and how many places are still available, broken down by electoral ward.
(AQW 21689/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Funded pre-school places are available in statutory nursery schools and nursery units attached to primary schools and in voluntary/private settings in receipt of funding under the Pre-School Education Programme.

The information requested is not held broken down by electoral ward. The table below details the position at the end of Stage 1 of the pre-school admissions process in relation to applications to pre-school providers in the Derry City Council area:-

No. of applications to pre-school providers in Derry City Council area	1481
No. of children who secured their 1st preference of pre-school place	1205

No. of applications withdrawn	2
Total no. of children placed	1412
No. of children unplaced	67
No. of funded pre-school places remaining available in Derry City Council area	135

Maghera High School

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Education what plans there are for the use of the site of Maghera High School.
(AQW 21711/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The North Eastern Education and Library Board had previously received a number of expressions of interest in this site. However due to Health and Safety concerns the Department endorsed a proposal to demolish the school, following asbestos decontamination, before any further action should be taken.

As this work has only just been completed on 11 March 2013 a decision regarding the cleared site has still to be reached.

The Board has indicated that at least two of those previously enquiring about this site, Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta and Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, are still interested. This is currently under consideration.

If it is decided that the site is not to be used for educational purposes it may be officially declared surplus. At this stage the process as outlined by DFP in the Central Advisory Unit's 'Disposal of Surplus Public Sector Property' will be followed. (Full details as per link below).

http://www.deni.gov.uk/disposal_of_public_sector_property.pdf

Grant-aided Schools: Boards of Governors

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Education who will have responsibility for appointing Boards of Governors in grant aided schools when the Education Bill becomes law.
(AQO 3789/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education Bill as currently drafted makes the Education and Skills Authority responsible for the appointments to school Boards of Governors that currently fall to the Department and the education and library boards. Other categories of governors will continue to be nominated or elected as set out in Schedules 4 to 7 to the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986 and Schedule 5 to the Education Reform (NI) Order 1989.

Dromore Central Primary School

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Education why the construction of the new Dromore primary school has been delayed.
(AQO 3798/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Dromore Primary School is a controlled school and is being taken forward by the SELB. It was originally anticipated to commence work on site July 2013.

In light of updated population data for the Dromore area in December 2012 the SELB reviewed the planned provision for the school and revised the provision from a 28 classbase to a 25 classbase. Subsequently the Economic Appraisal and design are being updated and the revised target date for commencement of construction is January 2014.

Voluntary Grammar Schools: Sectoral Body

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education whether the proposed Education Bill will include a sectoral body for Voluntary Grammar schools.
(AQO 3799/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My established policy position is that sectoral bodies must be non-statutory, and that no sectoral body will be specified in law. I have no plans to establish a sectoral body for Voluntary Grammar schools.

Schools: Emotional Health and Well-being

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Education why his Department has shelved the initiative Optimising Achievement through a whole school approach to Emotional Health and Wellbeing.
(AQO 3800/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The 'Optimising Achievement' materials which promote a whole school approach to social and emotional literacy were developed through an initiative of the Regional Training Unit (RTU). This work was begun initially in partnership with Together4All and most recently with Barnardo's.

The Department did provide financial assistance to RTU to sustain its partnership arrangement. This funding finished at the end of December 2012 and at that point the materials were ready for piloting at some later date with schools.

The Department did not commission these materials, however, I do view their development as compatible with the need for schools to recognise the importance of pupils emotional health and wellbeing. The Department's own work in this area under the "i-Matter" Programme has provided resources to schools to encourage pupils to seek timely support when they are experiencing stress. The priority at the moment within the 'iMatter Programme' is the development and piloting of an audit tool for use by schools to assess their current approach to promoting pupils' emotional health and wellbeing and how that might be improved. Responding to identified training needs comes after that.

Primary Schools: Area Plans

Ms P Bradley asked the Minister of Education, in relation to the draft area primary plan, to outline the proposed timescale for finding a local solution to combining primary schools.
(AQO 3801/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Area Planning is about providing strong, vibrant schools delivering high quality education by using the limited resources available efficiently and effectively.

It is the responsibility of the school managing authorities in the first instance to bring forward proposals for future primary provision in their areas. There is, however, no standard proposed timescale for finding a local solution to combining primary schools.

Consultation on the draft primary plans will allow for wide ranging discussion and dialogue at a local level which it is hoped will result in more practical and sustainable solutions being brought forward, including the potential for increased sharing of accommodation and resources.

Now is the time for managing authorities, schools and local communities to look to the future and difficult decisions will need to be made in the best interests of the children.

It is important, however, that the area planning process is not used to delay necessary decisions. I will therefore continue to make decisions on any Development Proposals published in advance of agreed area plans.

Delivering Social Change: New Teachers

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Education how many new teachers have been employed to date through Delivering Social Change in order to raise educational attainment.
(AQO 3802/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Two hundred and thirty recently graduated teachers will be appointed prior to the beginning of the 2013/14 academic year. It is envisaged that the recruitment exercise will run during May and June 2013.

A Strategic Oversight Group has been established and has undertaken a considerable amount of work to develop the final recruitment scheme and ensure it is practicable and compatible with legal requirements.

The project will ensure extra support for children in primary schools to achieve the expected levels in reading and maths at Key Stage 2. It will also provide tuition to pupils in post-primary schools who are not predicted to get at least a 'C' grade in GCSE English and/or maths.

The criteria for the identification of eligible teachers have been developed taking into account advice received from the Equality Commission. The criteria for the identification of eligible schools have also been developed and it is planned that schools will be invited to apply for the extra resource and begin the recruitment exercise in April.

Education Bill: Inspections

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Education why inspections have been included in the Education Bill, rather than in a separate stand-alone Bill.
(AQO 3803/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: New provisions on inspection require only 5 clauses, which would not justify or require a separate Bill. Inspection is better dealt with in the current Education Bill, along with the other matters covered by the Heads of Agreement.

Department for Employment and Learning

Southern Regional College: Higher Education Courses

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many full time, part time or full time equivalent students are studying for foundation degrees and degrees awarded under licence from other universities and degree awarding institutions, in the Southern Regional College, in each of its campuses.
(AQW 21507/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): Student enrolments on foundation degrees and other higher education (HE) level courses at each Southern Regional College (SRC) campus are detailed below by mode of attendance for the 2011/12 academic year, the latest year for which validated data are available.

Foundation Degree Enrolments at SRC campuses

SRC Campus	Full-Time	Part-Time	Total
Banbridge	0	55	55
Newry	205	135	340
Portadown	70	20	85
Total	275	210	485

Enrolments on other HE provision at SRC Campuses

SRC Campus	Full-Time	Part-Time	Total
Armagh	35	50	85
Banbridge	70	70	140
Lurgan	60	125	185
Newry	110	700	815
Portadown	0	195	195
Total	275	1,145	1,420

Source: Further Education Statistical Record

Note: Figures have been rounded to the nearest 5, with 0, 1, 2 rounded to 0. Therefore figures may not sum to the total.

Southern Regional College

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many full time, part time and full time equivalent staff are employed in each of the campuses of the Southern Regional College teaching foundation degrees and degrees licensed from other universities and degree awarding institutions.

(AQW 21508/11-15)

Dr Farry: Each further education college, in its capacity as an employing authority, is responsible for all employment related matters. Consequently, my Department does not hold the information requested. I have asked the Director of Southern Regional College to respond to the Member directly on this matter.

Southern Regional College: Courses

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many new courses, and in which academic fields, have been developed by the Southern Regional College in each of its campuses, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 21509/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department does not hold the lists requested by the Member, as information relating to the number of new courses is a matter for individual colleges.

My officials have contacted the Directors of the Southern Regional College who has confirmed that the information is not readily available, and could only be obtained at significant cost.

Therefore, as it is only available at disproportionate cost, I am not in a position to provide this information to the Member.

Further and Higher Education Colleges

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many students, full time, part time or full time equivalent, are studying for foundation degrees and degrees awarded under licence from other universities and degree awarding institutions, in further and higher colleges.

(AQW 21510/11-15)

Dr Farry: Student enrolments on foundation degrees and other higher education (HE) courses at each Northern Ireland (NI) further education (FE) college are detailed below by mode of attendance for the 2011/12 academic year, the latest year for which validated data are available.

Foundation Degree Enrolments at NI FE Colleges

College	Full-Time	Part-Time	Total
Belfast Metropolitan	400	105	505
Northern Regional	30	210	240
South East Regional	85	110	195
Southern Regional	275	210	485
South West	285	245	530
North West Regional	80	195	275
Total	1,145	1,080	2,225

Enrolments on other HE provision at NI FE Colleges

College	Full-Time	Part-Time	Total
Belfast Metropolitan	1,170	1,840	3,010
Northern Regional	230	915	1,150
South East Regional	475	795	1,275
Southern Regional	275	1,145	1,420
South West	105	785	890
North West Regional	575	780	1,355
Total	2,385	6,255	9,090

Source: Further Education Statistical Record

Note: Figures have been rounded to the nearest 5, with 0, 1, 2 rounded to 0. Therefore figures may not sum to the total.

Further and Higher Education Colleges: Courses

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many new courses, and in which academic fields, have been developed by further and higher education regional colleges in each of their campuses, in each of the last five years. (AQW 21511/11-15)

Dr Farry: I would refer the Member to the reply I gave the Member for North Antrim on 13 March 2012.

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/Documents/Answer-Book/2012/120316.pdf>

My Department does not hold the lists requested by the Member, as information relating to the number of new courses is a matter for individual colleges.

My officials have contacted the Directors of the six Regional Colleges who have confirmed that the information is not readily available, and could only be obtained at significant cost.

Therefore, as it is only available at disproportionate cost, I am not in a position to provide the information to the Member.

Visually Impaired Employees

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail (i) the number of people employed within his Department who are visually impaired; (ii) the position they hold; and (iii) the percentage they make up of the Department's staff. (AQW 21537/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department for Employment and Learning holds monitoring information on the number of employees who have a disability. The monitoring information held by the Department does not specify the types of disabilities its employees have.

Strategic Investment Board: DEL Assets

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 17631/11-15, to detail the nature of the £0.45m in assets that his Department has identified to the Asset Management Unit of the Strategic Investment Board, broken down by year. (AQW 21585/11-15)

Dr Farry: The receipt is in respect of the disposal of Felden, a former Government Training Centre which was included in the 2012-13 Departmental Budget at £0.45m

South West College

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 20592/11-15, whether the South West College has repaid any funding to his Department in consequence of the KPMG report.

(AQW 21646/11-15)

Dr Farry: As outlined in AQW 20592/11-15, in response to the investigation conducted by KPMG, my Department has instigated a comprehensive assurance exercise, across all six Further Education colleges, to ensure compliance with the original Letter of Offer and identify if there are any areas of concern.

This exercise is ongoing and is due to finish at the end of May 2013. Once this exercise has completed, the Department will consider the findings, and take action as appropriate, which may include recouping funding from Colleges.

Youth Employment Scheme: South Belfast

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the opportunities created by the Youth Employment Scheme in South Belfast.

(AQO 3805/11-15)

Dr Farry: Since the launch of the Youth Employment Scheme in September 2012, over 900 employers have signed agreements to participate in the scheme.

At the 29th March 2013, these employers had offered a total of 1,685 opportunities, to which 3,626 young people had been submitted. To date, 517 young people have taken part in the scheme and, of these, over 200 have secured full-time permanent jobs. In addition, 354 young people have started temporary jobs under the First Start initiative.

Members asked specific questions about South Belfast and South Down. In South Belfast, 74 employer agreements have been signed and 119 opportunities made available to young people. Twenty-one young people have availed of these opportunities, with seven having secured full-time employment. Also, 19 young people have found temporary employment under the First Start initiative in this area. In South Down, 174 employer agreements have been signed and 265 opportunities made available to young people. Sixty-one young people have availed of these opportunities, with 16 having secured full-time employment. First Start in this area has employed 21 young people.

In addition to the Youth Employment Scheme, my Department is also funding a number of new initiatives under the Executive's 'Pathways to Success' strategy, to increase the opportunities available to unemployed young people in South and West Belfast and South Down. These include a Collaboration and Innovation Fund, which will fund activity to help 2,800 disadvantaged 16 to 24 year olds from Belfast, to improve their employability by gaining work-related skills. Similar activity will also be funded in South Down to help over 1,100 unemployed young people. There is also a Community Family Support Pilot Programme, which will help young people living in six of the most disadvantaged families in West Belfast to re-engage with education, employment or training.

Furthermore the Local Employment Intermediary Service, more commonly known as LEMIS, provides personalised assistance to help unemployed young people residing in West Belfast and South Belfast to overcome their barriers to work. The service is also available on an outreach basis in South Down to young people with a common barrier to employment.

My assessment is that we have the right measures in place. Forty percent of participants on the Youth Employment Scheme find full-time permanent employment. However, we must do more to encourage young people to participate, young people have only taken up 30% of the opportunities available. I am actively considering how we might improve uptake going forward. I would ask members to promote the Youth Employment Scheme to businesses in their areas and encourage their young unemployed constituents to avail of all the opportunities on offer.

Welfare Reform: Benefits Offices

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what extra resources he has allocated to Benefits Offices to assist customers with the impact of Welfare Reform.

(AQO 3811/11-15)

Dr Farry: I assume that the Member means Jobs and Benefits Offices and the resourcing of the Employment Service as opposed to benefits, which is the responsibility of the Department of Social Development.

The Department for Employment and Learning is a key delivery partner to the Social Security Agency. It supports unemployed and economically inactive customers impacted by the Welfare Reform changes, to help them move closer to and into work.

The introduction of Universal Credit, a major element within the Welfare Reform Programme, is therefore expected to have major implications for the Employment Service within my Department.

As the lead department for Welfare Reform, the Department for Social Development is responsible for calculating the numbers who are likely to make a claim to Universal Credit.

These estimates will then inform any additional Employment Service resource that may be required to support the roll-out of Universal Credit in Northern Ireland, currently planned to commence in April 2014.

A specific resource impact of Welfare Reform has resulted from the Incapacity Benefit Reassessment, which commenced in February 2011.

As a direct response, to support those customers who were subject to the Incapacity Benefit Reassessment process, I launched a new specialist 'Work Connect' employment programme in September 2012.

The Employment Service recruited 19 additional frontline staff in 2011/12, and a further 39 staff will have been recruited by the end of 2012/13. Therefore, in total, there will be 58 additional frontline staff by the end of March 2013 to assist with the impact of Welfare Reform to date.

Manufacturing and Food Processing: Skills Requirements

Mr Moutray asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what efforts are being made by the Department to link with large manufacturing businesses and food processing plants to ascertain their current skills requirements, given the ever changing environment in which they operate.

(AQO 3812/11-15)

Dr Farry: As advanced manufacturing and food and drink processing have been identified by me as priority sectors, a great deal of work has been undertaken to identify and address the skills needs.

I chair the Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering Services Working Group, involving employers and representatives from further education colleges, universities, employer bodies and other government departments. Several large manufacturing businesses are represented on the group, which is working proactively to agree the skills needs of the sector and the interventions required.

I have commissioned research to ascertain the skills needs of the advanced manufacturing and engineering sector. The research will assess the skills profile of the sector, carry out a salary survey and highlight any skill imbalances which exist, or are forecast to exist.

Discussions are also ongoing with members of the group to develop an Aerospace Academy. It is proposed that the Academy will feature a number of short and long term interventions, such as a possible conversion course in Computer Numerical Control Machining (CNC).

My Department has also established a Future Skills Action Group with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, Invest NI and stakeholders and employers from the food and drink processing sector. I launched its three year Skills Action Plan last June, which sets out the skills issues identified by employers and available evidence, and details the actions to be taken to address them. This includes the identified need to raise management and leadership skills across the sector, and an indicated shortage of food technicians.

My officials respond quickly to agreed skills shortages in key sectors and we will continue to work with employers on other issues and themes, such as improving career attractiveness and communication.

My Department is undertaking a review of apprenticeships and youth training policy, which will provide us with a further opportunity to enhance the matching of skills to the specific needs of businesses. The review process will include engagement with business representatives.

Education and Employment: 14-to-19-year-olds

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what discussions have taken place with the Department of Education regarding the development of a strategy for 14-to-19-year-olds.

(AQO 3813/11-15)

Dr Farry: Firstly, I welcome the recent announcement by the Minister for Education to extend the budget for the Entitlement Framework for the next two years.

This will enable the excellent collaboration between further education colleges and schools to continue; colleges will be doing all they can to ensure that this is the case.

The Department of Education and my Department are committed to ensuring that, through the education and training system, every young person has the opportunity to fulfil his or her potential. To that end, I have agreed a number of high-level principles with the Minister for Education for the provision of education for 14 to 19 year olds. In particular, we agree that the needs of pupils should come before the needs of institutions, whether schools or colleges. We also agree the importance of avoiding duplication in the delivery of a stimulating and economically-relevant curriculum for our young people.

Senior officials from my Department meet regularly with officials in the Department of Education to consider these important issues, and will continue to do so. Currently, a formal 14 to 19 strategy has not as yet been produced.

I am confident that colleges will continue to provide excellent support to schools in the delivery of the Entitlement Framework. For example, in the 2011/12 academic year, there were almost 14,000 college enrolments through the Entitlement Framework. Performance on this provision is high, with learner retention and achievement rates of 99% and 89% respectively.

Training for Success: Northern Regional College

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the provision of Training for Success courses in the Northern Regional College.

(AQO 3814/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Training for Success programme provides a flexible menu that allows young people to enter training at an appropriate level and progress to a stage where they can maximise their individual potential. It is delivered through three strands, Skills for Your Life, Skills for Work, and Programme Led Apprenticeships which were introduced as a contingency measure in 2009.

Northern Regional College is one of 31 contracted training providers that deliver Training for Success and Programme Led Apprenticeships throughout Northern Ireland. Current occupancy records show that, across Northern Regional College's three sites, eight young people are participating on Skills for Your Life, 31 are participating on Skills for Work Level 1 and 310 on Programme Led Apprenticeships.

The Member will be aware that in November 2012 the training provision within the Northern Regional College was inspected by the Education and Training Inspectorate and evaluated as inadequate. This was in contrast to the further education provision which was evaluated as good.

Within the training provision there was variation in quality across the vocational areas: engineering, for example, was evaluated as very good, while plumbing, bricklaying and wood occupations were inadequate. A lack of work placements for trainees, particularly on Skills for Work and Programme Led Apprenticeships, to enable them to develop their occupational skills sufficiently and achieve their targeted frameworks, was identified as a weakness.

The Department is currently working with the College to ensure that a robust improvement plan is devised and implemented as a priority. The effectiveness of these improvements will be closely monitored by the Education and Training Inspectorate on behalf of the Department.

South West College, Enniskillen

Mr Elliott asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline any progress on the development of a new site for South West College, Enniskillen.

(AQO 3816/11-15)

Dr Farry: The South West College is preparing a business case to address accommodation needs at its Fairview campus in Enniskillen. We anticipate having a draft presented to the Department, for assessment, by June 2013.

Considerable work has been undertaken by the college in developing the draft business case, and initial indications are that the preferred option will be a new build on the site of the old Erne Hospital. This option would involve the development of a shared services site with a range of other public sector bodies. Discussions are ongoing between the college and other local parties.

No firm decisions can be made on options or capital requirements until the business case is complete. The project forms part of my Department's advanced planning, and a bid will be made in respect of the South West College to the next Comprehensive Spending Review.

Stranmillis University College and Queens University, Belfast: Merger

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the proposed merger of Stranmillis College and Queen's University.

(AQO 3817/11-15)

Dr Farry: I have already previously updated members on the proposed merger. I also made a statement on teacher education issues to the Assembly on 28 November 2011.

I have commissioned a two-stage study of the teacher education infrastructure in Northern Ireland. The first stage of this has now been completed and I will make a statement on this to the Assembly in the near future. The second stage will commence in the coming months.

Unemployment: Literacy and Numeracy

Ms P Bradley asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what programmes his Department has in place to assist people who are unemployed to gain basic literacy and numeracy skills.

(AQO 3818/11-15)

Dr Farry: 'Essential Skills' is my Department's primary programme to help people in Northern Ireland gain literacy and numeracy skills; this extends to those who are unemployed.

Individuals can enrol directly onto Essential Skills courses in further education colleges. In addition many of my Department's other programmes identify people with low levels of literacy and numeracy; depending on the programme they are on, such individuals are either required or encouraged to follow an Essential Skills course. For example, those on the Steps to Work

programme or on Training for Success, who are assessed as having a literacy or numeracy need, are offered appropriate Essential Skills courses.

Under the Executive's 'Pathways to Success' Strategy, my Department will fund new approaches to help unemployed young people, particularly those who are not in education, employment or training, to gain among others, qualifications in the essential skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT. The new initiatives include the Community Based Access Pilot Programme, the Collaboration and Innovation Fund, and the Community Family Support Programme.

For 18 to 24-year-old benefit claimants, my department has put in place the Youth Employment Scheme. Participants undertake an audit of their skills, which provides an initial detailed diagnosis of needs, including literacy and numeracy, and makes recommendations on how to address those needs.

The Local Employment Intermediary Service will continue to fund basic pre-entry level tuition within community organisations for unemployed adults to assist them to participate on courses in Essential Skills.

Finally, the Learner Access and Engagement Programme, which will commence in September 2013 following a successful pilot evaluation, will provide support to marginalised adults to undertake suitable further education, including Essential Skills.

My Department's programmes focus strongly on helping people to gain literacy and numeracy skills, particularly those who are unemployed; this remains a top priority for me.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Tourist Board: Irish Language

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether the Northern Ireland Tourist Board is abiding by legislation that requires all public bodies to take positive steps in promoting the Irish language and promoting the traditional form of place names.

(AQW 20002/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): The Northern Ireland Tourist Board abides by Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and recognises its obligations under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages; and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.

TV, Radio and Newspaper Advertising Campaigns: DETI Spend

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail her Department's TV, radio and newspaper advertising campaigns, in each of the last three years; and the spend on each campaign.

(AQW 21063/11-15)

Mrs Foster: During 2009/10 and 2010/11 the Department did not commission any TV, radio or newspaper advertising campaigns. In 2011/12, the Department spent a total of £253,549 on developing and implementing the EnergyWise campaign.

Economic Advisory Group

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the discussions she had with the Economic Advisory Group during the meeting on 5 March 2013.

(AQW 21108/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The main agenda item during my meeting with the Economic Advisory Group on 5th March 2013 was discussing the Group's findings and recommendations from their recently published 'Review of Access to Finance for NI Businesses' report. The Group also discussed their soon to be published Annual Report and initial thoughts on their forward work programme.

Power Supply Security

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the potential impact on security of power supply within Northern Ireland post 2015, as a result of the reduction in power generation across the UK, as a consequence of power station closures due to the Large Combustion Plants Directive and the reduced capacity of the Moyle Interconnector; and what contingencies are being put in place.

(AQW 21330/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Large Combustion Plant Directive has impacts post 2015 on existing power generation plant at the AES owned sites at Ballylumford and Kilroot.

My officials have been engaging with the Utility Regulator and the system operator SONI to consider how best to ensure there is a sufficient future conventional generation capacity margin and therefore adequate security of electricity supply for Northern Ireland.

It is also important to progress the new North-South electricity link and I have encouraged Mutual Energy to restore the Moyle electricity link with Great Britain to its full capacity as soon as possible.

Creative Industries Report

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what impact the recent findings of the Creative Industries Report will have in helping to generate and create employment.

(AQO 3815/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The recent findings of the "Inquiry on Maximising the Potential of the Creative Industries" by the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure has highlighted a number of issues relating to realising the full economic potential of the Creative Industries sector.

I fully recognise the importance of the Creative Industries as one of those sectors that offers good potential for growth and for helping to rebuild and rebalance the Northern Ireland economy. To that end, Invest NI has prioritised its support for the Creative Industries to reflect those areas that offer the greatest potential for growth, both in terms of employment and exports, as well as driving a shift to higher added value and higher productivity levels, namely Film & Television production, Digital Media and Music.

My Department, together with officials in Invest NI, will continue to work closely with colleagues in DCAL to address any barriers to growth and will use the findings of the inquiry to inform the draft Collaborative Framework to Support the Creative Industries.

Broadband Networks

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the timescales to review the EU guidelines for the application of state aid rules in relation to the rapid deployment of broadband networks; and (ii) any obstacles to their early roll out.

(AQW 21413/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department's analysis of the new EU guidelines for the application of State Aid rules in relation to the rapid deployment of broadband networks is ongoing. Officials are working with the UK National Competency Centre and suppliers in assessing baseline data, and consultation responses to ensure compliance with these guidelines. It is the intention to deliver these services by 2015.

North West 200

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what benefits, in terms of visitor numbers and television coverage, are generated as a result of the North West 200.

(AQW 21465/11-15)

Mrs Foster: An economic impact study carried out by Cogent/Millward Browne, commissioned by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB), found that the North West 200 attracted 49,387 visitors to the event in 2012.

In terms of television coverage no survey was commissioned by NITB directly.

According to the event evaluation report provided by the North West 200 organisers, the 2012 event generated BBC coverage totalling 300,000 viewers via 3 programmes in May. The report revealed that the figures for online viewing were over 100,000 and people who saw content through the BBC's NW200 Facebook page averaged 120,000. The highlights programmes had a 23% share of the Northern Ireland viewing audience.

G8 Summit

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the long term economic benefits from hosting the G8 summit and to detail whether her Department has investigated the impact hosting the summit has had in any other countries.

(AQW 21540/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The G8 Summit offers an unprecedented opportunity to showcase Northern Ireland not only to world leaders but to international media as a safe, secure and welcoming place for investment, to work and to experience as a culturally rich tourism destination.

My Department, supported by the Strategic Investment Board, is currently developing the scope, approach, methodology and timetable for the production of an economic impact analysis of the G8 Summit on Northern Ireland. It is too early in the process to accurately quantify the economic impact of hosting the G8 in Northern Ireland; however it is hoped that the findings of the evaluation will be available by the end of 2013.

Contact has also been made with representatives from the G8 Gleneagles 2005 Summit in order to identify and share lessons learned.

Oil or Gas Resources

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether the proposed licensee PL 1/13 has indicated any intention to search for, or to extract unconventional oil or gas resources.

(AQW 21692/11-15)

Mrs Foster: No. The applicant, CHx LLC, has not indicated any intention to search for, or to extract, unconventional oil or gas resources.

CHx LLC has stated that its primary exploration targets are Triassic, Permian and Carboniferous sandstones, similar to the rocks that form the reservoirs in many producing oil and gas fields elsewhere in the UK and Northwest Europe.

Department of the Environment

Planning Applications

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment (i) to detail the (a) Article 31; and (b) Article 33 planning applications currently under consideration; and (ii) for how long each case has been under consideration.

(AQW 19721/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): There were 60 Article 31 applications in May 2011. Of these 37 have been determined. I have announced my decision on a further 5 and of these 4 are being appealed to the Planning Appeals Commission. This represents 42 decisions on Article 31 applications - over two thirds of the total of applications in May 2011. In addition, since May 2011 8 new applications have been received of which 4 have been determined. There are currently 31 live Article 31 applications these are set out in Appendix A. I anticipate a new phase of Article 31 decisions over coming weeks and in advance of the summer recess.

Article 33 Appeals against non-determination, are decided by the Planning Appeals Commission. Records indicate that there are 11 Appeals yet to be decided. These are set out in Appendix B.

Appendix A

	Reference	Date Received	Applicant	Proposal	Location
1	F/1999/0465/O	23/12/1999	Larne Marina Company	Site for Waterfront leisure development	Off Chaine Memorial Road, Curran and Drumaliss, Larne
2	A/2004/0976/F	17/09/2004	Tesco Stores	Proposed foodstore	Land at the junction of Buncrana Road & Templemore Road, Derry (To PAC)
3	A/2006/0180/O	24/02/2006	McCormick Properties & Crumley Construction	Food Store	Lands off Buncrana Road, Londonderry
4	S/2008/0630/F	04/06/2008	Rose Energy Ltd	Biomass fuelled power plant	Ballyvannon Road, Glenavy, County Antrim (To PAC)
5	P/2009/0163/F	12/02/2009	The Hill Partnership c/o Ostick & Williams	Comprehensive mixed use development	Carnbane Way/Shepherds Way Roundabout, Newry
6	H/2009/0264/O	06/05/2009	JHT Upperlands Ltd	Heritage led regeneration	Former William Clark & Sons Ltd, Upperlands, Maghera, Co Londonderry
7	S/2009/0579/F	12/06/2009	Rose Energy Ltd	Water abstraction facility and water pipeline	Ballyvannon Road, Glenavy, County Antrim (To PAC)
8	O/2009/0477/F	31/07/2009	Homecare (NI)	Proposed retirement village and nursing home	Within the grounds of Manor House, Milford, Co Armagh

	Reference	Date Received	Applicant	Proposal	Location
9	A/2009/0689/O	21/08/2009	D & A Properties Ltd	Mixed use regeneration development	Drumahoe Industrial Estate, Drumahoe, Londonderry (To PAC)
10	X/2009/0858/O	26/11/2009	Comber Consortium	Mixed use development	Lands south east of the Comber by-pass
11	O/2009/0792/F	15/12/2009	NIE Plc	Proposed Interconnector	From new substation at Trewmount Road, Moy to link to proposed network in the Republic of Ireland (Public Inquiry)
12	Y/2010/0087/O	05/03/2010	Lagmar Properties Ltd	Retail store, petrol filling stations, industrial units	Former Rolls Royce factory, Upper Newtownards Road, Dundonald
13	X/2010/0296/O	02/04/2010	Marm Developments	Mixed use development	Lands at Marm Factory site, 20 Comber Road, Newtownards
14	A/2010/0241/O	12/04/2010	GSB Guernsey Trading Ltd & GML (NI) Ltd	Mixed use development including hotel, offices, healthcare facility	Lands to the east of Crescent Link, north of Sevenoaks, Londonderry
15	A/2010/0240/O	12/04/2010	GSB Guernsey Trading Ltd & GML (NI) Ltd	Retail superstore	Lands to the east of Crescent Link, north of Sevenoaks, Londonderry (refused – related to 14)
16	S/2010/0041/F	19/05/2010	Lisburn Energy Recovery Ltd	Proposed energy from waste gasification plant and ancillary infrastructure	211 Moira Road, Lisburn
17	H/2010/0254/F	24/05/2010	Merit Investments & Properties	Retail food superstore, petrol filling station	Moneymore Road, Magherafelt
18	Z/2010/1006/O	26/07/2010	Belfast Harbour Commissioners	Mixed use development	City Quays, Clarendon Dock, Belfast
19	Z/2010/1284/O	10/09/2010	The Trustees of the Diocese of Down and Connor	Mixed use development	Glenmona (former St. Patricks site) west of Monagh By-Pass, Springfield Road, Belfast
20	X/2010/0819/F	02/11/2010	JHT Newtownards Ltd & Asda Stores Ltd	Redevelopment of site to provide foodstore, petrol filling station	Former Scrabo High School site, Scrabo Road, Newtownards
21	H/2011/0103/O	25/02/2011	RSL Developments	Proposed foodstore, petrol filling station	Land between Thornhill Avenue and Oakvale Manor, Magherafelt
22	H/2011/0104/O	25/02/2011	Forbes Furniture Group	Demolition of existing furniture store and erection of supermarket	Lands including Forbes Furniture store, existing Lidl store and vacant site, Castledawson Road, Magherafelt
23	H/2011/0145/F	14/03/2011	Corbo Ltd	Food superstore, dental surgery, filling station	40 Ballyronan Road, Magherafelt

	Reference	Date Received	Applicant	Proposal	Location
24	X/2011/0189/O	14/03/2011	Castlebawn Development Ltd	Foodstore	Comber Road, Castlebawn Roundabout, Southern Relief Road, Newtownards
25	U/2011/0138/F	06/04/2011	Ballyclare Developments Ltd	Mixed use development	Former Spinning Mill, Hillhead Road, Ballyclare
26	A/2011/0226/F	07/04/2011	Caw Properties Ltd c/o Rapport Architects	Food superstore, hotel	Lands at Gransha Londonderry
27	L/2011/0359//F	08/04/2011	Townland Properties Ltd	Tourist destination resort	Gublusk bay, Killadeas, Co Fermanagh
28	J/2011/0433/O	18/11/2011	Riverside Building and Development Ltd	Mixed use cross border development	Lifford, Strabane
29	K/2012/0373/F	06/07/2012	Omagh Minerals Ltd	Underground mine and associated surface level works	56 Upper Botera Road, Cavanacaw, Omagh
30	S/2012/0691/F	19/11/2012	Maze Long Kesh Development Corporation	Erection of Peace-building and Conflict Resolution Centre, car parking, public realm and ancillary works utilising existing access from Halftown Road	Former Maze Long Kesh prison site to south of Lower Maze FC (33 Bog Road) and 9-35 Bog Road, Halftown Road, Lisburn BT27
31	F/2011/0256/F	09/12/2011	Quarryplan Ltd. (Omya UK Ltd)	Lateral extension of Demesne Quarry southwards into Tully Field,	Tully Field Parishagh Quarry and Denesne Quarry, 17 Munie Road, Glenarm, Larne

Current Article 33 Appeals as of 10 April 2013 Appendix B

Pac Ref	Planning Ref	Date Lodged With Pac	No of Weeks Lodged with PAC	Description	Address
2011/A0249	W/2011/0438/F	09.01.12	63 weeks	Erection of 39 apartment units for the active elderly	55-66 Clifton Road, Bangor
2012/A0024	B/2012/0009/F	25.04.12	47 weeks	Retention of extension to granny flat	12 Drumbane Road, Dungiven
2012/A0079	Z/2012/0352/O	02.07.12	38 weeks	Apartment development of 217 units	Site bounded by Little York Street, Great George's Street and Nelson Street, Belfast
2012/A0180	T/2012/0123/F	15.10.12	23 weeks	Site for new wind turbine, hub height 51.5m and blade tip height of 66.5m with control room	Approx. 585m east from 12 Laurel Lane, Belfast

Pac Ref	Planning Ref	Date Lodged With Pac	No of Weeks Lodged with PAC	Description	Address
2012/A0186	J/2011/0148/F	05.11.12	20 weeks	Proposed 11 no. wind turbines (maximum base to blade tip height of 125m) with ancillary developments	Meenablagh, Tullycar, Altamullan Townlands, Aghyaran
2012/A0188	V/2005/0206/O	09.11.12	19 weeks	Residential development with new primary vehicular access onto Upper Road (between 111 & 113) and secondary unconnected vehicular access from Downview Road, including associated site works	Lands fronting and south of 1-10 Goldenvue Park, west of Downview Road and north and east of 7-11 School Lane, Greenisland
2012/A0201	S/2012/0408/F	26.11.12	17 weeks	Housing Development (reduced site and numbers)	Opposite 4 & 6 Brankinstown Road, Aghalee
2012/A0212	S/2012/0153/O	05.12.12	15 weeks	Supermarket with associated Petrol Filling Station	Site formerly occupied by Down royal Public House, Ballinderry Road, Lisburn
2012/A0224	B/2012/0162/F	04.12.12	15 weeks	Proposed 250KW Wind Turbine to serve a farm 45m to Hub.	335m west of 120 Curragh Road, Dungen
2012/A0229	S/2012/0152/F	20.12.12	13 weeks	Erection of single storey extension to rear and erection of retaining wall to rear.	17 Haddington Hill, Lisburn
2012/A0252	X/2012/0447/F	15.01.13	10 weeks	Proposed dwelling in accordance with CTY 8.	Lands at 57 Belfast Road, Newtownards

Planning Decisions: Legal Challenges

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment how many legal challenges have been taken against planning decisions over the last three years.

(AQW 20076/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Legal challenges to planning decisions made by the Department can be made through the courts by way of Judicial Reviews (JRs) and the Department has been party to cases over the years.

The Department does not hold a complete central record of all legal challenges on planning decisions made over the last three years. However, based on information currently available, approximately 25 Judicial Reviews were taken against planning decisions between April 2010 to date; half of which remain ongoing. I have instructed officials to collate an accurate up-to-date database for all JRs taken on planning decisions over the last 3 years.

Planners

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment how many professional planners will be (i) transferred to local government; and (ii) retained centrally, when planning duties are transferred to councils.

(AQW 20722/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The arrangements for the transfer of planning functions to local government on 1 April 2015 are ongoing. A key part of these preparations is the development of Workforce Models in collaboration with local government staff to ensure that the right number of professional planning staff transfer to councils in 2015. This work is ongoing and will be subject to further consultation with local council officers and electoral representatives through the Regional Transition Committee (RTC) which I chair.

We will also consult with Trade Union Side. Therefore this is work in progress. I will continue to ensure that electoral representatives on the RTC and in the Committee are informed as information becomes available.

Good and strong work is being advanced on reform – the Executive funding package, now Executive agreement on the functions to be transferred, the public consultation on the severance scheme which commenced in late March, regulations on statutory transition committees to the Assembly shortly and the Reorganisation Bill now circulating to Assembly colleagues before Executive consideration is evidence of this.

Planning Service Staff

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment how many Planning Service staff will be (i) transferred to local government; and (ii) retained centrally, when planning duties are transferred to councils.
(AQW 20723/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The arrangements for the transfer of planning functions to local government on 1 April 2015 are ongoing. A key part of these preparations is the development of Workforce Models in collaboration with local government staff to ensure that the right number of professional planning staff transfer to councils in 2015. This work is ongoing and will be subject to further consultation with local council officers and electoral representatives through the Regional Transition Committee (RTC) which I chair.

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Good and strong work is being advanced on reform – the Executive funding package, now Executive agreement on the functions to be transferred, the public consultation on the severance scheme which commenced in late March, regulations on statutory transition committees to the Assembly shortly and the Reorganisation Bill now circulating to Assembly colleagues before Executive consideration is evidence of this.

Councils: Power to Rename Streets

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment when he will bring forward proposals to give councils the power to rename streets.
(AQW 21349/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I intend to consult on proposals on councils' powers in relation to street naming

later this year. The consultation will provide an opportunity for interested parties to give their views on any changes that may be required in relation to councils' powers to rename streets in their districts.

Lough Foyle: Transboundary Ramsar Site

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of the Environment whether he would facilitate a visit to Lough Foyle by the head of the Ramsar Secretariat, who has expressed an interest in exploring the designation of Lough Foyle as a Transboundary Ramsar Site.
(AQW 21473/11-15)

Mr Attwood: In my previous correspondence dated 29 March 2013 I indicated I had written to the Dublin Minister to ascertain his view on the designation of that part of Lough Foyle which fall within the jurisdiction of the Republic of Ireland.

I would welcome a visit by the head of the Ramsar Secretariat in relation to the Ramsar designation. I await the Dublin Ministers response.

Department of Finance and Personnel

TV, Radio and Newspaper Advertising Campaigns: DFP Spend

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail his Department's TV, radio and newspaper advertising campaigns, in each of the last three years; and the spend on each campaign.
(AQW 21061/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): Details of advertising campaigns by my Department in each of the last three years are provided in the following table.

Financial Year Advertising Campaign	Total Expenditure
2009-10 NI Direct Flooding Incident Line	£36,279
2010-11 Land and Property Services Direct Debit Campaign Northern Ireland Census 2011	£9,824 £529,240

Financial Year Advertising Campaign	Total Expenditure
2011-12 Northern Ireland Census 2011	£101,783

Civil Service: Staff Officer Vacancies

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 20052/11-15, to detail the current Civil Service Staff Officer vacancies based in the North West, in each Department.

(AQW 21238/11-15)

Mr Wilson: At 21 March 2013, the Northern Ireland Civil Service had 2 Staff Officer vacancies in the North West. For the purpose of this response, the North West is defined as the District Council Areas of Derry, Strabane and Limavady.

Civil Service: Equal Pay Settlement

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) how many staff from his Department, who were on secondment to the old Police Authority or the Northern Ireland Office between 2003 and 2009 were mistakenly paid both limbs of the settlement under the agreed 2009 Civil Service Equal Pay Settlement; (ii) what was the total amount that was mistakenly paid to these members of staff; (iii) from where did the money that was mistakenly paid come; and (iv) whether HM Treasury has requested that this money be clawed back.

(AQW 21512/11-15)

Mr Wilson: DFP made 7 payments to former NIPB headquarters staff who had returned to the NICS totalling just over £41,000, which was paid from the funding set aside for the NICS equal pay settlement. The NIPB made payments to a further 18 staff totalling just over £159,000. HM Treasury has not asked us to reclaim any monies paid out to NIPB staff.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Oakridge Social Education Centre, Dungannon

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when a new build is scheduled for Oakridge Social Education Centre, Dungannon.

(AQW 21354/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): The Southern Health and Social Care Trust has been developing a business case for Oakridge Social Education Centre. Timing of business case appraisal is dependent on the likelihood of capital funding availability.

Only after the business case has been through the approval process will I be able to confirm a specific timetable for the project.

Health and Social Care Campus in Derry

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the Health and Social Care campus in Derry will proceed following the findings of the Health Infrastructure Board.

(AQW 21359/11-15)

Mr Poots: You will be aware that I have just announced that two new Health and Care Centres are to be built in Lisburn and Newry.

Future Health and Care Centres across Northern Ireland will proceed based on a prioritisation process in light of budgetary constraints. The Health Infrastructure Board will continue to provide me with advice on this area of work.

Any future investment decisions will be subject to the normal business case approval process and availability of funding.

Smoking Ban: Cars

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when he plans to announce a consultation on introducing a ban on smoking in cars.

(AQW 21420/11-15)

Mr Poots: Banning smoking in private vehicles is one of a range of measures being considered by my Department to reduce smoking prevalence and protect people from the harm caused by second-hand tobacco smoke. Smoking on public transport vehicles and in work vehicles is already banned under the provisions of the Smoke-Free (Premises, Vehicle Operators and Penalty Notices) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2007.

In 2012, I commenced legislation banning sales of tobacco products from vending machines and prohibiting displays of tobacco products in large shops. The display ban legislation will be extended to small shops from April 2015. In addition, I recently introduced a Bill to the Assembly aimed at strengthening sanctions against retailers who sell tobacco products children and young people who are under 18 years of age. I am also giving consideration to the introduction of standardised packaging for tobacco products following a UK-wide consultation on this issue.

As part of this range of measures, it is my intention to consult on a range of options around banning smoking in cars shortly.

Indemnity for First Responder Volunteers

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what progress has been made by (i) his Department; (ii) the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service; and (iii) the Health and Social Care Board regarding indemnity for first responder volunteers.

(AQW 21421/11-15)

Mr Poots: Officials in my Department are leading on this issue and are working with key interests to explore how volunteers in Community First Responder (CFR) schemes can be indemnified. The focus of attention is on enabling the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service to provide appropriate indemnity cover to CFR schemes, and I am hopeful that a potential solution will be identified in the near future.

Community Resuscitation Strategy Steering Group

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many times the community resuscitation strategy steering group has met since the Ministerial announcement in January 2013.

(AQW 21422/11-15)

Mr Poots: To date the Community Resuscitation Strategy Steering Group has met once. This meeting was a joint meeting of the Community Resuscitation Strategy Steering Group and the Community Resuscitation Strategy Working Group and was held in February.

Community Resuscitation Strategy

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what interim plans are in place to ensure the models of practice in the Western, Northern and South Eastern Health and Social Care Trusts will be maintained during the development of the Northern Ireland Community Resuscitation Strategy.

(AQW 21424/11-15)

Mr Poots: Non-recurrent funding has been provided by the Public Health Agency for the Community Resuscitation Development Officer posts in the Northern and Western Health and Social Care Trusts until March 2014.

The British Heart Foundation Northern Ireland continues to provide funding for a Community Resuscitation Development Officer in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust. This funding is in place until October 2013.

GP Practices: Minimum Practice Income Guarantee

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking to help rural GPs maintain coverage of their areas after the cuts in the Minimum Practice Income Guarantee.

(AQW 21433/11-15)

Mr Poots: On 29 January 2013 my Department initiated a consultation with GPs on proposed revisions to the General Medical Services (GMS) Contract for 2013/14. The proposals included the delivery of equitable funding across GP practices over a seven year period from 2014/15 building on negotiations with the General Practitioners Committee nationally last year. This would include the erosion of the Minimum Practice Income Guarantee.

The consultation ended on 22 March and agreement was subsequently reached with the NI GPC on changes for 2013/14. Further work will be undertaken this year with the NI GPC on a detailed assessment of the issues and potential implications for individual practices, to ensure that the finite resources available are distributed equitably across practices in line with patient needs. The Department has deferred any action on the Minimum Practice Income Guarantee until the further work has been undertaken.

Transforming Your Care

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what resources his Department will provide for GPs to help them identify, follow up and manage the health checks for all that are proposed in Transforming Your Care.

(AQW 21434/11-15)

Mr Poots: Transforming Your Care did not propose annual health checks for the population and there are no plans to introduce them in Northern Ireland.

There was an Assembly debate on the issue of annual health checks on 4 February following a Motion proposed by the Health Committee. Whilst I am in favour of the principle of the proposal I did highlight during the debate the need to ensure

that proper consideration was given to the significant resource implications attached to providing such checks for the population, given that current resources are targeted at meeting the needs of patients based on clinical need. I also cautioned on the need to ensure that decisions on policy need to be evidence-based.

GP Practices: Minimum Practice Income Guarantee

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what consultation he had with representatives of GPs before bringing forward his plans to cut the Minimum Practice Income Guarantee.

(AQW 21435/11-15)

Mr Poots: On 29 January 2013 my Department initiated a consultation with GPs on proposed revisions to the General Medical Services (GMS) Contract for 2013/14. The proposals included the delivery of equitable funding across GP practices over a seven year period from 2014/15 building on negotiations with the General Practitioners Committee nationally last year. This would include the erosion of the Minimum Practice Income Guarantee.

The consultation ended on 22 March and agreement was subsequently reached with the NI GPC on changes for 2013/14. Further work will be undertaken this year with the NI GPC on a detailed assessment of the issues and potential implications for individual practices, to ensure that the finite resources available are distributed equitably across practices in line with patient needs. The Department has deferred any action on the Minimum Practice Income Guarantee until the further work has been undertaken.

Strategic Investment Board: DHSSPS Assets

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 17631/11-15, to detail the nature of the £5.23m in assets that his Department has identified to the Asset Management Unit of the Strategic Investment Board, broken down by year.

(AQW 21454/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department has identified to the Asset Management Unit of the Strategic Investment Board potential capital receipts of £5,268,500 for the period 2012/13 to 2014/15. These receipts will be achieved through the disposal of surplus property assets.

The £5,268,500 disposal receipt is broken down into annual targets as follows:

2012/13	£3,728,500
2013/14	£1,260,000
2014/15	£280,000

Measles, Mumps and Rubella Vaccine

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many children have received the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 21468/11-15)

Mr Poots: The measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine is given as two doses, with uptake measured by the number of children who have received the 1st dose by their 2nd birthday and the 1st and 2nd dose by their 5th birthday.

The table below shows the number of children who have received the first dose at age 2 for the past ten years.

Year	Total Children	Children Vaccinated	% Uptake
2003	21532	18884	87.7
2004	21297	18659	87.6
2005	21632	19523	90.2
2006	22253	20236	90.9
2007	22392	20516	91.6
2008	23423	21112	90.1
2009	24324	22267	91.5
2010	25222	23259	92.2
2011	24771	23029	93.0
2012	25397	24158	95.1

The table below shows the number of children who have received both doses at age 5 for the past ten years.

Year	Total Children	1st & 2nd dose MMR	%
2003	23611	20541	87.0
2004	22984	19615	85.3
2005	21808	18716	85.8
2006	22059	19086	86.5
2007	21812	18824	86.3
2008	22247	19745	88.8
2009	22847	20531	89.9
2010	22780	20727	91.0
2011	23698	21642	91.3
2012	24730	22459	90.8

Organ Donor Register

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what percentage of people who signed the organ donor register in the last five years subsequently withdrew from the scheme.

(AQW 21475/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested has been supplied by NHS Blood and Transplant, which is the organ donation organisation for the UK and is responsible for matching and allocating donated organs.

The information is shown in the following table –

Current register status of Northern Ireland residents who joined the NHS Organ Donor Register (ODR) between 1 April 2008 and 31 March 2013

Status	Number	Percentage
Still on ODR	159,943	98.7%
Registrant deceased	1,748	1.1%
Registrant withdrawn	306	0.2%
Total registrations	161,997	100%

Stillbirths

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in cases where a pregnant woman has discovered by ultrasound that her foetus has no heartbeat, what the average waiting time is for delivery of the dead foetus.

(AQW 21480/11-15)

Mr Poots: Every situation is assessed and managed individually. The decision in relation to the time between diagnosis of no foetal heartbeat and delivery is agreed by the doctor in collaboration with the woman and her partner. The woman will usually return within 24 to 72 hours for delivery.

GP Contracts

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the negotiations on GP contracts.

(AQW 21547/11-15)

Mr Poots: I explained in my written statement to the Assembly on 12th April the changes to the GMS Contract for 2013/14 were agreed with NI General Practitioners Committee (NIGPC) on 29 March following a consultation exercise which commenced on 29 January 2013 and concluded on 22 March.

Cancer Treatment

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the cancer treatment afforded to older people here compared with their counterparts in Britain; and what assurances he can give that older cancer patients are not being discriminated against because of their age.

(AQW 21548/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am not aware of any evidence that clinically essential treatments available in other parts of the UK are being denied to Northern Ireland cancer patients.

A patient's age will not disqualify them from receiving the healthcare they require.

Decisions about medical treatment are made by clinicians and are determined by clinical factors taking into account the patient's condition and a consideration of the risks and benefits of particular treatments.

Cancer incidence rises dramatically with age, most likely due to a build-up of risks for specific cancers that increase with age. My Department published a Service Framework for Cancer Prevention, Treatment and Care in 2011 which provides the health service and the public with clear information about the standards of services that apply for cancer patients in Northern Ireland. The Framework supports the increased integration of services across professional and institutional boundaries and places the patient and their care at the centre of the service.

Cancer Treatment

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what assurances he can give that patients here are afforded the same opportunity for specialist cancer treatment as those in Britain; and that patients are not being discriminated against because of their postcode.

(AQW 21549/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am not aware of any evidence that clinically essential treatments available in other parts of the UK are being denied to Northern Ireland cancer patients.

For patients who require treatment and care that fall outside the range of services normally commissioned by the Health and Social Care Board their clinician may apply for an Individual Funding Request or an Extra Contractual Referral. The Health and Social Care Board process for considering those requests may be found at the following link: http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/pdf/Protocol_ECR_and_IFR_arrangements.pdf.

Omagh Hospital

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the construction of the new hospital in Omagh.

(AQW 21563/11-15)

Mr Poots: The enabling works on the Omagh Local Hospital are continuing. Road widening of the Donaghane Road and demolition work was completed in March 2013 and the construction of a new outer link road, sewage and drainage infrastructure is ongoing. The procurement process for the construction of the main hospital building is scheduled for completion by Autumn 2013, with contractors on site soon after. The planned construction timescale for completion by the end of 2015 remains, with the hospital expected to open in 2016.

Samaritans Funding

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much core funding was provided to the Samaritans in each of the last three years; and how much will be provided in each of the next three years.

(AQW 21628/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Samaritans received £16,538 core funding from the DHSSPS in each of the last 3 years.

It is not possible to confirm the level of funding that will be made available to voluntary and community organisations for the years 2013/14 to 2015/16. Officials are assessing budgetary priorities for the year ahead and once this process is complete organisations will be contacted regarding funding available in 2013/14.

Positron Emission Tomography Scans

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety which hospitals perform positron emission tomography scans; and what is the current waiting list in each location.

(AQW 21670/11-15)

Mr Poots: Positron Emission Tomography scans are carried out in the Royal Victoria Hospital Belfast. The waiting time for a Positron Emission Tomography Scan, at 31st December 2012, the most recent quarter for which figures are available, is outlined in the table below.

Waiting time in weeks for a PET scan at Royal Victoria Hospital

	0 - 6 weeks	> 6 - 9 weeks	> 9 - 13 weeks	>13 - 21 weeks	>21 - 26 weeks	> 26 weeks	>26 - 36 weeks	> 36 weeks	Total
Number of patients waiting	136	23	19	57	46	92	0	0	373

Source: SDR1(Part 2) return

Hip Replacement Surgery

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of hip replacement surgeries commissioned by the Northern Local Commissioning Group in each of the last three years.

(AQW 21672/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information is not readily available on the number of hip replacement surgeries commissioned by the Northern Local Commissioning Group.

However information is available on the number of hip replacement procedures carried out in HSC Hospitals in Northern Ireland for those patients who reside in the Northern Local Commissioning Group area, in each of the last three years.

Year	Number of Procedures	
	Elective	Non-elective
2009/10	515	255
2010/11	488	275
2011/12	542	282

Source:- Hospital Inpatient System

It should be noted that hip replacement procedures were identified using the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys tabular list of operations and procedures (OPCS-4) codes W37, W38, W39, W46, W47, W48, W93, W94 and W95. The figures in the answer refer to operations carried out in the primary procedural position only.

Health and Care Centre in Derry

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the planned health and care centre in Derry.

(AQW 21691/11-15)

Mr Poots: As you will be aware, I have just announced that two new Health and Care Centres are to be built in Lisburn and Newry using a third party development procurement route.

My plan is for a further roll-out of Health and Care Centres across Northern Ireland. Decisions on when each one will happen will have to take into account the available budget, both capital and revenue, and will be subject to the normal business case approval process and availability of funding.

Department of Justice**Newtownards Courthouse**

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Justice what investments will be made at Newtownards Courthouse to ensure that it can accommodate the increased numbers arising from the closure of Bangor Courthouse.

(AQW 21405/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): Newtownards Courthouse can already accommodate the increased sitting days arising from the closure of Bangor Courthouse. An additional consultation room has been made available at minimal cost. There are now five consultation rooms at Newtownards Courthouse where solicitors can meet clients in private.

Disabled access at Newtownards Courthouse includes ramped access to the building, power assisted doors and a lift to the courtrooms on the first floor. The lift is being upgraded this year. There are also disabled toilet facilities and a disabled parking bay within the court precincts. Lift access to the first floor court office is not available, but an area on the ground floor is available for disabled court users to access court office services.

Newtownards Courthouse

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Justice what is being done to improve disability access to Newtownards Courthouse.
(AQW 21406/11-15)

Mr Ford: Newtownards Courthouse can already accommodate the increased sitting days arising from the closure of Bangor Courthouse. An additional consultation room has been made available at minimal cost. There are now five consultation rooms at Newtownards Courthouse where solicitors can meet clients in private.

Disabled access at Newtownards Courthouse includes ramped access to the building, power assisted doors and a lift to the courtrooms on the first floor. The lift is being upgraded this year. There are also disabled toilet facilities and a disabled parking bay within the court precincts. Lift access to the first floor court office is not available, but an area on the ground floor is available for disabled court users to access court office services.

Newtownards Courthouse

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Justice what is being done to ensure that solicitors can access private spaces in Newtownards Courthouse in which to meet their clients.
(AQW 21407/11-15)

Mr Ford: Newtownards Courthouse can already accommodate the increased sitting days arising from the closure of Bangor Courthouse. An additional consultation room has been made available at minimal cost. There are now five consultation rooms at Newtownards Courthouse where solicitors can meet clients in private.

Disabled access at Newtownards Courthouse includes ramped access to the building, power assisted doors and a lift to the courtrooms on the first floor. The lift is being upgraded this year. There are also disabled toilet facilities and a disabled parking bay within the court precincts. Lift access to the first floor court office is not available, but an area on the ground floor is available for disabled court users to access court office services.

Hydebank Wood: Secure College

Mrs McKeivitt asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the development of plans for a secure college at Hydebank Wood, as envisaged by the Prison Review.
(AQO 3727/11-15)

Mr Ford: In my statement to the Assembly on 19 March, I reiterated my commitment to the reconfiguration of Hydebank Wood as a secure college and outlined some of the key components of the proposed concept. I now anticipate that the Prison Reform Oversight Group will consider the proposed concept in more detail at its next meeting and that the development paper will be published by the summer.

However, I am not waiting to begin the work needed. Many of those components are actively being managed through the prison reform programme, some of which are short term work packages and some of which will take longer to implement. For example, in my statement I noted that work to improve the physical environment at Hydebank Wood and to make it more conducive to learning has already commenced. I also noted at the heart of the secure college approach will be the introduction of a revised learning and skills curriculum.

I also, in response to a question from Mr Maginness on my statement, noted the details of the best way to provide that curriculum are being explored, and that tendering issues might have to be taken into account. That being the case, it is unlikely that a revised curriculum and delivery model will be in place before 2014.

The benefits of this and other components may not be realised immediately and there is therefore still some detailed planning and co-ordination work required to achieve the secure college concept as envisaged by the Prison Review Team. Notwithstanding this, I am hopeful that the next inspection of Hydebank Wood by CJINI will recognise significant improvements from the inspection in February of this year.

Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust: Chairperson

Mr Sheehan asked the Minister of Justice when he was first made aware that the Chairperson of the Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust was until recently simultaneously a member of the Resource Group during the period when Resource Group successfully tendered for contracts to provide agency staff to the PSNI.
(AQO 3728/11-15)

Mr Ford: I have been advised by the Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust that the Chairperson of the PRRT has provided consultancy services, since 2009, to the Resource Group in his private employment as a consultant.

I am also advised by the Police Service of Northern Ireland that the Resource Group do not provide agency staff to the PSNI.

Fines: Non-payment

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Justice how many people are currently remanded in custody for non-payment of fines.
(AQO 3729/11-15)

Mr Ford: On an average day across the 2012 calendar year there were 34 people in prison solely for defaulting on a fine.

HMP Magilligan

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Justice whether doctors, solicitors and other professionals are no longer subjected to searches upon entry to HMP Magilligan, from 8 April 2013 onwards.

(AQW 21506/11-15)

Mr Ford: Any professional visiting a prisoner enters the prison through the Visitors' Search area. There have been no changes to the search procedures in this area.

From 8 April 2013 any professional visiting the prison for any other reason will be subject to searches that are random, unannounced or intelligence led.

Protection of Workers Bill

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Justice to outline (i) what consideration he has given to the Protection of Workers Bill at Westminster; and (ii) whether he intends to create a similar additional penalty for those who assault workers.

(AQW 21523/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Protection of Workers Bill at Westminster is a Private Member's Bill, introduced in October 2012. It would create, in England and Wales, a specific offence of assault against persons whose work brings them into face-to-face contact with the public or persons engaged in certain "essential" employment. The maximum penalties proposed in the Bill are six months' imprisonment and/or a £5000 fine on summary conviction.

As a result of the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2011 the maximum custodial penalty on summary conviction for common assault against any person is already six months with a £1000 fine also available in the alternative or in addition.

I have no plans at this stage to change the law any further in this area though I keep these matters under review.

Policing and Community Safety Partnerships

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Justice why successful programmes funded through Policing and Community Safety Partnerships during the financial year 2012/13 could not continue to access funding in 2013/14.

(AQW 21627/11-15)

Mr Ford: Each Policing and Community Partnership (PCSP) is required to prepare a Partnership Action Plan to address the key policing and community safety issues identified as priorities within their local area. Following local consultations, community engagement and research, PCSPs are currently submitting their Partnership Action Plans for 2013-2015. These plans may identify local community-based projects as part of the solution to local policing and community safety concerns; it is, however, a matter for each PCSP to consider what projects to include within their Plan, including any that may have received funding in the previous year.

Death of Baroness Thatcher

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice how many arrests have been made for offences arising from on-street parties held in relation to the death of Baroness Thatcher.

(AQW 21660/11-15)

Mr Ford: The PSNI has advised that, as of 15 April, there have been two arrests for offences connected to demonstrations which are believed to be related to the death of Baroness Thatcher. A number of follow up enquires are also continuing.

Strip Searching: Roe House

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Justice (i) how many strip searches have been carried out in Roe House in the last two years; (ii) on how many occasions contraband was recovered; and (iii) how many prisoners reported injuries after the searches.

(AQW 21661/11-15)

Mr Ford: There have been no full body searches carried out in Roe House landings 3 and 4 in the last two years.

Department for Regional Development

Door-2-Door Transport

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline why the new guidelines issued by Disability Action for the interim replacement for Door-2-Door Transport only apply to the northern part of County Down and the eastern part of County Antrim.

(AQW 21368/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): I would refer you to the answer to AQW 21367 11-15. I have asked that Disability Action meet you to clarify the position.

Door-2-Door Transport

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development how a price increase in the interim replacement for Door-2-Door Transport corresponds with assurances that service levels will remain unchanged.

(AQW 21371/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would refer you to the answer to AQW 21367 11-15. There are no changes to the pricing structure under the Disability Action Transport Scheme which commenced on 1 April 2013. I have asked that Disability Action meet you to clarify the position.

Door-2-Door Transport

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development whether the fares for the new Door-2-Door Transport scheme will be returned to previous levels when the interim scheme is replaced with a permanent solution.

(AQW 21372/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would refer you to the answer to AQW 21367 11-15. There are no changes to the pricing structure under the Disability Action Transport Scheme which commenced on 1 April 2013. I have asked that Disability Action meet you to clarify the position.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what role his Department has in scrutinising the administration of the interim replacement scheme for Door-2-Door Transport by Disability Action.

(AQW 21373/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The role for my Department is to ensure that the grant funding given to Disability Action to provide this interim service is used for the purposes it is intended and in accordance with the terms and conditions of grant as set out in our letter of offer to Disability Action.

Extreme Weather: Cost of Clearing Roads

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost of clearing roads as a result of the recent heavy snow.

(AQW 21387/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am not yet in a position to provide detail on all of the costs associated with clearing roads as a result of the recent heavy snow. As there was a significant private sector input to this work, it may be some time before all the contractors' invoices are received and processed for payment. However, it is estimated that the total cost for my Department will be around £3million.

Larne Railway Line

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of passengers using the Larne railway line, between the stations of Larne and Whitehead, during 2012/13 and how this compares with 2011/12.

(AQW 21398/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink have advised that the total number of passenger movements on the line section between Larne and Whitehead was 262,392 in 2011/12. This number increased to 294,627 in 2012/13 which covered 53 weeks and not 52 weeks as per the previous year.

These numbers do not include passengers using 'flash' passes such as School Passes and Annual Commuter Cards.

Sewage Odour in Holywood

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development what action is being taken by Northern Ireland Water to tackle sewage odour in Holywood.

(AQW 21404/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that a £3.5 million infrastructure project to resolve the sewage pollution at Kinnegar Lagoons, Holywood is progressing well and is on target to be delivered within its PC13 Business Plan which covers the period April 2013 to March 2015. Subject to the usual statutory approvals and budgetary constraints, NIW propose to commence the project during this financial year with a construction period of approximately twelve months.

While this project will prevent further pollution to the Lagoons, a second complementary project will consider the remediation options for the Lagoons and particularly the odours emanating from the mud at low-tide. NIW has also commenced work on this second phase and it is progressing well with several environmental studies and mud samplings completed. Further impounded water sampling and flood analysis is also planned along with scientific analysis of the results. The emerging

findings will be known later in 2013 and any financial and programming implications will be considered at that time in relation to the recommended remediation option.

Door-2-Door Transport

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development why the arrangements for the interim replacement of the Door-2-Door Transport scheme in North Down were not ready for the beginning of April 2013.

(AQW 21441/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Disability Action, which has operational responsibility for the interim service, has advised me that there has been a temporary delay in the full implementation of the scheme in the North Down area due to the fact that it is awaiting delivery of suitable accessible vehicles from a supplier in Northern Ireland. Disability Action is expecting delivery of these vehicles throughout April and is confident that the full service will be operational by the end of April. Disability Action have continued to provide services during the period in North Down.

Extreme Weather: Rural Communities

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how many meetings he had with the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to discuss the effect of recent heavy snowfall on rural communities.

(AQW 21489/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I was in regular contact with the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development throughout the recent Winter Weather Incident. We spoke on the telephone throughout the incident. We met on Tuesday 26 March 2013 in Kilcoo, near the Dromara Hills, an area which was badly affected. We held a further meeting on Thursday 28 March 2013 in Stormont. Staff in our respective Departments were, of course, in constant contact as part of the multiagency strategic response to the incident and provided mutual support and assistance round the clock to help those people experiencing difficulties.

Department for Social Development

TV, Radio and Newspaper Advertising Campaigns: DSD Spend

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Social Development to detail his Department's TV, radio and newspaper advertising campaigns, in each of the last three years; and the spend on each campaign.

(AQW 21034/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): Please find a breakdown of spend for DSD TV, radio and newspaper advertising campaigns, in each of the last three years:

2009/10

Pension Reform	£53,102.42
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2010/11

Child Maintenance Choices	£140,331.82
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2011/12

Benefits Uptake	£151,533.37
Child Maintenance Choices	£152,970.02
Boiler Replacement Scheme	£15,914.51

Disability Living Allowance

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development how many people in Derry have been in receipt of Disability Living Allowance in each of the last five years.

(AQW 21259/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The table shows the number of Disability Living Allowance recipients in the Derry City Council Local Government District in each year from November 2008 to November 2012.

Year	*Number of DLA Recipients
November 2012	14,720
November 2011	14,420

Year	*Number of DLA Recipients
November 2010	14,270
November 2009	14,060
November 2008	13,840

* The figures are rounded to the nearest 10.

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority

Welfare Reform Bill: Clause 69

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the projected cost to the block grant, in each of the next five years, from not enacting clause 69 of the Welfare Reform Bill.

(AQW 21393/11-15)

Mr McCausland: An initial estimate as to the potential cost to the block grant of not implementing the under-occupancy provisions, and I stress these are very early figures based on current average rent levels, is thought to equate to approximately £17m per annum. This would obviously be a recurring cost.

Underoccupancy

Mr Lunn asked the Minister for Social Development whether there are any circumstances, such as segregation along religious denominational lines, which would affect the implementation of new underoccupancy rules concerning housing benefit as proposed by the UK Government.

(AQW 21440/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Housing Benefit claimants currently living in the social rented sector generally have no restriction placed on the size of accommodation they occupy, and the amount of Housing Benefit to which they are entitled. The proposed introduction of the size criteria restriction will bring the social rented sector more into line with the approach in the private rented sector, where the rate of Housing Benefit is related to the size of dwelling the claimant needs.

Generally, there will be no exceptions to the application of the size criteria rules for claimants, except in specific circumstances: for example, the restrictions are not applicable to supported housing. Therefore, segregation of housing developments along religious denominational rules would not and should not affect the implementation of Housing Benefit size criteria proposals.

When requests for a transfer are made, applicants should indicate one or two locations where they are prepared to live. Applicants can also extend their areas of choice by opting for a wider General Housing Area which would include more estates and possibly a greater choice of landlords. The Housing Executive must make an offer of accommodation which is, as far as possible, within the locale chosen by the applicant. The Housing Selection Scheme Rules provide that all applicants are entitled to receive a maximum of three reasonable offers of accommodation.

St Patrick's Barracks Site, Ballymena

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Social Development when the newly refurbished housing on the St Patrick's Barracks site, Ballymena, will be ready for occupation.

(AQW 21442/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Fold Housing Association anticipate that the newly refurbished housing on the St Patrick's Barracks site, Ballymena will be ready for occupation in time for the contract completion date of December 2013.

Discretionary Housing Budget

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the value of the discretionary housing budget.

(AQW 21519/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Discretionary Housing Budget is detailed in the table below.

Year	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
DHP Budget (m)	£6.944	£5.939	£4.431	£4.431

Welfare Reform: Underoccupancy

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations and the Chartered Institute of Housing's estimate of the cost of enacting the underoccupancy rate.
(AQW 21532/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Department has only recently received the detail and has not undertaken an assessment of the costings for implementing the under occupation restriction. As I responded in my response to AQW 21257/11-15 it is too early to assess the costs.

Welfare Reform

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what is the current welfare budget; and what the budget will be in each of the next three years if welfare reforms are implemented in full.
(AQW 21570/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Around £5 billion annually of social security spending on Northern Ireland is met directly by HM Treasury in line with the actual entitlement of claimants. This is outside the funding allocated to and managed by the Northern Ireland Executive in the Block Departmental Expenditure Limit for spending on public services such as health and education. This funding relationship, under which HM Treasury carry the direct risk of increased demand, is predicated on Northern Ireland maintaining parity of social security policy with the rest of the United Kingdom.

The social security budget for Annually Managed Expenditure is set on an annual basis through the Estimates process. For 13-14 social security spending on Northern Ireland is estimated to be in the region of £5.36 billion.

Over the course of the subsequent two years spending on social security and budgets are estimated to increase above current amounts. Ongoing work which my Department is taking forward on the financial implications of Welfare Reform shows that Welfare Reform is expected to control the level and rate of the spending increase.

Alcohol: Minimum Unit Price

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the plans to tackle irresponsible alcohol promotions and on the introduction of a minimum unit price for alcohol.
(AQW 21618/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I have been concerned for some time about the way in which alcohol is promoted and marketed; in particular about promotions that encourage young people to buy and consume more alcohol than is good for them.

Regulations banning irresponsible drinks promotions such as, "all you can drink for £20" in pubs and clubs were introduced from 1 January 2013.

I have also endorsed the drink industry's Code of Practice on responsible retailing of alcohol. The code seeks to promote best practice and to prevent alcohol being irresponsibly promoted, served or sold.

I have been working closely with Health Minister Poots on commissioning research to model the likely impact of minimum unit pricing in Northern Ireland.

The research is essential as it will help inform our future decisions in this area and allow us to bring forward proposals that will have a proportionate and positive impact on physical and mental health well being in Northern Ireland.

It is intended that an appointment to carry out the research will be made by the end of June and that the research will be complete before the end of 2013.

Social Security Agency Buildings: Canteen Closures

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the number of canteen closures within Social Security Agency buildings that are planned in the next three years; (ii) the number of staff that will be made redundant as a result; (iii) the reason for the closures; and (iv) why no Belfast canteens are being closed.
(AQW 21781/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The canteen services in the Department are outsourced to external providers. One of the providers, Serco, has advised the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) that it plans to withdraw its catering services from eight offices in the Social Security Agency from 30 June 2013. The eight offices are: Armagh Jobs & Benefits Office (JBO); Coleraine JBO; Enniskillen JBO; Falls Road JBO; Foyle JBO; Hollywood Road JBO; Newry JBO; and Lisahally Processing Centre. There are no plans for the closure of any other canteen in the next three years.

The staff affected by the canteen closures are employees of Serco, and it is anticipated that that there may be some redundancies among these staff.

The reason for the canteen closures is that Serco has advised the Department of Finance and Personnel that it is not economically viable for them to continue to provide the catering services for the eight Social Security Agency offices listed. The contract with the provider included the provision for termination in the event of the catering services not being viable.

Of the eight Social Security Agency canteens that will be closing, two are in Belfast.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

AQW 20416/11-15: Cost of Answering

Mr Campbell asked the Assembly Commission for an approximate cost of answering AQW 20416/11-15.
(AQW 21467/11-15)

Mr P Ramsey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The approximate cost of answering AQW 20416/11-15 is £60.00. This takes into account salary costs of staff tasked with the gathering of information, collation and presentation of the information in the appropriate format and approval by line management.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 26 April 2013

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Procurement and Commissioning Procedures

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the research project procurement and commissioning procedures for the (i) Early Intervention Services and Children, by RSM McClure Waters; (ii) Making better use of the schools estate to support childcare access and affordability, by RSM McClure Waters; (iii) Childcare sector and parental survey, by RSM McClure Waters; (iv) Departmental support to develop Child Poverty Outcomes Models, by the National Children's Bureau and C4EO; and (v) Childminding research exploring issues of practice and quality within child minding and the impact of the grouping of children of different ages within childcare, by the National Children's Bureau; and what procedures are in place to ensure that research projects are open, transparent and relevant.

(AQW 19706/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): In 2011 OFMDFM advertised an open call for research linked to the Department's Policy interests. This call resulted in a number of research projects being funded including:

- Early Intervention Services and Children, by RSM McClure Waters;
- Childcare sector and parental survey, by RSM McClure Waters;
- Childminding research exploring issues of practice and quality within child minding and the impact of the grouping of children of different ages within childcare, by the National Children's Bureau;

The project on 'Making better use of the schools estate to support childcare access and affordability, by RSM McClure Waters', while proposed under the open call was not agreed for funding by the Childcare Research Steering Group. This was primarily because the Department of Education had been engaged in work assessing the use of the schools estate and it was considered there could be duplication of effort.

In 2012 it became necessary to commission some additional research to address specific policy concerns. In total 9 such grants were awarded. In particular Government targets to eradicate child poverty by 2020, difficulties with this in the current economic climate and new innovation in terms of Results Based Accountability and Outcomes Based Analysis resulted in a research grant being awarded to National Children's Bureau to develop Child Poverty Outcome Models, by the National Children's Bureau and C4EO. As a research grant, this was not subject to procurement procedures.

In terms of procedures in place to ensure that research projects are open, transparent and relevant, all research projects are project managed by NISRA statisticians. Each research project also has an advisory group to draw from expertise in each area which stretches beyond the policy arena to academia both local and international. An overall programme board manages the complete set of projects.

Education Bill: Employment of Teachers and Staff

Mr Lunn asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they have had any discussions with the Education Minister regarding the apparent contradiction between Clause 10(c) of the Heads of Agreement and Clause 3(1) of the Education Bill, in relation to the employment of teachers and staff.

(AQO 3406/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: There is no contradiction. The Education Bill gives effect to both of the key requirements on employment matters within the Heads of Agreement. Firstly, it will establish the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) as the employer of all staff in all grant-aided schools. Secondly, it provides for the delegation of employment functions to schools. This will ensure that boards of governors can take all of the employment decisions within their schools if they wish.

Children with Disabilities Strategy

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what specific actions are contained within the strategy for children with disabilities.

(AQW 21792/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The UN Conventions on children and disability place an obligation on all departments here to promote, protect and ensure equality. We are committed to implementing these conventions and we will meet this commitment through the frameworks of our 10 year Strategy for Children and Young People, the new disability strategy and our Delivering Social Change Programme. We support the Social Model of disability - it is not the disability that is limiting but the physical, organisational and attitudinal barriers that society puts in the way of disabled people. It is these barriers that we need to remove.

We are responding to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child recommendations by actions such as:

- developing a disability strategy that covers all age groups including children, young people and adults and all types of disability
- raising awareness on the rights, capabilities and contributions of people with disabilities by supporting a project to raise awareness of the UN Disability Convention amongst children and young people in schools and the development of a resource pack for teachers to help them teach about the rights of disabled people
- introducing Special Educational Needs Order (SENDO) legislation which protects the rights of children with disabilities in education and raising awareness of this legislation;
- taking action to improve speech and language therapy services and autism services for children and young people;
- introducing preventive initiatives through the child health promotion programme to enable optimum health to be reached.

The disability strategy sets out the key priorities that will be crucial in addressing the barriers that currently hinder disabled people's full participation in society. Our new disability strategy covers all types of disability and all ages – children, young people, adults and older people.

Through the Delivering Social Change Programme, we are encouraging the development of Action Plans with smaller numbers of cross-cutting and strategic objectives which can really make a difference and which are additional to existing work across government.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

DARD: Staff Travel Claims

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the cost to her Department of staff travel claims in each of the last three years.

(AQW 20190/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Staff Travel claims are a combination of Official Business Travel and the associated Subsistence Costs. The total costs for the Department and its Agencies for the last three years are as follows:

- 2009/10 - £3.25m
- 2010/11 - £2.96m
- 2011/12 - £3.16m

The Department currently employs 3,000 staff providing a vast array of services in a wide variety of sectors across the North. As part of the service delivery, staff are required to travel to various locations on a daily basis and are reimbursed for travel in line with Civil Service terms and conditions. These requirements represent the majority of cases reported in the answer provided.

The figures reflect both the large number of staff working in the Department as well as the need to deliver services to customers in all areas.

Single Farm Payments: Inaccurate Maps

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many farmers, in the East Londonderry constituency, have been affected by inaccurate maps for Single Farm Payment; and what are the financial consequences for these farmers.

(AQW 20543/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: There were 124 farm businesses with addresses in the East Derry constituency (defined as BT49, BT51, BT52, BT55, BT56) that were affected by fields missing from their new map. This was caused by a technical problem which affected a number of businesses, but which was rectified. All affected maps were available on-line or via the local DARD Direct offices by 22 February.

I asked that an additional 2 weeks be made available (to 8 March) to allow affected farmers to report any required map changes and to have the updated information pre-printed on their Single Application Form.

Farmers affected by the 'missing fields' problem will receive new maps around the time they receive their Single Application Form pack. To avoid any unnecessary delay in their Single Farm Payment they should ensure that the map reflects the

situation on the ground and, if any required map changes were not made by the 8 March, that only the eligible area is claimed on their Single Application Form. Farmers will not be disadvantaged by the fact that they initially received a map with fields missing.

Single Farm Payments: Inaccurate Maps

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in relation to the 3,560 farm maps containing errors which were sent recently to farmers, to detail (i) the cost of posting; (ii) the cost of printing, including associated documentation; (iii) the administration costs of compiling these maps; and (iv) all costs associated with redistributing corrected maps to farmers.

(AQW 20662/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The following detail is available: -

The cost of posting 37,900 maps was £22,899.63 excluding VAT. There are no costs available for the subset of 3,560 maps as these were dispersed within the print runs. The cost of each individual pack is dependent on its weight.

The cost of printing, including associated documentation for 37,900 maps was £72,322. Again the detailed cost for the 3,560 maps cannot be accurately assessed.

The administration costs associated with the 3,560 maps are part of the overall production of 37,900 maps and cannot be separated.

The costs of re-distribution of maps with errors or changes are not yet known as this will occur around the time that Single Application Forms are issued.

Voisinage Agreement

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline her Department's understanding of the terms of the Voisinage Agreement.

(AQW 21364/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Voisinage Agreement has its roots in the London Fisheries Convention of 1964. This was a European agreement which established exclusive fisheries rights within six nautical miles for coastal states. The Convention also allowed for previous access by other states inside six miles to continue by way of voisinage arrangements. A Voisinage Agreement was made between the British and Irish governments in the form of an exchange of letters between officials in the Dublin and Belfast Departments of Agriculture in 1965. This allowed vessels from each jurisdiction to fish in each other's exclusive limits subject only to the regulations in force in each jurisdiction. The letter from the Irish Department of Agriculture and Fisheries on 13 September 1965 stated, in keeping with the rules for south of Ireland vessels, that our vessels up to 75 feet overall length would have unrestricted access within the Irish inner six mile zone and any of our vessels that exceeded 75 and up to 90 feet would require a permit from the Irish authorities.

Rural Schools

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether her Department has a policy regarding the retention and protection of rural schools.

(AQW 21375/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The schools estate and education policy are a matter for the Minister of Education. I can advise that all Departments, including the Department of Education, have signed up to the policy on rural proofing which supports the fair and equitable treatment of rural communities in policy development by scrutinising proposed policies to ensure that the policy does not indirectly have a detrimental impact on rural dwellers and rural communities.

It is the responsibility of the Department for Education to rural proof their own policies, however my officials continue to make themselves available to provide support and guidance should it be required.

I have previously written to the Minister of Education on a number of occasions regarding the future of rural schools and highlighting the importance of rural schools in helping to sustain rural communities. In his response, the Minister of Education has reaffirmed his commitment to sustaining rural schools and outlining his Department's Sustainable Schools Policy. He has also confirmed that this policy was rural proofed prior to its publication in 2009 and that any decision to close or amalgamate a rural school is subject to an assessment using the criteria set out in the Sustainable Schools Policy.

Extreme Weather Conditions: Livestock Loss

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the compensation process that will apply to farmers who have lost livestock due to snow.

(AQW 21383/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I have obtained Executive agreement to hardship funding measures to assist farmers worst affected by livestock losses arising from the recent snow storm.

The first element of these measures is that DARD is paying for the costs of collection and disposal of fallen stock that have died as a direct result of the snow storm. The second element will be a hardship scheme, which will help to mitigate the costs of the livestock losses that have been sustained by farmers arising from the snow storm. This will be under the EU de minimis rules and capped at a maximum of 7,500 euro per farmer, including the collection and disposal costs of the fallen animals. Farmers, who have fallen stock disposed of during the period 2 April – 19 April 2013 by approved renderers, will be eligible for the hardship funding.

The scheme will be framed in light of the information gathered on the extent and nature of losses, which we will build as farmers have stock removed and disposed of by the approved renderers. I hope to release details of the scheme and how to apply as soon as possible.

Unanswered Question: AQW 20208/11-15

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why AQW 20208/11-15, tabled on 21 February 2013, remains unanswered.

(AQW 21408/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: This question was answered on the 8th April 2013.

Unanswered Question: AQW 20207/11-15

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why AQW 20207/11-15, tabled on 21 February 2013, remains unanswered.

(AQW 21409/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: This question was answered on the 8th April 2013.

Extreme Weather Conditions: DARD Helpline

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, during the recent extreme weather conditions, how many calls left on the hotline, were responded to within 24 hours of the original call being made.

(AQW 21412/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: From 25 March the helpline has been staffed 24 hours a day to ensure the majority of calls are responded to upon receipt. If all lines were busy and a caller could not speak to someone, the call diverted to an answer machine and the call was returned shortly thereafter.

Farmers are also able to contact the Helpdesk using the email address published on the website and in press releases. There is dedicated resource in place to deal with email queries.

Broadband: Rural Services

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what funds have been allocated for rural broadband.

(AQW 21414/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I have agreed to commit £5m to the Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) project being delivered by DETI to be used exclusively to target rural areas of high deprivation that currently have no fixed wire infrastructure to access broadband. These funds are in addition to the £2.5m my Department has already invested in the Next Generation Broadband project.

Broadband: Rural Services

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether any funds for rural broadband have been reallocated to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

(AQW 21415/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: As part of a refocus of Axis 3 funds I have agreed to allocate £5m to the Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) project being delivered by DETI, these funds are in addition to the £2.5m my Department has already invested in the Next Generation Broadband project.

Dairy Farm Sector

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, given that milk quotas will no longer pertain, what plans her Department has for the sustainability and development of the dairy farm sector over the next ten years.

(AQW 21423/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The dairy sector makes a very important contribution to the local agri-food industry and to ensure its future sustainability and development when milk quotas end in 2015 it is vital that it remains competitive and profitable. My Department's overall aim is therefore to help the dairy sector to improve its performance and grow its potential in the market-place. This has included joint support with Invest NI for an industry-led dairy competitiveness study whose aim was to help

the sector plan for the future post milk quotas. The recommendations of the study are now being taken forward by the dairy industry.

I believe that a market-led strategy is vital for the dairy sector because when milk quotas end there will be no restraints on production. As a consequence future decisions on milk production will be taken by the dairy sector in the context of input costs and market returns. Therefore, to help ensure that the industry remains sustainable, my Department through CAFRE and AFBI will continue to provide education, training, technical support and research to help improve efficiency, competitiveness and innovation. In addition we will be reviewing the range of support measures available to the local agri-food industry, including the dairy sector, under the 2014 to 2020 Rural Development Programme.

The dairy sector has the potential to grow further and to exploit opportunities arising from the predicted expansion in world population. In this context I look forward to receipt of the report of the Agri-Food Strategy Board which the dairy sector has engaged positively with, and which will help shape the future growth of the sector over the coming years, particularly following the ending of milk quotas.

Cattle Market Infrastructure

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what proposals her Department has for assisting cattle market infrastructure, in terms of providing grants or other support to help it meet all EU animal health and welfare standards. (AQW 21425/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Funding towards the improvement of infrastructure facilities at livestock markets is eligible under the EU Processing & Marketing Grant (PMG) Scheme, which is part of the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013.

Under the current PMG Scheme, my Department has received and approved one funding application towards the construction of a new purpose built livestock market at Markethill, County Armagh.

However, funding is not normally available to assist market operators in meeting minimum legal standards in relation to EU requirements, including animal health and welfare requirements. To date, my Department has not provided financial assistance to cattle markets to enable them to undertake their statutory obligations in relation to animal health and welfare, and I have no immediate plans to do so.

Sika Deer in Ballypatrick Forest

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development who owns the Sika deer in Ballypatrick Forest. (AQW 21456/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Sika deer in Ballypatrick Forest are wild deer. Wild deer are owned by no-one and can roam freely, as can other wild animals such as badgers, hares and foxes.

Extreme Weather Conditions: Livestock Loss

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how she plans to ensure that compensation payments to farmers for animals lost in extreme weather conditions will not differentiate in any way because of postcode and will be provided to assist those worst affected wherever they live. (AQW 21462/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am very aware of and fully sympathise with the very difficult situation that farmers find themselves in at this time arising from the recent snow storm. I have obtained Executive agreement to hardship funding measures to assist farmers worst affected by livestock losses arising from the recent snow storm.

The first element of this is that DARD is paying for the costs of collection and disposal of fallen stock that have died as a direct result of the snow storm. So that those who were potentially hardest hit would have immediate help, a list of postcodes was identified from calls for urgent assistance to the DARD helpline, and all farmers in those areas will have their fallen stock collected and disposed of by approved renderers during the period 2nd – 19th April 2013. However, whether part of the published postcode list or not, any farmer who considers they have suffered livestock losses as a result of the snow storm may be eligible for this scheme. I appreciate that there are smaller discrete areas in other locations in the north of Ireland where farmers have been equally affected by the snow storm and I have made arrangements in my Department to confirm the eligibility of any farmer calling the DARD helpline and requesting that fallen stock are collected under these arrangements.

I also intend to bring to the Executive proposals for a hardship scheme, which will be the second element of the hardship measures. The hardship scheme will help to mitigate the costs of the livestock losses that have been sustained by farmers arising from the snow storm. This will be under the EU de minimis rules and capped at a maximum of 7,500 euro per farmer, including the collection and disposal costs of the fallen animals. Farmers, who have fallen stock disposed of during the period 2 April – 19 April 2013 by approved renderers, will be eligible for the hardship funding.

The scheme will be framed in light of the information gathered on the extent and nature of losses, which will build as farmers have stock removed and disposed of by the approved renderers. The hardship payment will be specifically for livestock losses. I hope to release details of the scheme and how to apply as soon as possible.

Translation Services: DARD Spend

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much her Department spent on translation services for visiting foreign nationals in each of the last five years.

(AQW 21526/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

2008/09 £	2009/10 £	2010/11 £	2011/12 £	2012/13 £
NIL	NIL	NIL	180.00	611.00

Strategic Investment Board: DARD Assets

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 17631/11-15, to detail the nature of the £0.27m in assets that her Department has identified to the Asset Management Unit of the Strategic Investment Board, broken down by year.

(AQW 21583/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The assets that my department identified to the Asset Management Unit were: approximately 20 hectares of land at Tullyhogue, Cookstown, and a small parcel of land (0.04 hectares) at Derrynoyd Forest. Both assets were listed for disposal during 2012/13.

Extreme Weather Conditions: DARD Helpline

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail how many calls were received by the 0300 200 7852 emergency helpline, each day from 22 March 2013.

(AQW 21589/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: At 16 April a total of 936 calls have been received by the helpline. Prior to the 25 March only one call had been recorded which related to flooding. The Helpline has been manned 24 hours a day since 25 March. A breakdown of calls received per day between the 25 March and 16 April is provided at the Annex.

Annex

Date	Number of calls received
25 March	47
26 March	48
27 March	43
28 March	69
29 March	99
30 March	35
31 March	8
1 April	35
2 April	65
3 April	80
4 April	64
5 April	55
6 April	11
7 April	7
8 April	66
9 April	40
10 April	41
11 April	51
12 April	31

Date	Number of calls received
13 April	6
14 April	0
15 April	27
16 April	8

Extreme Weather Conditions: Fallen Animals

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, further to her Department's announcement that it would meet collection and disposal costs in respect of fallen animals resulting from the recent weather crisis, whether she intends to deduct such costs from any payment due to a farmer under the hardship scheme and to outline the reasons for this decision. (AQW 21591/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I have obtained Executive agreement to hardship funding measures to assist farmers worst affected by livestock losses arising from the recent snow storm. The first element of this is that my Department will pay for the costs of collection and disposal of fallen stock from the farmers most severely affected. This relieves those farmers of a potential cost to their business and protects both the environment and animal health by encouraging the proper disposal of fallen stock.

I also intend to bring to the Executive proposals for a hardship scheme, which will be the second element of the hardship measures. The hardship scheme will help to mitigate the costs of the livestock losses that have been sustained by farmers arising from the snow storm. Farmers, who have fallen stock disposed of during the period 2 April – 19 April 2013 by approved renderers, will be eligible for the hardship funding. The scheme will be framed in light of the information gathered on the extent and nature of losses, which we will build as farmers have stock removed and disposed of by the approved renderers.

Under the EU State Aid de minimis rules 7,500 euro is the maximum that can be granted to farmers. The costs of collection form part of the State Aid and must be taken into account when determining payments under the hardship funding measures.

Extreme Weather Conditions: Helicopter Support

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what level of negotiations, including the dates of meetings discussion topics and outcomes, were entered into by her departmental officials with the (i) Royal Air Force; and (ii) Government of the Republic of Ireland, in relation to the provision of helicopter support for the relief effort for farmers affected by the recent severe weather.

(AQW 21595/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: As part of the discussions on securing assistance in the relief effort, I made contact with a number of Ministers including the Secretary of State Theresa Villiers MP, and the Justice Minister Alan Shatter TD. My departmental officials were in contact with the British Ministry of Defence (MOD) from Monday 25 to Friday 29 March regarding the provision of helicopter support from the Royal Air Force (RAF) for the relief effort for farmers affected by the recent severe weather. Daily meetings were held between the British MOD and DARD on 25, 26, 27 and 28 March to discuss operational and planning matters regarding feed drops. There was also significant direct contact between my officials and the British MOD and the RAF in advance of and during the operations to deliver feed. The cost issues of the feed drops were discussed with the MOD on 25 March.

After my direct contact with Alan Shatter TD, my officials were in contact with the Irish Department of Defence from Tuesday 26 to Friday 29 March. Contact with the Irish Air Corps at operational level commenced on Wednesday 27 March.

Extreme Weather Conditions: DARD Helpline and E-mail

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the performance of the 0300 200 7852 emergency helpline and e-mail, from 22 March 2013, in coping with the concerns of farmers caught up in the recent severe weather conditions and whether she is aware of the concerns raised by some farmers that an excessive number of calls were redirected.

(AQW 21596/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The helpline staff have been working intensely to ensure that issues raised by farmers are dealt with quickly. At the 14 April 902 calls, relating to the adverse weather conditions, had been received.

The DARD Helpline was staffed 24 hours a day from 25 March. It was staffed in Dundonald House from 8am to 10pm from Monday 25 March to Friday 29 March, and it has been staffed every day in Dundonald House from 9am to 5pm from Saturday 30 March. Outside these hours the Helpline calls are diverted to my Department's staff at the Veterinary Service Belfast Portal office.

During the extremely busy periods, where a caller could not speak to someone, the call diverted to an answer machine and the call was returned thereafter. The answer machine is routinely checked throughout the day to make sure calls are returned

as quickly as possible. Farmers are also able to contact the Helpdesk using the email address published on the website and in press releases.

Where the call cannot be dealt with by helpline staff, for instance if it relates to fallen animals outside the Published Postcode List, a dedicated team of Veterinary Service or CAFRE staff have provided the necessary support.

In this dynamic situation my officials have done their utmost to ensure the information provided to callers is correct. To date a complaint has not been received regarding an excessive numbers of calls being redirected.

Extreme Weather Conditions: Assistance for Farmers

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether any grants are available to assist farmers effected by the recent heavy snow.
(AQW 21603/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am very aware of and fully sympathise with the very difficult situation that farmers face at this time arising from the recent snow storm.

I have obtained Executive agreement to hardship funding measures to assist farmers worst affected by livestock losses arising from the recent snow storm. The first element of this is that my Department will pay for the costs of collection and disposal of fallen stock from the farmers most severely affected. This relieves those farmers of a potential cost to their business and protects both the environment and animal health by encouraging the proper disposal of fallen stock.

I also intend to bring to the Executive proposals for a hardship scheme, which will be the second element of the hardship measures. The hardship scheme will help to mitigate the costs of the livestock losses that have been sustained by farmers arising from the snow storm. This will be under the EU de minimis rules and capped at a maximum of 7,500 euro per farmer, including the collection and disposal costs of the fallen animals. Farmers, who have fallen stock disposed of during the period 2 April – 19 April 2013 by approved renderers, will be eligible for the hardship funding. The scheme will be framed in light of the information gathered on the extent and nature of losses, which we will build as farmers have stock removed and disposed of by the approved renderers.

The hardship payment will be specifically for livestock losses. I hope to release details of the scheme and how to apply as soon as possible.

Extreme Weather Conditions: Compensation

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development who farmers should contact to apply for compensation for deceased animals as a result of the recent heavy snowfall.
(AQW 21606/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I have obtained Executive agreement to hardship funding measures to assist farmers worst affected by livestock losses arising from the recent snow storm. The first element of this is that my Department will pay for the costs of collection and disposal of fallen stock from the farmers most severely affected. This relieves those farmers of a potential cost to their business and protects both the environment and animal health by encouraging the proper disposal of fallen stock.

I also intend to bring to the Executive proposals for a hardship scheme, which will be the second element of the hardship measures. The hardship scheme will be specifically for livestock losses and help to mitigate the costs of the livestock losses that have been sustained by farmers arising from the snow storm. This will be under the EU de minimis rules and capped at a maximum of 7,500 euro per farmer, including the collection and disposal costs of the fallen animals. Farmers, who have fallen stock collected and disposed of during the period 2 April – 19 April 2013 by approved renderers will be eligible for the hardship funding. The hardship scheme will be framed in light of the information gathered on the extent and nature of losses, which we will build as farmers have stock removed and disposed of by the approved renderers. I hope to release details of the scheme and how to apply as soon as possible.

Extreme Weather Conditions: DARD Emergency Procedures

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, what emergency procedures her Department has put in place to ensure that help for rural communities isolated due to severe weather, is provided as quickly and efficiently as possible.
(AQW 21623/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has existing plans in place to deal with a range of emergency situations. The recent severe weather necessitated a multi- agency response, managed under the Executive's central crisis management arrangements, and in which my Department fully participated. The multi-agency response quite rightly focused initially on very difficult humanitarian issues, including the needs of vulnerable people in rural areas. As it became clear that there were emerging animal welfare issues my Department's existing emergency management arrangements were utilised in addressing shortages of and access to animal feed, and the collection and disposal of dead animals.

Salmon Fishing: River Faughan

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what follow up checks are made on the use of the tags issued for salmon fishing on the River Faughan.

(AQW 21657/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Loughs Agency staff are responsible for regulation of salmon tags in the Foyle area and carry out regular patrols on the River Faughan. Any angler identified by staff as having caught a salmon is checked to ensure that it is appropriately tagged and recorded in line with the appropriate regulations.

Salmon Fishing: River Faughan

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action is being taken to ensure that salmon caught on the River Faughan is tagged and logged.

(AQW 21658/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Loughs Agency works in partnership with the River Faughan Anglers Limited and actively engages in educating adults and children through the Agency's interpretative centre and education programme.

Loughs Agency staff also patrol the River Faughan on a regular basis, to check that salmon are appropriately tagged and recorded.

Salmon Stocks: River Faughan

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps are being taken to improve the measures to prevent the destruction of salmon stocks in the River Faughan.

(AQW 21659/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Loughs Agency is responsible for the conservation and protection of salmon in the Foyle system. The Agency is proactive in making and enforcing regulations for this purpose and for freshwater habitat management. All are underpinned by best scientific advice and reflect the resolutions and guidance from the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation.

The Loughs Agency are currently in the process of introducing new regulations which will include a reduction of the number of carcass tags issued to anglers in the Foyle and Carlingford area. This will impact on numbers of salmon taken.

It should be noted that the River Faughan salmon stocks have met their target population levels in the last four years.

Ash Dieback

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many trees have been lost to Ash Dieback Disease.

(AQW 21677/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: At 19 April 2013, destruction notices have been issued for an estimated 55,000 ash trees as a result of Ash Dieback.

Single Farm Payments

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the farm inspection process from the first point of contact with the farmer through to receipt of the Single Farm Payment.

(AQW 21680/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The farm inspection process for land eligibility inspections associated with claims under the Single Farm Payment Scheme is detailed in Annex A, a copy of which can be found in the assembly library, which illustrates a flow chart from submission of applications to the finalisation of claims.

Welfare Reform Bill: Rural Proofing

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action she has taken to ensure that the draft Welfare Reform Bill has been rural proofed.

(AQW 21690/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: It is the responsibility of all Executive Departments to rural proof their own policies. The Welfare Reform Bill falls within the remit of the Minister for Social Development, therefore the responsibility to ensure that it is rural proofed falls to his Department.

My officials continue to make themselves available to provide support and guidance to all departments on rural proofing should it be required.

Foie Gras Ban

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she has given consideration to introducing a ban on the sale of foie gras.

(AQW 21693/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: While the production of foie gras is banned here, the free movement of goods is a key principle in European Community law and is enshrined in Part III, Title I of the treaty establishing the European Community (TEC).

A unilateral ban on the import or sale of foie gras would contravene the provisions of the TEC and would result in proceedings being brought against us before the European Court of Justice.

As a result, I have no plans to ban the sale of foie gras here.

Equine Slaughter Plant, Belfast

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 21070/11-15, whether the equine slaughter plant in Belfast operates to animal welfare standards and is regularly inspected by departmental veterinary staff.

(AQW 21719/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I refer to my previous answer provided in AQW 21070/11-15.

Joint Council Committees and Local Action Groups

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what assistance she is providing to joint council committees and local action groups in relation to (i) assisting farmers affected by the recent severe weather conditions; and (ii) minimising the underspend in Rural Development funding.

(AQW 21727/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Rural Development Programme, including Axis 3, cannot accommodate hardship payments to farmers as it is currently drafted.

The programme would require an amendment which would have to be justified and approved by the Programme Monitoring Committee and the EU Commission. This is a process which would take in the region of 6 months.

As regards underspend within Axis 3, I am pleased to note that following a number of initiatives to accelerate spend, the Programme has now spent £45m. In addition, the refocus of the programme that I announced at the end of 2011 has recently resulted in the issue of a further £17m in Letters of Offer to 31 projects. The 7 Clusters have also announced that they have achieved almost full commitment of the available funds and it is their intention to spend out their remaining funds over the next 2 years.

DARD: Headquarters

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether a business case has been submitted to the Department of Finance and Personnel for the relocation of her Department's headquarters.

(AQW 21730/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Business Case to consider the options for delivering the DARD headquarters on the Ballykelly site has not been submitted to DFP but is expected to be completed by Summer 2013.

Extreme Weather Conditions: Helicopter Support

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the reasons for withdrawing air support during the recent snow crisis.

(AQW 21735/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Following the helicopter flights on 28 March our technical and logistical assessment indicated that there were no outstanding requests for help that required aerial support. Intelligence from both farmers and DARD staff on the ground indicated that access to remote areas was improving and that priority fodder needs had been addressed. While helicopter support was stood down it was kept under review, and all of the farmers who had requested assistance to move fodder successfully received support via our ground support programme involving Forest Service soft track machines.

Staff continued to work with farmers to address any ongoing adverse weather related issues.

Social Clauses

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in light of the Programme for Government commitment to include social clauses in all public procurement contracts for supplies, services and construction, how many contracts her Department has entered into since this commitment; and what where the social clauses included in these contracts.

(AQW 21737/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Since publication of the PfG commitment to include social clauses in contracts, my Department has entered into 37 contracts over the value of £30k, all of which included social clauses. All 37 contracts included an Equality Clause, a Health and Safety Clause and an Early Payment Clause. 3 of the contracts also included other Social Clauses such as providing opportunities for the unemployed, apprentices and students; providing work experience or employment opportunities; and providing opportunities for employees to develop essential skills. I will continue to ensure social clauses are maximised in DARD contracts.

EU Council Directive 1999/74/EC: the Welfare of Laying Hens

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether her departmental officials have obtained any evidence of non compliance with EU Council Directive 1999/74/EC: the Welfare of Laying Hens.

(AQW 21749/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The EU Council Directive 1999/74/EC: the Welfare of Laying Hens is enforced in NI through the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations 2012 (WOFAR). No notices have been served on laying hen premises under WOFAR, since the enactment of this legislation on 2nd April 2012.

818 inspections have been completed within the previous 12 months, visiting 100% of producers and evidence has been recorded of non-compliances in 0.9% of these cases. These are related to litter or range provision and have been followed up through the egg marketing regulations.

Extreme Weather Conditions: Livestock Loss

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the number of farm animals who died as a result of the severe weather, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 21755/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: At 17 April 28,437 fallen animals had been collected. A table is provided at the Annex which details the number of animals collected per constituency.

Annex

Breakdown by constituency of fallen animals collected as a result of the severe weather

Constituency	Total Animals Collected
Belfast North	3
East Antrim	8,244
East Londonderry	745
Lagan Valley	1,245
Mid Ulster	472
Newry & Armagh	527
North Antrim	7,140
South Antrim	879
South Down	8,616
Strangford	86
Upper Bann	93
West Tyrone	387
Total	28,437

Extreme Weather Conditions: Air Support

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) the cost of the air support provided by the RAF during the recent severe weather; and (ii) whether this was the deciding factor when withdrawing the support.

(AQW 21871/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In line with standard procedure and Treasury protocols, the British Ministry of Defence expects to be reimbursed when it provides support to the civil authorities throughout Britain and the north of Ireland. The detail of the actual costs for the use of helicopters to drop supplies to farmers are still being worked out and have not yet been presented to the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

The Irish Air Corps have indicated that there would be no charge for the aerial support provided by them to get supplies of fodder to livestock.

Cost was not the deciding factor in the decision to withdraw aerial support. Following helicopter flights on 28 March our technical and logistical assessment indicated that there were no outstanding requests for help that required aerial support. Intelligence from both farmers and DARD staff on the ground indicated that access to remote areas was improving and that priority fodder needs had been addressed. While helicopter support was stood down it was kept under review, and all of the farmers who had requested assistance to move fodder successfully received support via our ground support programme involving Forest Service soft track machines.

Staff continued to work with farmers to address any ongoing adverse weather related issues.

Extreme Weather Conditions: Livestock Loss

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what financial support is available to farmers who need to replace their sheep breeding stock following the recent snow.

(AQW 21873/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I have obtained Executive agreement to hardship funding measures to assist farmers worst affected by livestock losses arising from the recent snow storm. The first element of this is that my Department will pay for the costs of collection and disposal of fallen stock from the farmers most severely affected. This relieves those farmers of a potential cost to their business and protects both the environment and animal health by encouraging the proper disposal of fallen stock.

I also intend to bring to the Executive proposals for a hardship scheme, which will be the second element of the hardship measures. The hardship scheme will help to mitigate the costs of the livestock losses that have been sustained by farmers arising from the snow storm. This will be under the EU de minimis rules and capped at a maximum of 7,500 euro per farmer, including the collection and disposal costs of the fallen animals. Farmers, who have fallen stock disposed of during the period 2 April – 19 April 2013 by approved renderers, will be eligible for the hardship funding. The scheme will be framed in light of the information gathered on the extent and nature of losses, which we will build as farmers have stock removed and disposed of by the approved renderers.

Forest Service Geographic Information System Malfunction

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if there is a problem with the Forest Service GIS computer programme and if so, to provide further details including the length of time there has been a problem and when it will be remedied.

(AQW 21882/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Forest Service Geographic Information System (GIS) was closed down for 12 working days on several occasions between 11 February and 11 April to repair a problem which had resulted in slow operation of the software. This was resolved and the Forest Service GIS became fully operational from 12 April.

Forest Service Geographic Information System Malfunction

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why Forest Service cannot process grant applications as a result of a GIS system programme malfunction; and if this exercise and process can be conducted manually.

(AQW 21883/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Forest Service GIS is an integral part of the system to administer woodland grant applications. It is used when checking eligibility for support, environmental information and to provide data and maps to support grant approvals.

Manual processing is no longer considered an effective or sufficiently accurate means of assessing eligibility or mapping areas for grant support.

Forest Service Geographic Information System Malfunction

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much new woodland planting has been delayed due to a GIS system programme malfunction.

(AQW 21884/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Forest Service officials have identified 7 applications for a total of 16 hectares which have been delayed beyond the target approval period of 8 weeks as a result of the close down of the Forest Service GIS for repair.

Forest Service GIS was repaired and operational on 12 April and 4 of these applications have since been processed with approvals issued. Site visits for the remaining 3 have been arranged and we estimate that approvals will be issued by the 3rd May 2013 subject to findings of the site visit.

Glenariff Forest Park

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) why the walks in Glenariff Forest Park are due to close; and (ii) for how long will they be closed.

(AQW 21901/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

- (i) The walks in Glenariff Forest Park had been closed to the public in the interest of public safety as there was widespread snow and wind damage that caused trees and branches to fall and block forest roads and walking trails.
- (ii) Work on clearing sections of recreation paths has been completed and public access to the Forest Park is now available.

It will take a considerable amount of specialised work to clear and repair one particular path to the Glenariff waterfalls. The timeframe for the re-opening of this trail will be dependent on the findings of a full engineering assessment outlining the necessary repair works required to make the trail safe for public use.

I am aware of the importance of Glenariff Forest Park as a tourist attraction and all trails affected by storm damage will be re-opened as soon as possible following their reinstatement.

Extreme Weather Conditions: DARD Helpline

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether Typetalk training was provided to the staff that operated the Emergency Helpline during the snow crisis.

(AQW 21902/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Typetalk is used for communications between a textphone and a

standard telephone and is provided by an organisation called Text Relay. This is a fully automated service so, when required, relay assistants from within Text Relay provide a text-to-voice and voice-to-text translation service. Consequently there was no need for further training for the Helpline operators.

College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise: Annual Tuition Fees

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the reasons for the 3.26 per cent increase in annual tuition fees at the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise.

(AQW 21930/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: DARD's policy is to set its annual tuition fees for Higher Education courses at CAFRE in line with the tuition fees framework set by DEL. DEL operates a 2 tier fee regime, allowing students to be charged either a basic amount or a higher amount. These fees are increased annually in line with inflation, thus maintaining them constant in real terms. DARD charges the basic amount for Higher Education courses at CAFRE.

On 9 May 2012, DEL made a Statutory Rule which increased the basic fee from 1 September 2013 by 3.26%. In line with its policy, DARD made a Statutory Rule on 18 April 2013 replicating this increase for Higher Education courses at CAFRE, thus maintaining parity with the basic amount set by DEL.

Prehistoric Monuments

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what assistance her Department offers rural dwellers who want to preserve and protect a prehistoric monument on their land.

(AQW 21969/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

- 1 Funding has been available, and may still be available in some areas, under Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme 2007-13 (Measure 3.6 - Conservation and Upgrading of the Rural Heritage).
- 2 Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme is being delivered by seven Joint Council Committees (JCC) working in partnership with their appointed Local Action Group. A full list of contacts is attached at Appendix A.
- 3 The aim of this Measure is to create opportunities to preserve and upgrade the rural heritage and to use the natural and built environment as the basis for sustainable economic growth in rural areas.

Appendix A

The 7 Council Clusters (Lead council in bold) delivering the programme are:

RDD North Area

- Antrim, Newtownabbey and Carrickfergus
- Ballymena, Ballymoney, Coleraine, Larne and Moyle
- Belfast, Castlereagh and Lisburn

RDD West Area

- Magherafelt, Cookstown, Dungannon, Fermanagh
- Omagh, Strabane, Limavady, Derry

RDD South Area

- Ards, Banbridge, Down, North Down
- Armagh, Craigavon, Newry and Mourne

Animal Health and Welfare NI

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in relation to Animal Health and and Welfare NI, to detail whether her Department (i) provides its staff; and (ii) assists it financially.

(AQW 22007/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Animal Health and Welfare NI (AHWNI) is a, not-for-profit, independent industry body established last year to lead on the development and promotion of initiatives to tackle production diseases. My Department does not provide AHWNI with any staff.

In support of this industry-led initiative my Department will provide start-up funding to the 31 March 2014 of up to £125,497 to help AHWNI deliver its bovine viral diarrhoea (BVD) eradication programme and to develop a Johnes's disease control programme.

Dog Licences

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if people with disabilities who require an assistance dog will be exempt from purchasing a dog licence.

(AQW 22042/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The control of dogs here is legislated for by the Dogs Order 1983, Article 3 of which makes it unlawful to own a dog without a licence. However, Article 5 of the Order creates a number of exemptions to the requirement for a licence.

In addition, the Dogs (Amendment) Act 2011 amended the Dogs Order to create an additional exemption from the licensing requirements so that a dog licence is not required for a dog kept and used by a disabled person (within the meaning of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995) wholly or mainly for the purpose of assisting that person to carry out normal day-to-day activities. This new exemption came in to operation on 28 July 2011.

Bovine Viral Diarrhoea Eradication Programme

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the percentage of herd keepers who have participated in the voluntary phase of the Bovine Viral Diarrhoea eradication programme.

(AQW 22106/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The bovine viral diarrhoea (BVD) eradication programme is a voluntary programme developed and operated by Animal Health and Welfare NI (AHWNI) which is industry body, thus the farming industry has overall responsibility for the programme. The information you requested is therefore held by AHWNI who have advised that good progress has been made to date with 894 herds now in the programme. Over 40,500 cattle ear tags have been purchased and 13,535 tests have been carried out, of which 0.51% have tested positive for BVD.

Given the seasonal nature of calving here, which is focused both in spring and autumn, it is anticipated that the uptake by herd keepers will increase over the coming months.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure**Promoting Equality and Tackling Poverty and Social Exclusion**

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 20010/11-15, to detail the criteria used for any potential departmental funding to be considered in the context of her Department's priority of promoting equality and tackling poverty and social exclusion.

(AQW 20685/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): My Department's statutory duty, with regard to public funded sponsorship, must be discharged in accordance with relevant public law and public policy, with specific due regard to both the purposive and procedural needs to promote equality under S75(1) of the NI Act 1998.

With regard to specific criteria used for funding, Ministerial decisions, in the foregoing context, will be applied in relation to relevant factors, particularly timelines and targeting and clear, transparent and tangible outcomes which:

- Promote equality;
- Tackle poverty;

- Tackle social exclusion;
- Provide opportunities to deliver sustainable economic, social, and equality outcomes, and wider community returns;
- Provide opportunities to train and employ the long term unemployed; and
- Provide suicide prevention initiatives.

Department of Education

Schools: Nurture Units

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Education whether there is any provision within the current Nurture Units for children learning through Irish-Medium.

(AQW 20791/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Schools with established nurture units have developed this provision by acting on their own initiative. Funding for these units has been secured from a variety of other sources, mainly the Department of Social Development's Neighbourhood Renewal Investment Fund.

The Department's list of existing nurture units is based on information provided by the Education and Library Boards and this does not include any Irish Medium school with an established nurture unit. The Department is not aware of any particular reason for this position. However, it may be that, in the past, pupil numbers in P1/P2 were considered insufficient to sustain an intervention such as nurture group provision and to warrant the allocation of a distinct nurture room within existing accommodation. Until recently many Irish Medium schools have had small class sizes, making a nurture unit a less appropriate intervention, compared to other supports that may be available.

An additional 20 new nurture units will be created under the Delivering Social Change Signature Project. All primary schools were assessed against specific criteria, using objective measures of need and a ranked list produced using the percentage of pupils with free school meals entitlement. This approach has identified 20 potential locations for the new nurture units. I hope to be in a position to formally announce the schools which will participate in the Signature Project shortly.

I have also recently agreed to provide funding to 10 schools with existing nurture group provision, to ensure this is maintained until June 2015. This time period coincides with the life span of the Delivering Social Change Signature Project and ensures that all aspects of nurture group provision can be evaluated with a view to informing future policy.

It is open to any other primary school, Irish Medium or otherwise, to consider whether nurture provision is an appropriate intervention to meet the needs of their pupils and to explore other sources of funding if self funding is not an option.

Primary Schools: Area Planning

Mrs Dobson asked Minister of Education, in relation to the Area Planning proposals, how he will identify what role a primary school plays within its community, especially those in isolated rural communities; and what importance will be given to this role prior to making a final decision regarding a school's future.

(AQW 21380/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Area Planning is the mechanism for the delivery of the Sustainable Schools Policy, which provides a framework of criteria and indicators for assessing the range of factors which may affect a school's sustainability. This policy applies to all schools regardless of location.

The policy explicitly recognises the particular needs of rural communities. This is reflected in the lower enrolment threshold for rural primary schools, the accessibility criterion and the strong links with the community criterion. This latter criterion lists indicators which allow the role the school plays within its own community to be assessed.

The policy was assessed against the Rural Development Council's rural proofing checklist set out in its report, Striking the Balance, before publication in 2009. No adverse impact was identified.

The Boards' draft Primary Area Plans have been released for public consultation and this provides the opportunity for rural communities and their representatives to put forward their views.

Primary Schools

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education what measures he will use to ensure that judgements are made fairly for school children and communities when decisions are taken on the future of primary schools, particularly those in rural communities.

(AQW 21382/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Area Planning is the mechanism for the delivery of the Sustainable Schools Policy, which provides a framework of criteria and indicators for assessing the range of factors which may affect a school's sustainability. This policy applies to all schools regardless of location.

The policy explicitly recognises the particular needs of rural communities. This is reflected in the lower enrolment threshold for rural primary schools, the accessibility criterion and the strong links with the community criterion. This latter criterion lists indicators which allow the role the school plays within its own community to be assessed.

The policy was assessed against the Rural Development Council's rural proofing checklist set out in its report, *Striking the Balance*, before publication in 2009. No adverse impact was identified.

The Boards' draft Primary Area Plans have been released for public consultation and this provides the opportunity for rural communities and their representatives to put forward their views.

Children Changing Primary School

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education to detail any historical research that his Department has conducted into the impact on educational outcomes for children changing primary school; and any historical advice provided by his Department to the parents of children changing primary school.

(AQW 21386/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department has not commissioned research into the impact on educational outcomes for children changing primary schools, nor has it provided any historical advice to parents of children changing primary school.

Where children need to change schools because of a school closure, amalgamation or parental choice, the relevant Education and Library Board is responsible for providing support and information to enable parents to meet their preference, where possible, as to which primary school they wish their child (ren) to attend. This can include meeting with parents; providing details of schools with available places; information on how to apply for places, transport arrangements, open evenings; or arrangements for possible transition periods.

'Taking Boys Seriously' Report

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education what action he plans to take in relation to the recommendations in the 'Taking Boys Seriously' report.

(AQW 21399/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The report 'Taking Boys Seriously – A Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Male School-Life Experience in Northern Ireland' was an independent research project undertaken by the Centre for Young Men's Studies at the University of Ulster, for which both my Department and the Department of Justice provided funding. The Report was published in November 2012.

The Report provides some very useful research which has increased our understanding of factors that may contribute to male academic underachievement; how schools can become a more positive learning experience; male transitions through post-primary school and beyond; and how experiences of violence in a post-conflict society impact upon education and learning.

The research findings and recommendations make a very useful contribution to the evidence base which will influence thinking and future policy decisions in my Department and across government in relation to gender-specific issues affecting young people.

Education and Library Boards: Temporary Contracts

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education how many staff in each Education and Library Board are employed on temporary contracts under vacancy control and are deemed to be at risk; and how many of these staff were employed before 31 July 2011.

(AQW 21416/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards have provided the following information:

	Staff employed on temporary contract under vacancy control and deemed at risk	Staff on temporary contract employed before 31 July 2011
BELB	21	7
WELB	25	15
NEELB	68	38
SEELB	151	54
SELB	27	24

Education and Library Boards: Posts at Risk

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education (i) whether the human resources departments within each Education and Library Board have begun a process to determine which of the posts at risk will be filled on a permanent basis; (ii) when this process began; (iii) when it will conclude; and (iv) when staff will be advised of the outcome.

(AQW 21417/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards have provided the following information:

	(i) & (ii)	(iii)	(iv)
BELB	December 2011	30 June 2013	When each case review is complete
WELB	February 2012	30 June 2013	When each case review is complete
NEELB	March 2012	30 June 2013	When each case review is complete
SEELB	January 2012	Establishment of ESA	When each case review is complete
SELB	May 2012	30 June 2013	When each case review is complete

Education and Library Boards: Temporary Staff

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education how many meetings have taken place between the various human resources functions in each Education and Library Board and the temporary staff affected by vacancy control.

(AQW 21418/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards have advised that it is not possible to provide this information.

The management of vacancies in line with the Department's Vacancy Control Policy is discussed as part of regular staff briefings and meetings. There are no records of specific meetings between Human Resources staff and individual staff members.

Trade Union representatives have been kept informed of the progress of the vacancy control review through the normal consultative process.

Meetings with Political Parties

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education what formal meetings he has held in the last two years with other political parties to discuss (i) the Education and Skills Authority; (ii) academic selection; and (iii) Area Planning.

(AQW 21436/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have not had any formal meetings with other political parties to discuss the Education and Skills Authority, academic selection or Area Planning.

Strategic Investment Board: DE Assets

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 17631/11-15, to detail the nature of the £4.46m in assets that his Department has identified to the Asset Management Unit of the Strategic Investment Board, broken down by year.

(AQW 21453/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education's asset disposal targets for 2013/14 and 2014/15 comprise of surplus assets identified through a joint undertaking by Education and Library Boards and the Asset Management Unit of the Strategic Investment Board in early 2012. This exercise identified potential surplus assets for disposal in the controlled sector incorporating both surplus school and youth properties.

These projections were based on valuations undertaken by Land and Property Services in early 2012, which are reviewed every 6 months.

Individual disposals depend on departmental schedules, economic appraisals and commercial considerations in terms of timing and expected price.

However achievement of targets is subject to fluctuations in market valuations and the prevailing property market conditions at the time of disposal.

Properties which are currently on the open market at April 2013 are:

Address	Town	Disposing Body
Former Ballypriormore Primary School	Larne	NEELB
Antiville Primary School, 39 Fairway Lane	Larne	NEELB
Ballee Primary School	Ballymena	NEELB
44 Ballylesson Road	Belfast	SEELB

Address	Town	Disposing Body
Lower Ballinderry Primary School	Lisburn	SEELB
Kindle Integrated Primary School	Killough	SEELB
Ballycloughan Primary School	Saintfield	SEELB
Tullymacarette P S, 23 Upper Quilly Road	Loughbrickland	SELB
2 Station Road, Kesh	Fermanagh	WELB

Properties which are the subject of transfer negotiations to Housing Associations are:

Address	Town	Disposing Body
Killard Special School, Newtownards	Newtownards	SEELB
Land at Clifton Special School, Ballykillaire, Bangor	Bangor	SEELB
Land at Good Shepherd Rd, Lisburn	Lisburn	SEELB
Ballyduff Primary School, New Mossley	Newtownabbey	NEELB
St Mary's Primary School, Larne (two phases)	Larne	NEELB

The asset disposal targets for 2013/14 and 2014/15 will be continually monitored by the department in discussions with Asset Management Unit, the Education and Library Boards and Land and Property Services to ensure that the required receipts can be delivered in each financial year.

Education and Library Boards: Procurement

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 20241/11-15, how many staff undertake this work in each Education and Library Board.

(AQW 21502/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Functions outlined in AQW 20141/11-15 which will transfer to the Central Procurement Directorate are within the Goods and Services Procurement sections within the Education and Library Boards. The transferring functions form only part of these individuals' day to day responsibilities. Staff numbers within these sections are set out in the table below.

	Staff numbers
BELB	4
WELB	4
NEELB	6
SEELB	4
SELB	3.5

Schools: Completion of Newbuilds

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education what is the average length of time taken to complete the building of (i) a primary school; and (ii) a post primary school following Ministerial approval.

(AQW 21504/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: When a major capital build project receives Ministerial approval to proceed in planning a considerable amount of time is needed to develop the project from initial conception through to actual build. All projects both primary and post-primary will have different issues to be addressed, many of which are outside the control of my Department. These include all statutory approvals including planning permission and building control. Therefore it is not possible to give a definitive timescale to complete a project. However, once all approvals/ tenders are in place a medium sized primary school on a greenfield site should be constructed in a 12-14 month period and a larger post-primary school would take on average 24-26 months. A new build project on an existing school site may take longer as a result of decanting issues.

Taskforce on Protestant Working Class Communities

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education (i) to detail the initiatives introduced by his Department in response to the 2004 Report from the Taskforce on Protestant Working Class Communities; (ii) which initiatives currently focus on the issues raised in the 2004 report; and (iii) the results of any evaluations into initiatives designed to address the issues raised in this report.

(AQW 21601/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

- (i) The Renewing Communities Programme (RCP) was the then Government's response to the 2004 Report of the Taskforce on Protestant Working Class Communities. This was a cross-departmental programme co-ordinated by DSD which included a range of education-linked pilot projects aimed at selected disadvantaged areas of Belfast. Funding for the majority of these projects ended at 31 March 2008; however in some cases funding was extended to 30 June 2008 and in others it was mainstreamed through DE or BELB. Details of the projects are set out below:

Project Title	Description	Funding from April 2008
Supporting SEN in schools & developing management standards.	Supported schools under pressure by providing teachers with necessary Professional Qualification.	Funded to 30 June 2008.
Curriculum Advisory and Support Services (CASS) – SEN Support Pilot	Provided specialist training in autism, dyslexia and behavioural issues.	Mainstreamed by BELB from April 2008
Integrated Children's Services	Supported the delivery of integrated services to children in order to enhance early years provision and support other children's development and learning activities.	Mainstreamed by DE from April 2008
Healthy Schools Initiative	Promoted health and well-being in children including the development of active schools and food in schools programmes.	Funded to 30 June 2008
Full Service School Demonstration Project	To establish a Full Service School programme demonstrating how community access, full health and social services provision and childcare could come together.	Mainstreamed by DE from April 2008
Alternative Education Provision – Extension of Pathways Project	An extension of the Pathways Project, which supported young people who were excluded from or who are experiencing difficulty in mainstream education.	Mainstreamed by BELB
Strengthening Governance	Develop leadership potential within Protestant disadvantaged working class areas and encourage more people with appropriate skills to take up the role of governors in local schools.	Funded to March 2008.
Detached Youth Work Teams	Provided support to engage with disaffected youth in meaningful activities and divert them from becoming involved in anti-social behaviour.	Funded to 30 June 2008.
Role Models and Mentoring	Project to bring successful local people into schools and youth clubs to encourage young people to aim high and raise aspirations.	Funded to 30 June 2008.
Summer Intervention Programmes	Involved groups working with young people across Belfast	Mainstreamed by DE from April 2008.

- (ii) The Taskforce identified the low level of educational attainment in some Protestant working class communities and the adverse impact this was having on the life chances of the young people concerned. The projects introduced through the RCP in DE were aimed primarily at addressing this. There is direct linkage between some the projects initiated under the RCP and the programmes and policies I am currently progressing to address educational underachievement and tackle disadvantage, wherever it exists, across the north of Ireland.

My Department currently dedicates substantial resources to provide a range of assistance, programmes, and services to ensure that all our disadvantaged children and young people, have access to and can fully participate in school life, obtain formal qualifications, enhance their employment opportunities and ultimately provide a route out of poverty. These include the provision of free school meals and clothing allowances and a range of programmes and interventions targeted at socially deprived areas including Sure Start, extended schools, full service provision, Achieving Belfast and Achieving Derry Bright Futures, provision for nurture units, continued progress in a number of areas which contribute to promoting health and health issues and provision for outreach and detached youth workers and youth intervention.

I recently announced additional funding of £4million to increase access to mainstream youth services in disadvantaged areas, with priority given to interface areas and, through outreach and detached youth work, to support the specific targeting of disadvantaged areas or communities of interest and those who may be at greater risk of social exclusion, marginalisation or isolation because they experience a combination of barriers to learning. In 2013/14, just over £1.1million has been allocated to the BELB.

I am also providing additional funding to Education and Library Boards for youth intervention initiatives to engage young people in a range of diversionary activities. In 2013/14 £140k has been allocated to BELB. In previous years, DE has also distributed additional funding on behalf of OFMDFM for summer intervention programmes – a decision on funding for 2013/14 is awaited.

I will make additional funding of £500k available in 2013/14 and 2014/15 to establish a new Regional Governors' Support Service to deliver consistent, high quality training and support for school governors, which will include the development of leadership potential. The service will operate initially via the BELB and then under the proposed new Education and Skills Authority.

I launched the 'Education Works' advertising campaign in September 2012 to inform and engage all parents, but in particular those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to become more engaged in their children's education.

I have committed £2 million a year over the next two years to encourage community based education initiatives with a very specific focus on education outcomes. The programme will aim to join up community based and school activity in a more coherent way through promoting partnerships of voluntary and community organisations and schools to provide educationally focused programmes in communities with particular concentrations of educational disadvantage. In addition, I have committed a further £1 million a year over the next two years to focus on standards of literacy and numeracy in schools.

My Department also has a key role in working with other Departments to ensure a coherent approach to proactively tackling disadvantage and improving educational outcomes. This includes, for example, the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister on a literacy and numeracy project to recruit 230 additional teachers.

- (iii) Evaluations have been undertaken on a number of the projects initiated through the RCP and related follow-on programmes. These are detailed in the following table:

Project	
Healthy Schools	The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) evaluation of the Healthy Schools Initiative in 2008 found the results to be useful and worthwhile.
Extended Schools	The ETI published 'An Evaluation of Extended Schools 2010' and reported that 'In almost all cases where Extended Schools are serving disadvantaged communities effectively, significant improvements are evident in the educational outcomes and the personal well-being of pupils'. The ETI evaluation report also includes examples of Good Practice Case Studies and is available to view in full at http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/surveys-evaluations/surveys-evaluations-primary/surveys-evaluations-primary-2010/an-evaluation-of-extended-schools-july-2010.pdf
Full Service project	The independent evaluation (available in the Assembly library – FGS McClure Watters – Evaluation of the Full Service project – June 2008) carried out on the Full Service programme outlined a number of positive impacts on learning and achievement of pupils. The schools involved have also reported a range of wider social benefits such as greater parental involvement and community engagement. More detailed information is available from the individual programme website as follows: Full Service Schools – http://belfastbms.org/site/fses/
Achieving Belfast and Achieving Derry Bright Futures Programmes	The ETI undertook 'An Evaluation of the Early Progress of the Achieving Belfast and Achieving Derry Bright Futures Programmes' in May 2010. The report identified strengths and areas for improvement within each programme and highlighted the importance of all stakeholders having a shared understanding of roles and responsibilities, taking ownership of targets and being accountable for the outcomes. The evaluation report is available at www.etini.gov.uk
Youth Provision	The ELBs and Youth Council are required to evaluate and report on their use of the additional outreach and detached funding provided annually since 2012/13. To date, feedback has shown that funding has been very successful in addressing the particular needs for which it set out to address. ELBs have built upon the learning from the initiatives conducted under the Renewing Communities Programme and have applied it as they continue to target efforts to raise levels of achievement for all young people.

Southern Education and Library Board: Vice-principal Posts

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education how many vice-principal posts in the Southern Education and Library Board have been filled without being publicly advertised, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 21636/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In the Southern Education and Library Board 14 vice-principal posts have been filled over the last five years without being publicly advertised. It is not possible to provide the information requested broken down by calendar year as the small numbers involved would require a high level of suppression to prevent identification of an individual, in line with the confidentiality principle of the Statistics Authority's Code of Practice on Official Statistics.

School Principals and Vice-principals: Redundancy Payments

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education how many principals and vice-principals have received redundancy payments for reasons other than school closures, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 21637/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The number of principals and vice-principals who have received redundancy payments for reasons other than school closures is detailed in the table below.

Academic Year	Number
9/10	3
10/11	11
11/12	19

Dean Maguirc College, Carrickmore

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Education what proposals are in place to construct a new secondary school in Carrickmore as a replacement for the Dean Maguirc College.

(AQW 21654/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: A major capital works project for Dean Maguirc College is one of a large number of proposals currently with the Department. There are a number of site and planning issues still to be resolved around the plans for a new build for the school.

I will continue to examine the case for capital investment and proposals for Dean Maguirc College will be considered together with other new build propositions as part of any future announcement.

Preschool Places: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many pre-school places are available in the North Down area.

(AQW 21697/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Information in the table below relates to Stage 1 of the 2013/14 pre-school admissions process:-

No. of funded pre-school places available in the North Down Borough Council area	898
No. of 1st preference applications to pre-school providers in North Down Borough Council area	887

Preschool Places: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many applications were received for pre-school places in the North Down area.

(AQW 21698/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Information in the table below relates to Stage 1 of the 2013/14 pre-school admissions process:-

No. of funded pre-school places available in the North Down Borough Council area	898
No. of 1st preference applications to pre-school providers in North Down Borough Council area	887

Preschool Places: Criteria

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education what is the criteria used to award pre-school places.

(AQW 21699/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Pre-School Education in Schools (Admissions Criteria) Regulations (NI) 1999, as amended by the Pre-School Education in Schools (Admissions Criteria) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2012, require statutory nursery settings to give priority to children from socially disadvantaged circumstances in their final pre-school year. The term "child from socially disadvantaged circumstances" is defined as meaning "a child whose parent is in receipt of income support or income-based jobseeker's allowance." Under the Pre-School Education Programme (PSEP) voluntary/private sector providers are also required to apply this criterion when allocating places.

Pre-school settings must then set their own criteria to select children down to the last available place when too many children apply to a provider. These may include a range of factors such as proximity to the school or the previous attendance of siblings. These criteria are entirely at the discretion of the Board of Governors or Management Committee of individual pre-school settings and are not determined by DE.

Preschool Places: Cost

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education what is the cost of a single pre-school place.
(AQW 21700/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Funded pre-school places are available in statutory nursery schools and nursery units attached to primary schools and in voluntary/private settings in receipt of funding under the Pre-School Education Programme.

The current cost of a funded place in each type of setting is as follows:

Nursery Schools	£2,941 (full-time)	£1,934 (part-time)
Nursery Units	£2,734 (full-time)	£1,813 (part-time)
Voluntary/Private settings	£1755 (all places are part-time)	

STEM Subjects

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education what arrangements exist within the Education and Skills Authority for the provision of specialist advice on STEM subjects, given that such provision within the Education and Library Boards is being reduced.
(AQW 21707/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Skills Authority (ESA) will deliver all of the functions of the organisations that it will replace, including advice on STEM subjects. As with other services, the transformation to a single, streamlined organisation will ensure that this key service is delivered more efficiently and effectively. Decisions on the organisational arrangements for the delivery of the service have not yet been taken.

Preschool Education

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Education what progress has been made towards achieving 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.
(AQW 21713/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Progress on the Programme for Government commitment in 2012/13 shows that 99.8% of children, whose parents engaged with the pre-school admissions process to the end, obtained a funded place for September 2012.

Out of a total of 23,134 applications received from target age children, 22,537 were offered a funded pre-school place; 542 parents did not continue with the process through to the end; and 55 children remained unplaced at the end of the process.

At the end of Stage 1 of this year's pre-school admissions process on 10 April 2013, some 95% of children whose parents applied on time have been allocated a place in a funded pre-school setting for September 2013. 1,030 children are unplaced. Stage 2 of the process is currently underway with some 2,290 places remaining available across the Board areas.

Public Procurement Contracts: Social Clauses

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Education, in light of the Programme for Government commitment to include social clauses in all public procurement contracts for supplies, services and construction, how many contracts his Department has entered into since this commitment; and what where the social clauses included in these contracts.
(AQW 21739/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department complies with procurement guidance provided by the Department of Finance and Personnel, Central Procurement Directorate. It should be noted that the Department does not procure schools' construction projects; these are procured by the education authorities such as the Education and Library Boards.

Current guidance may be located using the following link:

http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/index/procurement-2/cpd/cpd-policy-and-legislation/content_-_cpd_achieving_sustainability_in_construction_procurement/content_-_cpd_proposal_for_promoting_equality_and_sustainable_development.htm

To date no guidance has been endorsed by the Procurement Board regarding the use of social clauses in supplies and services contracts or the financial or labour trigger levels at which they should be implemented.

Since the publication of the PFG commitment in March 2012 the Department has entered into only four contracts. These goods and services contracts did not include social clauses.

Teachers: Newly Qualified

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education what policies are in place to encourage schools to employ newly qualified teachers.

(AQW 21752/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department does not employ teachers but I acknowledge that, in the current economic climate, it can be difficult for many newly qualified teachers (NQTs) to find employment in schools. The same can be said of graduates in a wide range of professions. However, I have taken a number of significant steps to improve employment prospects of NQTs, including:

- urging employers to give preference to NQTs and experienced non-retired teachers when vacancies arise;
- providing guidance to schools about using the Substitute Teacher Register when booking substitute teachers, thus enabling schools to identify younger teachers;
- challenging schools and employing authorities as to why prematurely retired teachers are being re-employed in preference to NQTs or non-retired teachers;
- making schools liable for the total cost of employing prematurely retired teachers;
- restricting the pay of prematurely retired teachers who have received discretionary compensation ("added years") but who subsequently return to teaching.

In addition, over the last three years I have more than halved the number of days worked by retired teachers in providing substitute cover thus increasing opportunities for NQTs and non-retired teachers. I have also made a cut of 32% to the number of students entering initial teacher education courses which is designed to further reduce the pool of teachers seeking employment.

I welcome the announcement by the First and deputy First Ministers of investment in the employment of 230 graduate teachers not currently in employment, on a two year contract, to improve the literacy and numeracy skills of our young people. Not only does this provide employment opportunities for NQTs, it should also have a positive impact on my raising standards agenda by improving the educational outcomes of pupils who are most at risk of underachieving.

Voluntary Grammar and Grant-maintained Integrated Schools

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education what issues have emerged since June 2012 as a result of internal audits undertaken in Voluntary Grammar and Grant-maintained Integrated schools by his Department's internal audit team.

(AQW 21783/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The programme of internal audits undertaken by the Department included visits to 15 voluntary grammar and grant maintained integrated schools. While the audits provided generally satisfactory assurance about the level of compliance in these schools, some minor issues were identified and these have been followed up with, and are being addressed by, the relevant schools.

The only significant issue identified was, in some cases, a failure to retain evidence of pre-employment vetting checks. Urgent action was taken by the relevant schools to ensure vetting checks were completed.

As a further response to this issue, the Department took the decision to provide guidance to all voluntary grammar and grant maintained integrated schools to remind Boards of Governors of the need to ensure that vetting checks were being appropriately completed and also the evidence that should be retained to demonstrate that these checks had been completed.

DE Bodies: Financial Allocation

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to outline the financial allocation to each (i) Education and Library Board; and (ii) arm's-length body for the 2013/14 financial year.

(AQW 21784/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The resource financial allocation to each (i) Education and Library Board; and (ii) arm's-length body for the 2013/14 financial year, is as follows:

(i) Education and Library Boards:

ELB	£'000
BELB	239,031
NEELB	306,231
SEELB	277,447
SELB	337,440
WELB	299,349
Total	1,459,498

(ii) Other Arm's-length bodies:

ALB	£'000
Staff Commission	339
CCMS*	3,328
CCEA*	21,446
Youth Council*	5,003
Total	30,116

* Includes small elements of non-cash

Notes:

- 1 The above figures are initial allocations and as such do not yet include all funding which may be allocated during the year when information to inform the level of funding etc. is provided.
- 2 The above figures do not include capital allocations.

Catholic Certificate in Religious Education

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the implications for the future of the religious education certificate should the Education and Skills Authority become the single employing authority for teachers.

(AQW 21785/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: It is envisaged that the establishment of ESA as the single employing authority for teachers will not impinge on the ability of individual schools to make it a requirement for applicants to hold a recognised Religious Education Certificate on taking up a teaching post, or subsequently to obtain one. A Board of Governors of a school will have the option of undertaking its own recruitment and selection and setting the required qualifications and experience required for a post.

Review of the Efficiency Delivery Programme

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education what action has been taken within his Department as a result of the Northern Ireland Audit Office report on the Review of the Efficiency Delivery Programme.

(AQW 21786/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have noted the findings of the NIAO report on the Review of the Efficiency Delivery Programme over the Budget 2008-11 period. However for Budget 2011-15, rather than setting explicit efficiency targets (as was the case for Budget 2008-11) the Executive determined that it was a matter for each Minister to deliver their priorities from within the budget allocated to them. Clearly the Budget 2011-15 outcome produced major challenges for the Department, as the level of funding available was less than had previously been in place.

Savings areas were identified and taken forward in the Savings Delivery Plan. In agreeing these savings areas I sought to protect frontline services, such as Special Education, Extended Schools, Free Schools Meals Entitlement, Counselling, Youth and Early Years as far as possible and to drive out further inefficiencies, wherever feasible. However the actions that I have taken to remain within budget are largely about cost reductions rather than efficiency savings. Hence, the savings that I am currently achieving are being delivered on an entirely different basis from those reviewed by the NIAO.

I will continue to seek to drive up efficiency in the education sector and this will be an important role for ESA. I will of course take into account any relevant and appropriate recommendations in the NIAO report

Area Planning Co-ordinating Group

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education for a list of attendees at the first meeting of the area planning co-ordinating group that was held on 8 April 2013.

(AQW 21787/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The attendees at the first Area Planning Steering Group comprised the Chief Executives of the Education and Library Boards, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, the Council for Integrated Education, Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta and Department of Education officials. The table below sets out the Group attendees by sector.

Sector	Members
Controlled (Education and Library Boards)	Dr Clare Mangan, Belfast Mr Barry Mulholland, Western Mr Ray Gilbert, North Eastern (vice Mr Shane McCurdy) Mr Gregory Butler, South Eastern Mr Tony Murphy, Southern
Maintained (Council for Catholic Maintained Schools)	Mr Jim Clarke, Chief Executive Mr Gerry Lundy, Deputy Chief Executive
Integrated (Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education)	Ms Noreen Campbell
Irish-medium (Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta)	Dr Micheál Ó Duibh

Mr Gavin Boyd attended the meeting in his role of Chief Executive (Designate) of the Education and Skills Authority.

I attended for the first half of the meeting to discuss the way forward with members. John McGrath, the group chairman, also attended, with other Department of Education officials.

Catholic Certificate in Religious Education

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Education to provide details of the correspondence between his Department and the Catholic Council for Maintained Schools, over the last three years, on the Certificate of Religious Education for applicants to maintained primary schools' teaching positions.

(AQW 21816/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My officials routinely correspond with the Catholic Council for Maintained Schools on a range of issues including the Certificate of Religious Education.

With regard to the Certificate in particular, correspondence has been in relation to the following:

- Input to the Department's Review of Employment Opportunities for Teaching Staff;
- Consultation on the EQIA on the Certificate;
- Re-deployment of teachers facing redundancy;
- Accessing the Certificate; and
- Preparation for meetings to discuss the Certificate.

Education and Skills Authority Board

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education which sectoral groups will have a place on the board of the Education and Skills Authority.

(AQW 21817/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education Bill provides that the membership of the Education and Skills Authority will comprise: a chairperson; 8 political representatives; 4 members representing the interests of transferors of controlled schools; 4 members representing the interests of trustees of maintained schools; and 4 other members who are representative of the community.

St Ita's Primary School, South Belfast

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Education for an update on the number of places available for admissions at St Ita's Primary School, South Belfast in 2014/15.

(AQW 21825/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: On 17 April 2013 I approved a Development Proposal which increased the admissions number of St Ita's Primary School, Carryduff, from 75 to 82 from 1 September 2013. This increased number will also apply for 2014/15 and successive years.

Belmont House School and Foyleview School Merger

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Education to detail the rationale behind the proposal to merge Belmont House School with Foyleview School.

(AQW 21828/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am aware that the Western Education and Library Board (WELB) has been in discussion with the Board of Governors of both Belmont House and Foyleview Schools regarding a proposal for a merger.

At the present time the Board is following the statutory process leading to the publication of a Development Proposal to support this intent. However, until a Development Proposal is published, the issues concerned are entirely a matter for the WELB to consider.

Catholic Certificate in Religious Education

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education (i) why teachers at Catholic maintained primary schools must have the Catholic Certificate of Religious Education (CCRE), including the requirement that teachers who have been made redundant will be accepted to these schools but will be required to obtain the CCRE over three years; (ii) who introduced the ruling of the CCRE requirement in Catholic maintained primary schools; (iii) when this ruling was made and accepted by the relevant Government body; and (iv) whether this ruling complies with equality legislation.

(AQW 21853/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

- (i) The Teachers' Certificate in Religious Education is a professional qualification, which is regarded by the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) and the Trustees of Catholic Schools as an essential measure of a teacher's commitment and suitability to work in a Catholic maintained primary or nursery school. It is regarded as a genuine occupational requirement in Catholic schools which seek to educate children within the framework of a distinctive philosophy and associated set of values.
- (ii)(iii) The requirement to hold this certificate predates the establishment of the CCMS and its origins can be traced back to the early establishment of Catholic Schools by the Trustees of those schools.
- (iv) Under the Fair Employment & Treatment Order 1998 there exists an exemption which potentially allows faith based schools, of any religious denomination, to discriminate on the grounds of religion. CCMS have advised that neither they nor the Trustees of Catholic schools have ever sought to apply this exemption, choosing instead to rely on the acquisition of the Teachers' Certificate in Religious Education which is available to all teachers.

Special Educational Needs

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to list the occupational, speech and language and physiotherapy provision available for young people with special educational needs, broken down by (i) school; and (ii) Education and Library Board. (AQW 21863/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Provision of occupational therapy, speech and language therapy and physiotherapy, as allied health services, is the responsibility of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and is regularly delivered across both educational and health settings.

The type, level and frequency of such therapies is recommended by the relevant Education and Library Board (ELB), usually in consultation with the relevant Health Trust, based upon the individual learning needs of the child.

ELB Chief Executives have advised that listing the therapy provision currently provided to all pupils in all school settings would be cost prohibitive.

Early Years Fund: Service Level Agreement

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW16101/11-15, for an update on the situation. (AQW 21864/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The draft report on the review of the DE Early Years Fund is currently being finalised. I plan to review this funding and its delivery to ensure that it aligns with DE's current aims and objectives. The set of recommendations in the review will be one of the elements that will inform my decision on the way forward.

Preschool Placement Process

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education how many children in each Education and Library Board, have not been placed at the end of Stage 1 of the pre-school placement process for 2013-14.

(AQW 21865/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The table below details the position at the end of Stage 1 of the 2013/14 pre-school admissions process:-

	No. of target age children placed at end of Stage 1	No. of target age children unplaced at end Stage 1	No. of funded places still available
BELB	3321	244	364
WELB	3649	158	445

	No. of target age children placed at end of Stage 1	No. of target age children unplaced at end Stage 1	No. of funded places still available
NEELB	4882	139	494
SEELB	4591	220	418
SELB	5258	269	569
Total	21701	1030	2290

Children of Armed Services Personnel

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Education how many Armed Services children are registered to attend primary school.
(AQW 21877/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Figures from the 2012/13 Annual school census record that there were 462 children of Armed Services personnel enrolled in primary schools and preparatory departments of grammar schools.

Children of Armed Services Personnel

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Education whether his Department collects any data on the academic achievement of Armed Services children in (i) primary; and (ii) post-primary school.
(AQW 21878/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The academic achievement of primary pupils is not currently available at an individual pupil level therefore it is not possible to produce analysis detailing the performance of pupils classified as Armed Services children. However for the 2012/13 academic year pupil level academic achievement will be available for primary school pupils that should allow such analysis to be produced.

The academic achievement of Armed Services children attending post primary schools is collected by the School Leavers Survey. In 2010/11 36 Armed Services pupils left mainstream grant aided post primary schools and of these 19 (53%) achieved at least 5 GCSEs A*-C (inc. equivalents) including GCSE English and maths. The average achieving this standard in the north of Ireland is 60%.

Children of Armed Services Personnel

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Education how many Armed Services children are registered to attend post-primary school.
(AQW 21879/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Figures from the 2012/13 Annual school census record that there were 187 children of Armed Services personnel enrolled in post-primary schools.

Area Planning Documents: Consultation

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education who is responsible for leading the consultation on the area-based planning documents in the North Eastern Education and Library Board area.
(AQW 21891/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The North Eastern Education and Library Board remains solely responsible for the consultations on its Area Plans. Board Officers are leading the consultation on the recently published NEELB Primary Area Plan.

The area plans for all 5 Board areas are available online from each of the Education and Library Board (ELB) websites, or on request from the relevant ELB. Links to the plans and the online consultation response facility are available on www.puttingpupilsfirst.info/. Replies may also be submitted by post to the relevant ELB. I would expect the Boards, working closely with CCMS and other sectors, to make themselves available to address any issues directly with the stakeholders.

Interested groups and organisations may find it useful to meet to discuss the proposals in the NEELB Area Plans affecting them, and conduct a consultation with their stakeholders to inform their responses. Schools may also choose to consult with their staff, parents, and pupils on proposals, and again this may be used to inform their responses to the NEELB consultation.

Area Planning Documents: Consultation

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education what mechanisms are in place to conduct the consultation exercises on area-based planning.
(AQW 21892/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The North Eastern Education and Library Board remain solely responsible for the consultations on its Area Plans. Board Officers are leading the consultation on the recently published NEELB Primary Area Plan.

The area plans for all 5 Board areas are available online from each of the Education and Library Board (ELB) websites, or on request from the relevant ELB. Links to the plans and the online consultation response facility are available on www.puttingpupilsfirst.info/. Replies may also be submitted by post to the relevant ELB. I would expect the Boards, working closely with CCMS and other sectors, to make themselves available to address any issues directly with the stakeholders.

Interested groups and organisations may find it useful to meet to discuss the proposals in the NEELB Area Plans affecting them, and conduct a consultation with their stakeholders to inform their responses. Schools may also choose to consult with their staff, parents, and pupils on proposals, and again this may be used to inform their responses to the NEELB consultation.

Area Planning Documents: Consultation

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education whether anybody other than North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB) can carry out an area based planning consultation exercise in the NEELB area.
(AQW 21893/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The North Eastern Education and Library Board remains solely responsible for the consultations on its Area Plans. Board Officers are leading the consultation on the recently published NEELB Primary Area Plan.

The area plans for all 5 Board areas are available online from each of the Education and Library Board (ELB) websites, or on request from the relevant ELB. Links to the plans and the online consultation response facility are available on www.puttingpupilsfirst.info/. Replies may also be submitted by post to the relevant ELB. I would expect the Boards, working closely with CCMS and other sectors, to make themselves available to address any issues directly with the stakeholders.

Interested groups and organisations may find it useful to meet to discuss the proposals in the NEELB Area Plans affecting them, and conduct a consultation with their stakeholders to inform their responses. Schools may also choose to consult with their staff, parents, and pupils on proposals, and again this may be used to inform their responses to the NEELB consultation.

Area Planning Documents: Consultation

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education under what circumstances a school would be asked to carry out a consultation exercise on behalf of the North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB) in the NEELB area.
(AQW 21894/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The North Eastern Education and Library Board remain solely responsible for the consultations on its Area Plans. Board Officers are leading the consultation on the recently published NEELB Primary Area Plan.

The area plans for all 5 Board areas are available online from each of the Education and Library Board (ELB) websites, or on request from the relevant ELB. Links to the plans and the online consultation response facility are available on www.puttingpupilsfirst.info/. Replies may also be submitted by post to the relevant ELB. I would expect the Boards, working closely with CCMS and other sectors, to make themselves available to address any issues directly with the stakeholders.

Interested groups and organisations may find it useful to meet to discuss the proposals in the NEELB Area Plans affecting them, and conduct a consultation with their stakeholders to inform their responses. Schools may also choose to consult with their staff, parents, and pupils on proposals, and again this may be used to inform their responses to the NEELB consultation.

Catholic Certificate in Religious Education

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education (i) whether the Certificate of Catholic Religious Education (CCRE) is required by teachers to apply for a job in an integrated primary school; (ii) when this became a requirement; (iii) whether this requirement is in line with the Equal Opportunities Employer status of integrated primary schools; and (iv) whether integrated primary schools will offer teachers the support to gain the CCRE, as is offered by schools in the Catholic maintained sector.
(AQW 21897/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There has never been a requirement to possess the Certificate in Religious Education to work in Integrated Primary Schools. Some integrated primary schools may seek the Certificate in Religious Education as a job related criterion, such as for teachers whose responsibility it is to prepare pupils, in years 3, 4 and 7, for their sacraments may be required to hold the certificate.

The Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998 prohibits discrimination by the government and public on the grounds of religious discrimination or political opinion in employment and training. Under the terms of Article 71 (1) (a) of this legislation this prohibition does not apply to teachers in all schools.

Integrated schools encourage all staff in their professional development, however, it is up to the individual Board of Governors to decide if they will provide support for any teacher wishing to obtain this certificate.

Schools: Newbuilds

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Education at what stage is each of the new school builds announced in June 2012.
(AQW 21903/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Progress as at April 2013 on the 18 capital build projects announced in June 2012 is shown in the table below:

School	Estimated Construction Start	Current Status
Victoria Park Primary School	August 2013	RIBA Stage D approved EA approved on 15 March 2013 Revised planning application submitted.
Eglinton Primary School	December 2013	Stage D approved March 2013 EA approved on 22 April 2013. PQQ to issue April 2013
Foyle College / Ebrington Primary School	January 2014	Stage D under consideration. EA revisions being re-drafted by WELB due to consideration of addition of 2 special needs classrooms.
Enniskillen Model	April 2015	Stage D under consideration. Revised EA currently under consideration.
Dromore Central	January 2014	Stage D under consideration. Revised EA currently under consideration Site acquired Planning approval in place.
St Clare's Ps Newry & St Colman's Abbey Primary School Newry	December 2013	Stage D approved. EA approved 15 April 13 Land transaction agreed and being completed. Planning approval delayed until July 13 due to 2nd bat survey required.
St Mary's Primary School Banbridge	February 2014	Stage D approval. EA approved 18 April 13 Outline planning approval in place.
Tannaghmore Primary School Lurgan	February 2014	Stage D approved. EA approved on 1 March 2013 Planning approval in place PQQ being prepared
St Teresa's Primary School Lurgan	October 2013	Stage D approval. EA approved on 12 March 13 PQQ being prepared Acquisition of additional land being progressed.
Colaiste Feirste	March 2014	Stage C approved. Stage D submission expected May 2013. Planning application to be submitted on approval of Stage D.
Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagain	December 2013	Stage C approval. EA approved by DE on 3 March 13 Officials working with Planners, BCC, Roads Service on full planning application. PQQ being prepared.

School	Estimated Construction Start	Current Status
Belmont House Special School -Derry	May 2016	WELB currently considering revised proposal to include merger between Belmont House and Foyleview Special Schools. This will change scope and size of project. Design team to be appointed to take forward.
Rossmar Special School Limavady	December 2015	Economic Appraisal expected with Department by end of April 2013.
Castletower Ballymena	Not yet known	Stage C Department continuing to liaise with NEELB to finalise EA.
St Joseph's Convent Primary School, Newry	December 2013	Stage D approved. EA approved 9 April. Planning approval in place. PQQ submissions returned and assessed. Tender expected to issue May 2013. Site purchase well advanced
Arvalee Special School, Omagh	July 2014	EA for appointment of Consultants to undertake new-build business case approved. EA for main works expected June 2013
St Gerard's Resource Centre, Belfast	September 2013	Layout revisions agreed with the School. EA currently under consideration.

Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education how his Department engages with past pupils to assess the outcomes of careers education, information, advice and guidance provided at schools.

(AQW 21917/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department does not engage in longitudinal studies of past pupils to assess outcomes of careers education, information, advice and guidance provided at schools. The Department does hold school leavers data which indicates the destinations of pupils on leaving school. The Young Persons Behaviour and Attitudes Survey (YPBAS) into which the Department has inputted, specifically asks questions relating to the impact of CEIAG provided at schools by teachers and career advisors. These questions will be retained for the next survey.

'Education Reform – A Human Rights Review' Report

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Education (i) for his assessment of the Education Reform – A Human Rights Review report by the Human Rights Commission; and (ii) what priority his Department places on tackling the human rights abuses that are mentioned throughout the report on (a) academic selection; and (b) lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues.

(AQW 21936/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I attended the launch of the Human Rights Commission's Education Reform – A Human Rights Review and I welcome their report.

The Commission's recommendation on academic selection is consistent with my own view that academic selection is a barrier to addressing underachievement in disadvantaged communities and raising standards across the whole education system.

It is disappointing that some schools choose to put the needs of the institution ahead of the needs of the children they are there to serve through using unregulated tests for the purpose of admission. The resolution of this situation requires the agreement of the Executive and the Assembly. In the absence of political agreement, my Department will continue to work to persuade schools to move away from academic selection.

All students/pupils have the right to be treated with respect and dignity and not be treated any less favourably on grounds of their actual, or perceived, sexual orientation.

My Department is working with the Council for the Curriculum Examinations & Assessment (CCEA) to produce revised guidance for schools on the delivery of Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE).

The revised guidance will make it clear that all schools should ensure staff are supported in the teaching of issues associated with sexual orientation and consider how they can help teachers to address relevant issues within the context of RSE and Pastoral care policies. It is intended this guidance will be developed in 2013/14.

Bullying, in whatever form and for whatever reason, has no place in schools. All schools are required by law to have a discipline policy which includes anti-bullying measures. The Department recognises that it cannot tackle bullying alone and it is for this reason that it continues to fund and participate in the local Anti-bullying Forum (NIABF), whose members include Cara-Friend/GLYNI and the Rainbow Project as members. The NIABF has a range of different Task Groups which focus on anti-bullying themes, including Homophobic and Transphobic bullying, putting into action work that is required to further develop the anti-bullying strategy. These operational groups are made up of Forum members and additional organisations with relevant expertise (linked to the group's theme), including representatives from SAIL – Transgender NI.

Shared Education

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education for his definition of shared education.
(AQW 21991/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Shared education means the organisation and delivery of education so that it:

- meets the needs of, and provides for the education together of learners from all Section 75 categories and socio-economic status;
- involves schools and other education providers of differing ownership, sectoral identity and ethos, management type or governance arrangements; and
- delivers educational benefits to learners, promotes the efficient and effective use of resources, and promotes equality of opportunity, good relations, equality of identity, respect for diversity and community cohesion.

Unanswered Question: AQW 20791/11-15

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Education why AQW 20791/11-15 has not been answered.
(AQW 21996/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The question has now been answered.

Integrated Primary Schools

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Education how many nursery schools in South Belfast act as feeder schools to integrated primary schools.
(AQW 21999/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Nursery schools and playgroups serve a wide area and are not intended as feeders for any particular primary school. Accordingly, it is not possible for any primary school to guarantee a place to any child.

Each school is responsible for setting its own admissions criteria to admit children up to their approved admissions number. Department guidance contained in Circular 2012/12 "Open Enrolment in Primary Schools" at paragraph 70 specifically states that admissions criteria are not recommended to make reference to attendance at a specific nursery or pre-school setting. However, some schools do still use attendance at a nursery school as one of their priorities within their admissions criteria. In such cases it is the responsibility of the primary school to manage parents' expectations in terms of their likelihood, or otherwise, of obtaining a place at the school.

Integrated Primary Schools

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Education how many parents in South Belfast have chosen integrated primary schools as their first choice; and whether there is a disparity between that number and the number of places available in the integrated sector.
(AQW 22000/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Applications to schools do not conform to constituency boundaries and the Belfast and South Eastern Education and Library Boards, who administer the admissions process in the South Belfast area have advised me that they do not collate information on how many first preference applicants to integrated schools reside in South Belfast.

However, I can advise you that the 3 integrated primary schools in the South Belfast constituency – Forge IPS, Cranmore IPS and Lough View IPS have a combined total of 123 approved P1 places. There were 147 first preference applications for admission to the 3 schools in September 2013, of whom 134 have been allocated places after additional P1 places were approved by the Department. The 13 applicants who did not get their first preference choice may have been allocated an integrated place at their second or subsequent preference or at an integrated school outside of the South Belfast constituency.

Sub-economic Tendering

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Education to outline the prevalence of sub-economic tendering his Department has experienced with building contracts over the last three years; and what plans are in place to discourage this practice. (AQW 22018/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Building Contracts are not procured by the Department. School building projects are procured by the education sectors such as the Education and Library Boards.

The Department and its Arms Length Bodies to which procurement policy applies have to comply with procurement guidance endorsed by the Procurement Board. Procurement Guidance Note 02/19, Procedures and Principles for the Evaluation of Tenders is available from the following link:

http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/index/procurement-2/cpd/cpd-policy-and-legislation/content_-_cpd_-_policy_-_procurement_guidance_notes/content_-_cpd_procurement_guidance_notes_pgn_02_09/pgn_02_09_tender_evaluation_procedures_-_july_2010__minor_amendments_made_to_refer_to_pgn_01_10__pdf_version.pdf

This guidance states (page 15) that 'Where an abnormally low tender is submitted, the evaluation panel should refer to the provisions detailed in Regulation 30 (6-8) of The Public Contracts Regulations'. Regulation 30 states that if an offer for a public contract is abnormally low the contracting authority may reject that offer but only if it has—

- (a) requested in writing an explanation of the offer or of those parts which it considers contribute to the offer being abnormally low;
- (b) taken account of the evidence provided in response to a request in writing; and
- (c) subsequently verified the offer or parts of the offer being abnormally low with the economic operator.

Primary School Places

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many pupils in each Education and Library Board area have yet to receive a Primary 1 school place. (AQW 22059/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education & Library Boards have advised me that the number of pupils in each of the Board areas who have yet to receive a Primary 1 place, as of 23 April 2013, are as provided in the table below.

Education & Library Board	Pupils Yet to Receive a Primary 1 Place
Belfast Education & Library Board	15
Western Education & Library Board	4
North Eastern Education & Library Board	8
South Eastern Education & Library Board	34
Southern Education & Library Board	18

The Education and Library Boards are responsible for administering the admissions process and Transfer Officers from the Boards will continue to work with parents to ensure all children are placed as soon as possible.

Department for Employment and Learning

Training for Success

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 21335/11-15, what information his Department holds on the movement of trainees into employment, including the cost of each individual training position and the support provided to trainees wishing to start their own business. (AQW 21362/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): The Department does not hold the information as requested by the member in relation to Training for Success (TfS) and movement into employment. The aim of TfS is to give young people an opportunity to attain skills and qualifications they need to best equip themselves for the world of work; it is not an employment programme. Consequently, and in common with other education and training initiatives, primary data collection is concentrated on achievement of qualifications.

The programme is delivered across three strands;

- Skills for Your Life;
- Skills for Work and;
- Programme-Led Apprenticeships.

The costs of the first two strands range from £7,940 over 52 weeks training to £25,500 for trainees with a disability and training on the Skills for work Strand. The training entitlement here is 156 weeks.

Funding for Programme-Led Apprenticeships is based on the ApprenticeshipNI Funding model and ranges from £12,480 to £14,930 across six funding categories. An additional £1,560 is payable in respect of trainees with a disability.

For all strands the additional disability payment is paid to provide additional resource in terms of staff time and additional resource to ensure that trainees benefit fully from their training.

Information on the destinations of participants from the Training for Success programme is set out in the Training for Success Statistical Bulletin which was published for the first time in March 2013 and will be published quarterly from now on. This bulletin is available from the Department's website (<http://www.delni.gov.uk/index/publications/r-and-s-stats/tfs-and-programme-led-apprenticeships-statistical-bulletins/tfs-prog-led-apps-stats-sept07-oct12.htm>)

The Steps to Work (StW) programme is delivered by a network of 8 Lead Contractors spread over 10 contract areas throughout Northern Ireland. As a consequence of this delivery model statistical data on the StW programme performance is only available for Northern Ireland in its entirety or, for those leaving Step 2 provision, by Contract Management area.

Detailed information on the movement of participants into employment, inter alia, from the Steps to Work (StW) programme is set out in the Steps to Work Statistical Bulletin which is published bi-annually, in June and December, by my Department. In addition a factsheet with relevant statistical data is also produced in March and September. All of these publications are available from my Department's website.

(<http://www.delni.gov.uk/index/statsandresearch/training-and-employment-stats/steps-to-work-statistics.htm>)

During the period September 2008 to June 2012 (the latest date for which statistics are available) 2,610 participants left Step 2 provision in the South Eastern Contract Area, which includes Lisburn City Council. Of these 2,610 leavers 825 (32%) moved to unsubsidised/subsidised employment. It should be noted that in addition to Lisburn City Council the South Eastern contract area also covers the Banbridge, Kilkeel, Ballynahinch, Downpatrick and Newcastle Job Centre/Jobs and Benefit Office areas.

Participants interested in starting their own business can avail of a phased approach to self-employment. Support ranges from basic awareness and participation in Invest NI's Regional Start programme through to the opportunity to participate in a period of supported self-employment to test their business, which may last for up to 26 weeks, before deciding if they wish to trade independently. Business mentoring support is provided throughout all phases of this provision. In addition participants in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) receive Benefit Based Training Allowance equivalent to their JSA plus a weekly top up of £15.38 while those on other work focussed benefits such as Income Support, Incapacity Benefit or Employment Support Allowance receive the weekly top up of £15.38 in addition to their benefit.

The unit cost for the StW programme for the period September 2008 to March 2012 is £1,151.

Higher Education: Students with Disabilities

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many students with a disability have been enrolled in Higher Education Institutions over the last five years, broken down by disability type.
(AQW 21522/11-15)

Dr Farry: I have placed the information requested in the Assembly Library and on my Department's website at <http://www.delni.gov.uk/>.

This table details the number of students at Northern Ireland (NI) Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) from 2007/08 to 2011/12 who declared having a disability, based upon their own self assessment, broken down by disability type.

Information on disability is collected on the basis of a student's own self assessment. Students are not obliged to report a disability and Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) therefore advises that the figures reported based upon disability analyses may not be representative of the total student population.

It is important to note that HESA's disability coding frame changed in 2010/11, and this involved a change to the wording of the disability categories and the number of categories recorded. The universities' data collection methodologies also changed significantly in 2008/09, with the introduction of online admission systems and the switch from a paper disability questionnaire to an online questionnaire. There were also small differences between the Northern Ireland HE Institutions in the way that the HESA disability coding frame was presented to students in these new admission systems. There is no standard implementation guide for the disability questions across all HE institutions in the United Kingdom. The University of Ulster also highlighted some technical difficulties in the implementation of the new systems. As a result the figures below are not directly comparable on a year by year basis.

Translation Services

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how much his Department spent on translation services for visiting foreign nationals in each of the last five years.
(AQW 21530/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department cannot identify separately expenditure on translation services for visiting foreign nationals.

Visually Impaired People

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of visually impaired people who are (i) employed by the public bodies under the control of his Department; and (ii) enrolled on further or higher education courses. (AQW 21534/11-15)

Dr Farry: There are currently 27 people employed by public bodies under the control of my Department, who are known to have a visual impairment.

In the 2011/12 academic year, the latest year for which validated data are available, there were 405 professional and technical enrolments at the NI Further Education (FE) Colleges who self-classified as 'blind/partially sighted'. In addition there were a further 100 enrolments on recreational courses at the FE Colleges who self-classified as 'blind/partially sighted'. In 2011/12 there were 85 enrolments at the NI Higher Education Institutions who had self-declared as 'blind/partially sighted/or having a serious visual impairment uncorrected by glasses'. Students are not obliged to report a disability and therefore the figures reported may not be representative of the total student population. The figures have been rounded to the nearest 5.

European Social Fund Projects

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what funding has been offered to European social fund projects in Belfast for skills and employment training between 2011 and 2014. (AQW 21592/11-15)

Dr Farry: 55 projects based in Belfast have been offered funding under Priority 1 of the Northern Ireland Social Fund Programme 2007-2013, to provide employment skills and training over the period 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2014. Of these projects, 38 operate exclusively within Belfast, and 17 deliver activities across Northern Ireland. A further 8 projects based in Belfast have recently been offered funding for the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014. Of these, 5 operate exclusively within Belfast and 3 deliver activities across Northern Ireland.

Projects were offered 40% of project costs from the ESF Programme and 25% of costs by my Department. The remaining 35% of costs are independently sourced by the projects from other public match funders.

A list for each respective group of projects showing details of funding offered has been placed in the Assembly Library and on my department's website at <http://www.delni.gov.uk/>.

European Social Fund Projects

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning which groups in Belfast were offered funding by the European Social Fund for skills and employment training from 2011 to 2014. (AQW 21593/11-15)

Dr Farry: A total of 55 projects based in Belfast have been offered funding under Priority 1 of the Northern Ireland Social Fund Programme 2007-2013, to provide employment skills and training over the period 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2014. Of these projects, 38 operate exclusively within Belfast, and 17 deliver activities across Northern Ireland. A further 8 projects based in Belfast have recently been offered funding for the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014. Of these, 5 operate exclusively within Belfast and 3 deliver activities across Northern Ireland. A list for each respective group of projects showing details of funding offered has been placed in the Assembly Library and on my department's website at <http://www.delni.gov.uk/>.

European Social Fund Projects

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, for 2011 to 2014, to detail (i) what outputs were agreed with each training provider in relation to European Social Fund projects in Belfast for skills and employment training; (ii) the arrangements for monitoring the outputs; and (iii) the actions applicable if these targets were not met (AQW 21594/11-15)

Dr Farry: A total of 55 projects based in Belfast have been offered funding under Priority 1 of the Northern Ireland Social Fund Programme 2007-2013, to provide employment skills and training over the period 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2014. Of these projects, 38 operate exclusively within Belfast, and 17 deliver activities across Northern Ireland. A further 8 projects based in Belfast have recently been offered funding for the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014. Of these projects, 5 operate exclusively within Belfast and 3 deliver activities across Northern Ireland.

A varied range of target outcomes has been agreed for individual projects, which include delivery of pre-vocational and vocational training, accredited and non accredited qualifications for employability, and tailored packages of employment focused training and development to meet the needs of individual participants. Each project has agreed a target of assisting a specific number of participants. A list for each respective group of projects showing details of funding offered has been placed in the Assembly Library and on my department's website at <http://www.delni.gov.uk/>.

My Department's ESF Managing Authority monitors expenditure and outcomes throughout the duration of the projects, and may withdraw or reclaim funding from projects that fail to deliver outcomes.

Teacher Training: Student Intake

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the discussions that his Department has had with the Teacher Training Colleges and the Department of Education regarding the student intake for 2013-14 and 2014-15; and how this compares with 2011-12 and 2012-13.

(AQW 21669/11-15)

Dr Farry: The responsibility for the allocation of student intake numbers for initial teacher training is the responsibility of the Minister of Education. That said, the issue was raised at a meeting between my officials and those of the Department of Education in March. I will meet with the Minister of Education on 30 April to discuss a range of issues including intake numbers.

Regional Colleges: Religious Background of Students

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for a breakdown of (i) Roman Catholic; and (ii) Protestant students attending each regional college.

(AQW 21717/11-15)

Dr Farry: The table below details the breakdown of (i) Catholic and (ii) Protestant student enrolments attending Professional and Technical courses at each Regional College for the 2011/12 academic year, the latest year for which data are available.

College	Catholic	Protestant
Belfast Metropolitan	8,375	7,515
Northern Regional	5,215	11,090
South Eastern Regional	4,770	9,825
Southern Regional	12,610	6,975
South West	12,450	5,390
North West Regional	12,310	3,585
Total	55,725	44,380

Source: Further Education Statistical Record

Notes:

- 1 Religious Background for 28% of student enrolments was not stated or unknown in 2011/12 and therefore the figures cannot be assumed to be a true representation of the student population.
- 2 The figures relate to student enrolments and not actual student numbers. An individual student can have multiple enrolments.
- 3 Figures presented in the table are rounded to the nearest 5, with 0, 1, 2 rounded to 0. Due to rounding the sum of numbers in each column may not add to the total shown.

Disabled Students' Allowance

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning why the disabled students' allowance is not available for mature students who are not studying at further education colleges or higher education institutes but paying for a qualification themselves from an alternative training provider and a private awarding business.

(AQW 21729/11-15)

Dr Farry: I can advise the member that Disabled Students' Allowances can be paid to students outside the Further Education College and Higher Education Institution environment, including alternative training providers and private institutions. However, the course must be an undergraduate course designated by my Department under Schedule 3 of the Education (Student Support) (No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) (as amended) and be validated by a United Kingdom degree awarding public body, such as a University.

DEL: Letters in Irish

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning why a letter issued to students, signed by the head of HE Student Finance in his Department, included a version in Irish.

(AQW 21805/11-15)

Dr Farry: I can advise the member that the Education Maintenance Allowance scheme is jointly administered and financially supported by both my Department and the Department of Education. It is the Department of Education's policy that correspondence which is issued to all schools and parents of all school children should be published bilingually in English and Irish.

Skills Solutions Service

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many employers has the Skills Solutions Service contacted this year.

(AQW 21926/11-15)

Dr Farry: The number of employers contacted by the Skills Solutions Service from 1 January 2013 until 18 April 2013 was 298.

Regional Colleges: Higher Education Places

Ms McGahan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many higher education places are available in each of the Regional Colleges.

(AQW 22030/11-15)

Dr Farry: I have previously announced that the Maximum Student Number, or 'MaSN', allocation for full-time higher education across further education regional colleges will increase by a total of 140 additional places by 2015.

My Department is currently conducting a review of existing demand for higher education opportunities in further education colleges, to determine this year's allocation of the new places.

There are also around 6,000 part-time higher education enrolments in further education. My Department does not place a cap on part-time higher education places and therefore expansion of part-time provision within existing budgets offers colleges another route to increase higher education provision.

In the current academic year 2012/13 the Regional Colleges have the following allocations of full-time higher education places:

Belfast Metropolitan College	1463
Northern Regional College	266
South Eastern Regional College	533
Southern Regional College	539
South West College	420
North West Regional College	635
Total	3856

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Invest NI

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, over the last three years, what role Invest NI has played, and what financial contribution it has made, in marketing the (i) University of Ulster at Magee; and (ii) Project Kelvin project in the North West.

(AQW 14189/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Invest NI does not make any financial contribution to the marketing of Project Kelvin or University of Ulster. Hibernia Atlantic, who won the DETI contract to deliver the project, is responsible for the marketing of Project Kelvin. Similarly the University of Ulster is responsible for marketing the university and each campus.

Invest NI, in its role of promoting Northern Ireland as a high-quality business location, promotes the key benefits of the region's digital infrastructure, and the skills availability and research expertise of both universities. In doing so, Invest NI presents the benefits of the Kelvin direct transatlantic link and the University of Ulster including the Magee campus, in both promotional materials and directly to potential inward investors.

Corporation Tax

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment at what stage the safe space away from public scrutiny will end, which her Department, Invest NI and HM Treasury claim they need to enable them to assess the merits of lower corporation tax.

(AQW 21449/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Executive is continuing to press for the power to set a lower rate of corporation tax in Northern Ireland. The case for doing so is strong and the merits of the case have been set out in a range of research already in the public domain, including that conducted by my Economic Advisory Group and research conducted by my Department into attracting high value FDI.

The First and deputy First Ministers met the Prime Minister on 26 March 2013 to press the case for devolving corporation tax powers to Northern Ireland. They have expressed their disappointment at the Prime Minister's indication that a decision will be delayed until Autumn 2014, after the Scottish independence referendum.

I remain committed to seeking this power as a means to rebalance our economy, create jobs and increase prosperity.

Access to Finance Strategy

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline, as a result of the Access to Finance Strategy (i) the number of new business start-ups; (ii) the number of jobs created; and (iii) the effect on exports.

(AQW 21515/11-15)

Mrs Foster: There are two funds aimed at business start up. They are NISPO and the NI Small Business Loan Fund. The NISPO Fund does not have a job target, however, I can report that of NISPO's 23 investments to date, 21 are start ups. It has created 31 jobs to date. The NI Small Business Loan Fund has only recently been launched and as such has not yet started reporting.

To successfully attract support from the Funds, businesses must demonstrate significant growth potential, usually through the penetration of existing export markets and/or seeking new export markets. Therefore, over the life of each Fund it is anticipated that Invest NI intervention will have a positive export impact.

Job Creation: Access to Finance Strategy and the Finance Voucher Initiative

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the targets for job creation within (i) each of the five funds of the Access to Finance Strategy; and (ii) the Finance Voucher Initiative.

(AQW 21517/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Job creation from these Funds is long-term in nature and will be achieved over the full ten year life of each Fund. Information on the number of jobs created and safeguarded for each Fund will be collected during their periodic evaluations.

NISPO and Co-Fund do not have job targets. The three more recently launched Funds' targets are as follows:

- Growth Loan Fund 2,100
- NI Small Business Loan Fund 230
- Development Fund 750

The key objective of the Finance Voucher scheme is to help SMEs with the cost of external consultants to prepare more robust applications for funding, primarily from banks. This is principally a programme that will enhance the knowledge and skills within SMEs. As such, it is not a job creation programme and job targets have not been put in place.

Lending Schemes Uptake

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the uptake by Northern Ireland businesses of UK wide lending schemes over the last five years.

(AQW 21518/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department does not hold information on bank lending and would not be authorised to release such data. Indeed, in its report on the Review of Access to Finance for Northern Ireland Businesses published last month, the Economic Advisory Group has recommended that the British Banking Association and all banks with a presence in Northern Ireland work together to provide data on the scale of lending to Northern Ireland businesses.

Information on lending through the Government-backed Enterprise Finance Guarantee (EFG) scheme is in the public domain and is available at the following link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/enterprise-finance-guarantee>

The EAG Access to Finance report (page 22) also includes further details of uptake of EFG by individual lenders over the last 5 years to December 2012:

<http://www.eagni.com/fs/doc/publications/eag-review-of-access-to-finance-for-ni-businesses-final-report.PDF>

In addition, the latest data on the Bank of England and HM Treasury Funding for Lending scheme was published in March 2013 and provides details on lending to businesses at a UK level. It is available at the following link:

<http://www.bankofengland.co.uk/publications/Pages/news/2013/044.aspx>.

Access to Finance Strategy

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the reasons for the delay in establishing the £30 million Development Fund, which is part of the Access to Finance Strategy.

(AQW 21520/11-15)

Mrs Foster: A tender process in respect of the planned £30 million Development Fund managed by Central Procurement Directorate, was completed in April 2011. The resulting successful bidder was then responsible for raising £20 million in

match funding from the private sector. Unfortunately it was unable to raise the necessary private sector funding. A new tender process was commenced in November 2012.

Invest NI is now in the process of evaluating the tenders received and any contract awards will be announced in due course.

Translation Services: DETI Spend

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much her Department spent on translation services for visiting foreign nationals in each of the last five years.

(AQW 21559/11-15)

Mrs Foster: DETI has not incurred any costs on translation services for visiting foreign nationals in any of the last five years.

'Game of Thrones'

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, to detail (i) the amount of support provided by the Northern Ireland Executive to the producers of Game of Thrones each year since 2009; (ii) the number of full time equivalent jobs created as a result of production each year since 2009; (iii) these jobs by average length of appointment or contract; (iv) the number of full time equivalent jobs since 2009 filled by permanent local residents; and (v) the total amount of support available to the producers for the newly commissioned series and the estimated number of full time equivalent jobs which will be created.

(AQW 21577/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Northern Ireland Screen Commission (NI Screen) is the lead organisation for developing the film and television industry in Northern Ireland. Invest NI is the largest funder of NI Screen, providing support of £43.4million for the period 1st April 2003 to 31st March 2013, including £7.9million in the last financial year. The following table provides the requested information related to funding of HBO's Game of Thrones production over the relevant period 2009 – 2013.

	Support Provided to GoT (£)	FTE's from Production of GoT ¹	Average Length of Contract (Mths)	FTE's filled by Perm Local Residents
Pilot (2009)	1,600,000	30	n/a	30
Series 1 (2010)	1,600,000	190	6	190
Series 2 (2011)	2,850,000	221	6	221
Series 3 (2012)	3,200,000	250	6	250
Series 4 (2013)	1,600,000 ²	Not available	Not available	Not available
Total	9,250,000	691	691

The above data is related to FTE's only and does not include those employed on shorter term daily rates on an 'as and when required' basis. Neither does it include the number of cast members engaged on each production. The following table details the total number of people involved in the production of each series of Game of Thrones.

	Core Crew ³	Dailies	Local Cast	Total
Pilot (2009)	155	100	202	457
Series 1 (2010)	316	113	1,010	1439
Series 2 (2011)	336	553	1,498	2387
Series 3 (2012)	261	151 ⁴	1,665	2077
Series 4 (2013)	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available

1 FTE's have been calculated by summing the periods of individual employment contracts and then converting to total years.

2 Reduced support negotiated as the Production will be able to avail of new High End TV Tax Credit

3 Includes NI resident permanent FTE's

4 Base estimation, Northern Ireland Screen expects this to be more in the region of 500 - 600

Airline Routes

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how her Department is encouraging airlines to operate new routes.

(AQW 21607/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department, through Tourism Ireland, is in dialogue with Northern Ireland's airports on an ongoing basis to help bring new air services to Northern Ireland and to explore opportunities to promote, and drive demand for, existing

services. The abolition of Air Passenger Duty (APD) on direct long haul flights since January 2013 has made Northern Ireland a viable option for many long haul airlines.

I am keen to see improved access to all markets which offer the business and inbound tourism links which are important to the Northern Ireland economy. In particular, I believe there is real potential to reinstate direct air services from Northern Ireland to Germany and Canada.

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what proposals her Department has to utilise the local enterprise network more effectively to promote and develop a stronger small and medium enterprise sector outside the Belfast metropolitan area plan.

(AQW 21610/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department and Invest NI recognise the role of the local enterprise network in promoting and developing a stronger SME sector.

Invest NI has a contractual relationship with Enterprise Northern Ireland (ENI). ENI is the membership body representing a number of Local Enterprise Agencies. The organisation delivers enterprise programmes on behalf of Invest NI, specifically, the Regional Start Initiative and the Social Entrepreneurship Programme. The local enterprise network is therefore involved in the delivery of these programmes throughout Northern Ireland.

ENI is also a subcontractor to the Ulster Community Investment Trust PLC for delivery of the Northern Ireland Small Business Loan Fund, insuring this initiative is promoted to the SME sector.

Invest NI will continue to work with these organisations, along with local Councils, Chambers and other stakeholders, to maximise opportunities and encourage enterprise.

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of (i) small and medium-sized enterprises; and (ii) their employees, based at each of the local enterprise companies, for each of the last five years.

(AQW 21611/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Local Enterprise Agency Network is entirely independent of my Department and, as such, my Department does not hold the information requested.

Ulster American Folk Park, Omagh

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what proposals, in terms of capital investment support, her Department has to sustain and develop the range of tourist attraction facilities at the Ulster American Folk Park.

(AQW 21612/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Ulster American Folk Park is managed by National Museums Northern Ireland, the holding group funded by the Department of Culture Arts and Leisure. The sustainability and development of the facility would therefore primarily be an issue for the DCAL Minister.

My Department, through the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB), provided financial assistance of £150,000 to re-erect The Francis Rogan Plantation House at The Ulster American Folk Park under the Tourism Development Scheme 2008–11.

NITB is facilitating the local authorities within the Tyrone & Sperrins destination to progress the development of a destination plan which will engage the public, private and community sectors. Business Tourism Solutions (BTS) has recently been appointed consultants for this plan.

Power Cuts

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what procedures her Department can put in place to ensure that the possibility of a future power cut across the greater Belfast area, including the city centre, is diminished in any future periods of extreme weather.

(AQW 21622/11-15)

Mrs Foster: While it cannot be guaranteed that customers will never be disrupted by future severe weather, industry and government have well developed plans to deal with a range of events.

In line with Government's civil contingency commitments, DETI works with a broad range of partners to ensure that their business continuity arrangements for power disruption are robust, and in particular protect the most vulnerable in our society.

NIE responses to customers affected by the recent snow storm clearly show how close cooperation on ongoing planning can reduce the impact of such events. NIE has advised that 175,000 customers in the central and eastern districts of Belfast, who lost power on the night of Friday 22 March 2013, were reconnected within 20 minutes.

Tourism: Motorhomes

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, over the last three years, what correspondence her officials have had with their counterparts in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland on motorhome tourism.

(AQW 21640/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) works closely with the Caravan & Camping Forum for Northern Ireland which discusses a range of issues affecting the caravan, camping and motorhome sectors, and consists of:

- The British Graded Holiday Parks Scheme;
- The Caravan Club;
- The Camping and Caravanning Club;
- The British Holiday & Home Parks Association;
- The National Caravan Council; and
- Private caravan park operators.

NITB Officials met with Waterways Ireland, at the invitation of the Northern Ireland Motorhome Association, in Dublin on the 18 October 2012 to explore opportunities for partnership regarding motorhome tourism; such as working with marinas to provide motorhome facilities.

Invest NI: Hospitality Expenses

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 20502/11-12, for a breakdown of how the £511,699 was spent.

(AQW 21647/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The £511,699 spend quoted in AQW 20502/11, comprised: -

£168,000 – sponsorship of events held in overseas markets, such as roundtable receptions, conferences, seminars, and specific business events in priority investment sectors to enable the Northern Ireland sales proposition to be presented to potential inward investors and support lead generation in order to secure new inward investment projects in support of the Executive's Programme for Government targets.

£177,000 – international expenditure at networking events for foreign owned companies and clients, which offered the opportunity to build relationships with key decision makers from potential investors, to present the benefits of investing in Northern Ireland and to outline the potential support available.

£167,000 – expenditure in Northern Ireland relating to the hosting of inward visits by potential investors, visiting stakeholders and dignitaries, such as Ambassadors, to enable them to gain a better understanding of the inward investment and trade development opportunities which exist with Northern Ireland. This included facilitating meetings between such visitors and both international and local companies in order to start to develop opportunities.

Renewable Energy

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what is the current percentage of electricity generated from renewable sources.

(AQW 21648/11-15)

Mrs Foster: In the year ended 31 March 2013, the annual average percentage of electricity generated from renewable sources was 13.7%.

G8 Summit

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what discussions she had with the Tourist Board to ensure that reputational damage is minimised in the event of rioting or protests being broadcast globally during the 2013 G8 summit in Enniskillen.

(AQW 21696/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Planning for such an eventuality is one of a wide range of topics discussed at the monthly G8 Northern Ireland Executive Co-ordinating Group, which is chaired by my Department and attended by a cross-section of participants including representatives from the Police Service of Northern Ireland, Northern Ireland Tourist Board and OFMDM's Executive Information Service.

The hosting of the Summit provides an opportunity to showcase Northern Ireland on the world stage as a safe, secure and welcoming place to invest in, to do business with and as a beautiful, culturally rich tourism destination.

Inward investment: Visits to Constituencies

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the number of inward investors visiting each constituency in the last three years; and (ii) the number of potential jobs that may have arisen as a result.

(AQW 21746/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) plays an important role within the Northern Ireland economy, and Invest NI has a very successful track record of attracting high quality investment, which benefits the entire region. Invest NI is building on this success by working closely with local stakeholders to maximise investment and employment opportunities in all areas.

Invest NI neither determines the locations for visits by a potential investor nor the location for an investment project. This decision is taken by the investor. However, Invest NI works closely with the company when preparing a draft visit programme to ensure that the locations to be visited meet their requirements, and also provide the best opportunity for Invest NI to sell the Northern Ireland proposition.

The table below shows an analysis by Parliamentary Constituency Area (PCA) of the 513 inward-investment visits hosted by Invest NI during the financial years 2009-10 to 2011-12. These visits relate to potential inward investors with identifiable project proposals.

Inward Investment Visits by Parliamentary Constituency Area 2009-10 to 2011-12

PCA	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	Total
Belfast East	34	47	51	132
Belfast North	17	22	25	64
Belfast South	48	54	62	164
Belfast West	12	7	7	26
East Antrim	9	19	14	42
East Londonderry	5	2	3	10
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	-	-	-	-
Foyle	13	10	7	30
Lagan Valley	3	7	1	11
Mid Ulster	-	-	1	1
Newry & Armagh	1	6	3	10
North Antrim	-	2	1	3
North Down	5	2	-	7
South Antrim	4	2	-	6
South Down	1	-	-	1
Strangford	2	1	1	4
Upper Bann	-	-	2	2
West Tyrone	-	-	-	-
Total	154	181	178	513

Notes:

- 1) 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.

Securing an inward investment project may span a considerable time period (18-24 months) and is the result of many factors, which may include an inward investment visit. A company may visit a number of different locations within Northern Ireland before making a decision about whether and where to invest. It may also visit on a number of different occasions. Furthermore, some inward investors may determine to create jobs without an inward visit having taken place, for example where an existing investor chooses to grow their operations.

It is therefore not possible to establish a direct relationship between individual visits and specific employment-related inward-investment projects, as sought in the second part of the question. It should also be recognised that employment opportunities resulting from inward investments are not restricted to people living in the area in which it is located.

Tourist Board: Tourism Ireland Meetings

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the number of meetings which have taken place between the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and Tourism Ireland in the last three years; and (ii) the number of these meetings she attended.

(AQW 21748/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Boards of Tourism Ireland and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board meet jointly on an annual basis.

The Chairman of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board is also a member of Tourism Ireland's Board of Directors which meets eight times per year. I attended these meetings in October 2011 and May 2012.

At an executive level, officials across Tourism Ireland and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board meet and liaise closely on an ongoing and regular basis in relation to a range of operational matters. It is not possible to quantify this engagement as the information is not readily available and may only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Royal Charter Celebrations

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what support for tourism is available for towns and cities to celebrate the 400th anniversary of being granted their Royal Charter.

(AQW 21753/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The main support mechanism available for tourism events from my Department, through the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB), is the Tourism Event Funding Programme, an annual funding programme designed to support International and National Tourism Events.

The Tourism Event Funding Programme for events occurring between 1 April 2013 and 31 March 2014 has now closed.

Two events applied to the Tourism Event Funding Programme 2013/14 relating to towns and cities celebrating the 400th anniversary of being granted their Royal Charter. Both events were unsuccessful as they did not reach the minimum scoring criteria of the fund.

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board will promote and market tourism events throughout the year on their consumer website www.discovernorthernireland.com.

Invest NI: Advertising Spend in USA

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the advertising spend by Invest NI in the United States of America, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 21801/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Presenting and promoting Northern Ireland as a great place to do business is key to Northern Ireland's success in attracting inward investment and encouraging exports.

The advertising spend for media placed in the US market over the last 3 years has been collated and is detailed below. The total is £819,990.

Financial Year	Advertising Placement (£)
2010-11	34,843
2011-12	366,171
2012-13	418,976
Grand Total	819,990

Advertising activity over the last 3 years has supported sales activity in-market and has been specifically aimed at raising the profile of Northern Ireland and promoting the region as a destination for inward investment and to highlight expertise in the region. Channels used include online, airport advertising and selected print publications.

Research has indicated that Northern Ireland does not enjoy a widespread positive high profile particularly in the more distant emerging markets. In some markets including the US there exists a level of supposed familiarity that requires augmented/adjusted – eg some people's awareness is confined to bad news stories they may have been exposed to and their perception of Northern Ireland may be based on outdated information about the region's stability. Research has also highlighted that people are sometimes unlikely to be able to differentiate between Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland.

Given that the biggest barrier is one of perception, this can be addressed by marketing and promotion and increased budget has been allocated to this over the last 2 years.

Ferry Route: Belfast to Birkenhead

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) whether there has been an average 20 percent increase in HAULIER fares on the Belfast to Birkenhead ferry route and that in some individual sailings, the morning

and weekend rates increased by up to 55 percent in 2011; ii) whether Stena Line has proposed a fare increase of 21 percent for hauliers effective throughout 2013; (iii) whether fare increases have occurred since September 2011 when Stena Line, with the approval of the Office of Fair Trading, officially took over the Belfast to Birkenhead route from DFDS Seaways; and (iv) whether fare increases by P&O on its Larne to Cairnryan route only increased by 3 percent for the same period.

(AQW 21914/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I am aware of fluctuations in price for freight traffic on the Belfast to Birkenhead route and have requested a meeting with Stena Line to discuss this issue. However, the development and operation of ferry links, and the fares the operators charge, are entirely matters for commercial decision by individual sea carriers and the Northern Ireland and Great Britain ports.

Trade with Brazil, China and India

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what steps her Department is taking to increase trade with (i) Brazil; (ii) China; and (iii) India.

(AQW 21964/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI continues to target Brazil, China and India as part of its ongoing trade development activities.

A trade mission has recently returned from India, I will lead a mission to Brazil in May and a June mission is planned to China. As a measure of the importance of these countries further trade missions are planned for the latter part of this year. Invest NI will also have stands at the Hospitalar life sciences exhibition in Sao Paulo, Brazil and Food Hotel China food importers exhibition in Shanghai, China.

Invest NI has recently recruited a Head of Territory for Asia-Pacific who will have responsibility for further developing trade with China. Invest NI is also currently recruiting a Trade Business Development Director for North and South America. This position will also be located in-market.

I am delighted to report an increase in the value of exports to all three countries in 2012 – exports to Brazil increased by £12 million to £29 million on the previous year, China increased by £28 million to £81 million and India by £5 million to £27 million.

Department of the Environment

Planning Decisions: Review of Staff Actions

Mr Wells asked the Minister of the Environment whether he has any plans to review the actions of his staff in relation to planning decisions R/1999/0147, R/2001/1526/F and R/2006/0841/F.

(AQW 19641/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): I am advised that the applications referred to were properly processed in accordance with established process and procedure. In these circumstances and in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, I consider that there is not a basis to initiate a review.

Shale Gas Operations: Environmental Damage

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment whether his Department accepts the recommendation by the European Parliament's Environment Committee to member states that it considers it appropriate, in the context of liability, to provide for the reversal of the burden of proof for shale gas operators, where, in view of the nature of the disturbance and its adverse effects, other possible causes and any other circumstances, the balance of probability indicates that shale gas operations were the cause of the environmental damage; and whether he intends to take action to ensure compliance with this recommendation.

(AQW 21352/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I have noted and will fully consider the comments of the European Parliament's Environment Committee. As I have made clear many times my focus is on ensuring that proposals for shale gas extraction are subject to the most rigorous assessment in terms of the potential impacts on the environment. Indeed, my view is not only a precautionary approach but an enhanced precautionary approach.

This is why the Department has been reviewing emerging research, studying case studies from other parts of the world and liaising with counterparts in other Environmental Agencies in Britain and Ireland and other EU countries where fracking is currently proposed or taking place to establish a broader evidence base to aid more effective decision making.

It is entirely proper that it is on the far side of the ongoing research and science that an assessment is made on fracking. That is the strong approach.

Planning Applications

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of the Environment what was the average time taken to process normal or uncontentious planning applications in (i) 2007; and (ii) 2012.

(AQW 21410/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Normal, uncontentious applications are taken as those applications where no letters/petitions of objection were received by the Department and the decision of the Department was to approve.

There has been significant improvement in the time taken to process normal, uncontentious planning applications over the last 5 years, particularly in the intermediate category of applications. This has been greatly assisted by the streamlined council consultation process.

In 2006/07, the overall average processing time for normal or uncontentious applications was 20 weeks, while in 2011/12 it was 18 weeks – an improvement of 2 weeks.

Given the direction of travel, I have asked senior management in planning to further review planning timeline targets to see how we can be further challenging.

New Car Registrations

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of new cars registered in (i) 2011; and (ii) 2012; and how these figures compare with (a) England; (b) Scotland; and (c) Wales.

(AQW 21439/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The figures and comparisons requested are detailed in Table 1 below.

Table 1 New Car Registrations

	2011	2012	Percentage Change 2011 to 2012
Northern Ireland	47,766	47,990	+0.5%
England	1,671,818	1,755,770	+5.0%
Scotland	167,764	182,525	+8.8%
Wales	67,727	72,438	+7.0%
Subtotal for Great Britain *	1,907,411	2,010,825	+5.4%

Notes: Figures for Northern Ireland were sourced from the Northern Ireland Department for Regional Development National Statistics Annual and Quarterly 'Northern Ireland Road and Rail Transport Statistics' publications, and includes exemptions and imports. Those for England, Scotland, Wales and Great Britain were sourced from Department for Transport Vehicle Licensing Statistics 2012, Table veh0254, published on 11 April 2013 <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/departement-for-transport/series/vehicle-licensing-statistics>

* Great Britain data include all cars newly registered with DVLA, so in fact will include small numbers of imported (or NI) vehicles which have been used before, and a small number of vehicles which cannot be assigned between England, Scotland and Wales.

Councillor Severance Package

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of the Environment, in relation to the proposed terms of the Councillor Severance package, when will qualifying councillors wishing to avail of the package be able to step down.

(AQW 21474/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The regulations will specify a prescribed period during which councillors who apply for a severance package must resign their seats. I want, to be fair to councillors – particularly the longest serving – with flexibility to decide when they wish to leave public office. The consultation which is currently underway proposes a prescribed period for the severance arrangements from the date the regulations come into operation (anticipated as August 2013) until 31 March 2015.

It is proposed to have two periods during which councillors can apply for severance. Both periods will be before the next local government elections in 2014.

The first application period would be from the date the regulations come into operation to 31 December 2013. Councillors who apply during this period will have to resign before 31 December 2013. The resultant vacancy may be filled by co-option.

The second application period would be from 1 January 2014, to the closing date for nominations to stand at the 2014 local government elections. Councillors who apply during this period will have to resign before 31 March 2015.

Clearly I will listen closely to the views expressed in the consultation around this issue.

Cavanacaw Gold Mine

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 14479/11-15, for a breakdown of the costs incurred by his Department in the recent civil action on the Cavanacaw Gold Mine.

(AQW 21513/11-15)

Mr Attwood: A total of just under £50,000 has been incurred by DOE in the recent civil action on the Cavanacaw Gold Mine. A breakdown is as follows:

- £10,000 to each of the three complainants following an Assembly Ombudsman investigation; and
- £19,998 of legal fees relating to the Judicial Review Case.

Single-use Carrier Bag Levy

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment what consideration was given to exempting retailers with fewer than ten employees from the single use carrier bag levy; and why he decided not to include such an exemption in the legislation.

(AQW 21535/11-15)

Mr Attwood: My Department carried out two public consultations and a Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) on its proposals for a carrier bag levy; the RIA included an analysis of the potential impact on small businesses.

Having considered the responses to the consultations and the findings of the RIA, I took the decision that the levy should be applied consistently across all retail outlets. I believe that this is essential if we are to achieve significant and sustained change in consumer behaviour.

While the majority of bags are obviously issued by the major retailers, smaller premises, taken as a retail group, issue millions of bags each year. The availability of low cost or free bags at these premises would not generate the level of behavioural change required to substantially reduce carrier bag use. The exclusion of such premises would therefore be inconsistent with my main objective - to avoid the unnecessary use of bags.

I, of course, acknowledge that smaller businesses may find it more difficult – in the first instance at least - to adjust to the charging arrangements. It is for this reason that I have ensured that the record-keeping requirement is restricted to the absolute minimum needed to demonstrate compliance. There will also be a simple online process for registration and payment – payment will be made quarterly, and should only take a few minutes on each occasion.

I believe that once businesses - including small businesses - have adjusted to the new arrangements they will see real benefits – including financial savings generated by the purchase of fewer bags. I consider it was a good insight by the trade association for local newsagents which said at the time of the introduction of the levy, "The introduction of the Levy will lead to significant cost savings for our members which will greatly outweigh any administrative costs incurred as well as contributing to waste management and environmental strategies."

This approach, together with the enthusiastic response to the levy across consumers and others, demonstrates the validity of the approach I have adopted.

River Samples

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment what progress has been made in the creation of court appointed samplers and in recruiting and training lay people or members of River Trust Groups to help take samples from rivers.

(AQW 21557/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The possibility of using lay volunteers to take samples of pollution and of rivers is an issue which was first raised a number of years ago in a Public Accounts Committee Report. At that time the possibility of using volunteers for this work was explored in depth by the Department, including consideration of the legal issues, taking advice on the practical and volunteer safety issues, and discussing the wider practicalities with bodies such as the Ulster Anglers Federation.

The conclusion was that there were insurmountable legal difficulties in warranting non-professionals such as angling bailiffs and members of the public to do this work under current water pollution legislation; in addition the Department concluded there would be major health and safety implications in using lay people. Similarly, upon close consideration of the practicalities it became clear that a number of the proposed benefits of using lay people (for example the potential for samples to be taken more quickly) were in fact very unlikely to be realised in practice.

In summary therefore the possibility of using volunteers to collect river samples has already been carefully considered by the Department; but has been ruled out on practical, safety and, on legal grounds. However, NIEA met some time ago with the Ulster Angling Federation (UAF) to discuss the possibility of using Private Fishery Bailiffs to assist with pollution investigations in other ways. It was highlighted that, within the powers of the fisheries legislation under which they are appointed, these bailiffs have wide-ranging powers to help protect fisheries habitat and angling interests.

NIEA therefore proposed to the UAF that where these bailiffs witness any significant pollution incident, a witness statement or other statement of fact prepared by the bailiff would carry considerable weight as evidence in any subsequent enforcement action. However this proposal has not been taken up to any significant degree.

Nevertheless my Department, through the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), greatly values the key contribution made by members of the public and acknowledges that our work would be much harder but for the general public's help.

In particular we value the public alerting NIEA to potential environmental problems by reporting pollution incidents through the Pollution Hotline, and in working directly to improve Northern Ireland's environment and river catchments through key initiatives such as the formation of Rivers Trusts and Catchment Management Groups.

However, there are a number of other avenues for the public to get directly involved in improving river quality. For example since 2011 NIEA has supported the Riverfly Monitoring Initiative. The initiative involves Angling groups or other interested stakeholders being trained by the UK Riverfly Partnership to carry out a simple biological assessment of river invertebrates. To date, 41 volunteers have been trained and currently 40 sites are monitored on a regular basis.

I would encourage anyone with an interest in getting directly involved in improving our rivers to contact NIEA to find how they can participate in the Riverfly Monitoring Initiative, take part in their local Catchment Stakeholder Group or establish a River Trust on their local river.

Translation Services: DOE Spend

Mr Craig asked the Minister of the Environment how much his Department spent on translation services for visiting foreign nationals in each of the last five years.

(AQW 21558/11-15)

Mr Attwood: DOE has not incurred any expenditure on translation services for visiting foreign nationals in each of the last five years.

Recyclable Waste

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment (i) how much material collected as recyclable waste is exported on an annual basis; (ii) to what destinations; and (iii) what happens to it when it arrives at its destination.

(AQW 21580/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Under the Transfrontier Shipment of Waste Regulations 2007 (as amended) all exports of waste from Northern Ireland to outside the UK must be accompanied by documentation, copies of which must be sent to the Department prior to shipment.

According to Departmental records during the calendar year 2012 just over 630,000 tonnes of waste was exported from Northern Ireland destined for recycling operations.

This waste was sent to the following countries:

Bangladesh, Belgium, China, France, Germany, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Ireland, South Korea, Lithuania, Malaysia, Mexico, Netherlands, Norway, Pakistan, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Thailand, United States and Vietnam.

The above countries are all signed up to the Basel Convention and as such are required to take the appropriate measures to ensure the availability of adequate facilities, for the environmentally sound management of hazardous wastes and other wastes. When the material arrives at its destination it goes through a recycling operation which varies depending on the nature of the waste.

One of the challenges around all of this is to recycle more on the island of Ireland. For example, only 30% of plastics on the island are recycled with 70% of these plastics exported for recycling. I have met David Surplus – the recently appointed Chair of the North South Market development Steering Group – to help accelerate how we can recycle more on the island with recycles related jobs one of the results.

Review of Public Administration: Planning Procedures

Mr Frew asked the Minister of the Environment what role MLAs will have in representing the views of constituents in the new planning procedures after the Review of Public Administration; and at what stage will MLAs have an input into the process.

(AQW 21620/11-15)

Mr Attwood: MLAs currently represent the views of constituents on planning procedures throughout the planning process through a number of avenues, such as correspondence cases, office meetings with planners, phone calls etc. It is envisaged that this will continue to be the case after the transfer of planning functions to councils.

Post transfer, MLAs will also still be able to influence the planning system through the Assembly legislative processes and the usual method of committee scrutiny. However, the planning function for the big majority of individual applications will pass to Councils in 2015 – as will the local development and community planning responsibility. This will be a fundamental shift in responsibility, a shift to Councils.

Oil and Gas Exploration Wells

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment whether his Department was made aware of any incidents of environmental contamination or leaks from oil and gas exploration wells since 1998; and if so, to provide details.

(AQW 21625/11-15)

Mr Attwood: My Department is not aware of any incidents of environmental contamination or leaks from oil and gas exploration wells since 1998.

I have been advised that a total of sixteen wells have been drilled to date, the earliest of which dates back to 1965. Fifteen of the wells have been abandoned and one, on the North Antrim coast, is currently plugged.

Waste Management by District Councils

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of the Environment what proposals his Department has for waste management by district councils within the context of EU regulations and guidelines that relate to renewable energy objectives.

(AQW 21651/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The competent authorities in Northern Ireland for the preparation of plans setting out arrangements for the recovery, treatment or disposal of municipal waste are the 26 district councils. The three regional district council waste management groups (WMGs) are currently developing revised waste management plans (the plans) in tandem with the Department's draft revised waste management strategy.

The plans must take account of the draft revised strategy, which has been developed in the context of relevant EU Directives and moves the focus of waste management away from resource management towards resource efficiency with a greater emphasis on waste prevention and recycling. However, some residual waste has value in the form of recoverable energy and the draft revised strategy supports efficient energy recovery from residual waste in accordance with the waste hierarchy as this can deliver environmental benefits, reduce carbon impacts and provide economic opportunities. It also notes that alternative technologies such as anaerobic digestion can contribute to meeting our non-fossil fuel obligations and policies on renewable energies, and are eligible for financial support.

The Department has provided detailed guidance setting out key requirements of the plans and continues to work closely with the three WMGs in the development of their plans that will be assessed and determined by the Department later this year.

Driver and Vehicle Agency

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of the Environment on how many occasions the Driver and Vehicle Agency has lost passports and official documents during driving licence applications, over the last three years.

(AQW 21685/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA) requires, in certain cases, the submission of a passport or other official document with an application for a driving licence to provide evidence of identity. These documents are returned by post once identity has been confirmed.

The Agency has agreed a process with Royal Mail to instigate a search for missing documents when a customer reports to DVA that a passport or other official identity document has not been delivered. DVA may reimburse the customer the full price of a replacement passport or other official document under certain conditions where it has been notified as lost or not delivered. Where a driving licence is reported lost the Agency may issue a free replacement licence.

The following table details for each of the last three financial years the number of occasions when the Agency issued a payment to cover the cost of a replacement passport or other identity document and details of the number of driving licences replaced by the Agency free of charge as the customer declared that they were not received.

	Financial Year		
	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Number of payments for replacement passports and other identity documents	36	26	29
Driving Licences replaced free of charge as declared lost in post	252	290	273
Total	288	316	302

In relation to passports and other documents reported not delivered these figures represent an average of approximately 0.02% of the total documentation returned to customers by Driver Licensing Division and the number of driving licences replaced free of charge represents approximately 0.13% of licences issued.

Driving Licence Applications

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of the Environment how many driving licence applications have been turned down over the last three years due to documents such as passports not being included.

(AQW 21686/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Applications for a driving licence are checked for completeness on receipt in the Driver & Vehicle Agency. Incomplete applications are returned to the customer.

Applications may be rejected for a number of reasons, including the absence of the necessary identity documents. The Agency notes the driver record that an application has been received and returned but the reason for the return is not recorded.

I am not able, therefore, to provide information relating to the number of applications that have been rejected because the relevant identity documents were not submitted. I have advised the DVA to record the reason in future.

People with Special Needs

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment to list the councils that (i) employ people with special needs; and (ii) offer work placements or work experience to people with special needs; and how many posts and placements are available in each council.

(AQW 21701/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The information you have asked for is provided in the table below.

Council	Does the council employ people with special needs? Y/N	Does the council offer work placements or work experience to people with special needs? Y/N	If the response to Q2 is yes - How many posts and placements are available?
Antrim Borough Council	Yes	Yes	8 employees and 2 placements
Ards Borough Council	Yes	Yes	The council has given a commitment to provide 1 placement per year
Armagh City & District Council	Yes	Yes	All requests for placements are considered on a case by case basis
Ballymena Borough Council	No	No	n/a
Ballymoney Borough Council	Yes	Yes	1 employee and 1 placement
Banbridge District Council	Yes	Yes	All requests for placements are considered on a case by case basis
Belfast City Council	Yes	Yes	32 placements were facilitated in the 2012/ 2013 financial year; the council works closely with special schools and organisations to facilitate placements
Carrickfergus Borough Council	Yes	Yes	All requests for placements are considered on a case by case basis
Castlereagh Borough Council	Yes	Yes	25 employees, 2 short term and 1 long term placement in the past 12 months
Coleraine Borough Council	Yes	Yes	1
Cookstown District Council	Yes	Yes	All requests for placements are considered on a case by case basis. Council pro-actively promote work placements/experience to people with special needs.
Craigavon Borough Council	Yes	Yes	1 employee with 6 work placements accommodated per year
Derry City Council	Yes	Yes	All requests for placements are considered on a case by case basis
Down District Council	Yes	Yes	Placements offered to students of all and mixed abilities

Council	Does the council employ people with special needs? Y/N	Does the council offer work placements or work experience to people with special needs? Y/N	If the response to Q2 is yes - How many posts and placements are available?
Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council	Yes	Yes	7 employees and 2 placements; all requests considered
Fermanagh District Council	No	Yes	4 people currently on work placement. All requests for placements are considered on a case by case basis.
Larne Borough Council	Yes	Yes	2 employees and 1 placement
Limavady Borough Council	No	Yes	All requests for placements are considered on a case by case basis; 1 placement due to start in April 2013
Lisburn City Council	No	Yes	2 long term placements
Magherafelt District Council	Yes	Yes	6
Moyle District Council	Yes	Yes	All requests for placements are considered on a case by case basis
Newry & Mourne District Council	Yes	Yes	3 currently although placements are available on request
Newtownabbey Borough Council	Yes	Yes	All requests for placements are considered on a case by case basis
North Down Borough Council	None at present	Yes	2 currently with opportunities for other placements available
Omagh District Council	Yes	Yes	13 employees and 2 placements
Strabane District Council	Yes	Yes	All requests for placements are considered on a case by case basis

Review of Public Administration: Transfer of Resources

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what progress has been made in identifying the amount and methodology for transferring resources from central to local government for those areas that will move to local government under the Review of Public Administration.

(AQO 3842/11-15)

Mr Attwood: A key and significant element of local government reform is the issue of which responsibilities and functions should transfer from central government to local councils. The Transfer of Functions Working Group is taking this issue forward. Discussions regarding which functions should transfer have been ongoing for a number of months and following the Executive Committee's decision on 11th April 2013, I am now able to bring some certainty to the process.

Now that the package of functions is agreed, it is important that we move swiftly to confirm the number of staff transferring and the quantum of funding. In confirming these details, Ministers will have regard to the principle agreed by the previous Executive. That is: functions which are to transfer from central to local government should be fit for purpose, sufficiently funded and cost neutral to the ratepayer at the point of transfer. This will require the transfer of resources from central to local government when the functions transfer. There will also be a requirement for Departments to commit adequate resources preparing for the functions to transfer. The Finance Working Group and DFP are currently addressing the methodology to be used for transferring resources from central to local government.

Ministerial colleagues have agreed to provide me with this information by 31st May 2013. This will enable Departments to provide certainty to staff and to draw up firm transfer plans to ensure that all functions are fit for purpose and properly financed. It will also enable councils to begin to plan new organisational structures and arrangements.

Road Safety: North/South Co-operation

Ms McGahan asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the extent of North/South co-operation in the area of road safety.

(AQO 3844/11-15)

Mr Attwood: There is a great deal of co-operation between my Department and our Irish counterparts on road safety matters. It is an important element of our interaction through the North South Ministerial Council Transport Sectoral meetings, the latest of which was held on 17 April.

My officials and I liaise regularly with counterparts in Ireland to share experience and exchange information including, over the last few years, on the development of respective road safety strategies.

I recently attended the launch of Ireland's Road Safety Strategy 2020 in Dublin Castle where I welcomed the concentration on serious road traffic injuries along with a continued focus on reducing fatalities. Our strategies are complementary, with many of the same issues to be addressed, and both focusing on the principal causes of road traffic casualties.

The Department has established more structured arrangements at official level to progress mutual projects, support activities in one jurisdiction which impact on the other, and generally to ensure positive road safety benefits on both sides of the border. The most recent meeting with the Road Safety Authority was on 20 March 2013 when a range of areas of mutual interest were explored, including road safety strategies, EU legislative proposals, driver licensing issues, research plans and enforcement.

One example of significant progress has been towards the mutual recognition of penalty points across the island for speeding, drink/drug driving, non-wearing of seat belts and using a mobile phone when driving. This is a critical road safety measure which will help reduce death and serious injury on our roads. It will complement and strengthen the benefits already achieved through the mutual recognition of driving disqualifications, introduced in 2010. The Irish Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport and I have agreed a date of 31 December 2014 for the legislation required for this groundbreaking work to be in place.

The Department's Driver and Vehicle Agency continues to work closely with the RSA in carrying out joint enforcement operations and this coordinated approach is working extremely well with non-compliant operators being detected and subjected to appropriate sanctions at the roadside.

Road safety counterparts will continue to share information on initiatives and measures and on the technical, logistical and public information aspects of implementing such measures. They will also consider further activities that would afford the possibility of raising the profile of the strong collaboration on road safety activities, including in enforcement operations and promotional campaigns.

At the North / South Transport Sectoral meeting in Armagh on 17 April 2013 Minister Varadkar, Minister Kennedy and I discussed road safety, particularly given the increase in road deaths, both North and South, to date in 2013, compared with the same period in 2012. This is clearly of concern. I advised the Sectoral meeting that I would be writing to the relevant Ministers in the Governments of the British Irish Council (BIC) requesting a meeting in the margins of the next BIC meeting to identify how we can create more cohesion around the law and practice of road safety.

Single-use Carrier Bag Levy

Ms Brown asked the Minister of the Environment how the exemptions detailed under Schedule 1 of the Single Use Carrier Bags Charge Regulations (NI) 2013 will work in practical terms.

(AQO 3846/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Regulations were drafted so as to ensure that free bags are only issued where the nature of the product requires that a bag should be supplied. This is consistent with the primary aim of the legislation, which is to achieve at least an 80% reduction in the number of carrier bags used in Northern Ireland each year.

This approach means specific exemptions from the levy on grounds such as patient confidentiality, hygiene and food safety and the protection of both goods and consumers.

For example, there are 3 categories of food-related exemptions; these are for unwrapped or partially wrapped food products, hot takeaway food and hot drinks, and packaged uncooked fish, meat or poultry. Bags containing prescription medicines are also exempted from the levy. Other exemptions relate to unpackaged seeds or bulbs or goods contaminated by soil, unpackaged axes, knives and blades and live aquatic creatures in water. Exemptions will also apply in the case of very small bags and mail order dispatch and courier bags.

It is also worth emphasising that the levy relates to single use carrier bags issued new. Previously used bags are therefore excluded from charging. Reusable bags are also excluded at this stage – although, subject to Assembly approval I propose to extend the levy to low cost reusable bags next year.

Departmental staff have been working with retailers to educate them on the requirements of the Regulations – including the provision for exemptions. Guidance which explains the legislative requirements – including practical examples – is available online. This includes a short video containing a section specifically on exemptions.

The very positive response to the carrier bag levy on its introduction on 8 April confirms that citizens and businesses want to address the waste challenge and climate threat and embrace interventions to do so.

Planning: Third-party Right of Appeal

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on progress on publishing a consultation paper on third-party right of appeal.

(AQO 3847/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I do not intend to publish a consultation on a Third Party Right of Appeal. The scale of planning reform in the current Planning Bill, the change of transfer of planning to Councils, the need to press on with better timelines for decisions, the multiple planning challenges mean that attractive though I consider Third Party Right of Appeal, a better time and environment will emerge for the proposal.

Maze/Long Kesh Site

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of the Environment to detail all the elected representatives who responded (i) in favour of; and (ii) in opposition to the listing of buildings at the Maze/Long Kesh site.

(AQW 22157/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The listing process for some of the buildings at the Maze/Long Kesh site was completed in 2005 following a holistic survey of the heritage interest of the whole site. This was commissioned by OFMDFM, on advice from Environment and Heritage Service (as NIEA was then known). This information contributed to final decisions to list 5 structures within the prison and to protect two Second World War aircraft hangers and associated defensive features as scheduled monuments.

The listing process was carried out in line with the legislative requirements for listing and Departmental policy. Article 42(3) of the Planning Order (NI) 1991 states that:

‘Before compiling or amending any list under this Article, the Department shall consult with the Historic Buildings Council and with the appropriate district council.’

These ‘statutory consultations’ were carried out. HBC agreed with the Department’s recommendation and Lisburn District Council noted the recommendation and did not object.

In addition, the owner of the site, OFMDFM, was notified in advance of the decision in line with the Agency’s standard procedure. No wider consultation is undertaken in regard to listing decisions.

The Department sought a response to the listing of the buildings at the Maze/long Kesh site from Lisburn District Council, as a statutory consultee in the process. The council’s response in March 2005 was ‘the Council decided to note’ the consultation. This is not regarded as an objection (or opposition) to the proposal.

In addition, following the formal listing of the building, responses have been received from a number of elected representatives. These are detailed below.

- 1 Paul Butler MLA
- 2 Jim Alistair QC MEP
- 3 Cllr Tom Elliot MLA
- 4 George Savage MLA
- 5 David McNarry MLA

Department of Finance and Personnel

Coiste na n-larchimi

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what investigations have been conducted into Coista Na N-larchimi not complying with its legal obligations under company legislation, whilst in receipt of public funding; and what were the outcomes of any investigations.

(AQW 21365/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): Coiste na n-larchimi is a sub-partner in a PEACE III project led by the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland (CFNI). In December 2011 the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), PEACE III Managing Authority, was made aware that Coiste na n-larchimi had not properly filed its annual return and accounts to Companies House for the years 2008, 2009 and 2010. It had been struck off the Companies House register on 2 September 2011.

SEUPB immediately brought this to the attention of CFNI, who had responsibility for addressing the issue directly with Coiste na n-larchimi. SEUPB also suspended payments to CFNI in relation to the project. When the issue was raised with the project, the annual return and accounts for 2011 and the previous three years were promptly submitted.

Companies House issued a Restoration Notice on 16 December 2011, restoring the company to the register and stating that it was “deemed to have continued in existence as if it had not been dissolved or struck off the register”.

Coiste na n-larchimi

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether their Department approved and paid funding to Coista Na N-larchimi while that organisation was not filing accounts, as required under company legislation; and what steps have been taken, or will be taken, to recover such funding.

(AQW 21366/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Department of Finance and Personnel does not provide funding to Coiste na n-larchimi.

Coiste na n-larchimi

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether any funding has been offered to Coista Na N-larchimi since the discovery that it had not filed accounts and met its obligations under company legislation.

(AQW 21369/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Companies House issued a Restoration Notice to Coiste na n-larchimi on 16 December 2011, stating it would be restored to the register "as if it had not been dissolved or struck off the register".

Since that date, two PEACE III Letters of Offer which identify Coiste na n-larchimi as a project partner have been issued to the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland (CFNI). The Letters of Offer awarded £343,442 and £438,035 to CFNI for allocation to Coiste na n-larchimi.

Coiste na n-larchimi

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel who approved and paid funding to Coista Na N-larchimi at a time when it was not filing accounts and meeting its obligations under company legislation.

(AQW 21370/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Coiste na n-larchimi is a sub-partner of a wider PEACE III project led by the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland (CFNI). As the project lead partner, CFNI has responsibility for approving and paying project expenditure claims to sub-partners, including Coiste na n-larchimi.

Rates: Average Domestic

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what is the average household domestic rate in 2013/14; and how this compares to the average council tax and water charges in England, Scotland and Wales.

(AQW 21471/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Taking inflationary increase in the regional and domestic rates into account the average domestic rates bill in NI will be approximately £816 for 2013/14.

Information on average council tax bills for 2013/14 is not available, however, for 2012/13 the average council tax bills, per chargeable dwelling in the rest of the UK ranges are:

- England £1,201
- Scotland £985
- Wales £1,036

Separate domestic water and sewerage charges are also levied in the rest of the UK and the averages for 2012/13 ranged from £324 to £376 for England, Scotland and Wales.

Rates: Average Non-domestic

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what is the average non-domestic rate in 2013/14; and how this compares to the average rate in England, Scotland and Wales.

(AQW 21472/11-15)

Mr Wilson: A direct comparison between the average non domestic rate in Northern Ireland and the uniform business rate in England, Scotland and Wales is not an indication of relative differences in non domestic rate bills. The reason for this is due to the fact that Northern Ireland rates are based on a much earlier revaluation date of 2003 compared to the UK's 2010 revaluation. However, for your information the figures are as follows

Northern Ireland	58.034p*
England	47.1p
Wales	46.4p
Scotland	46.2p

* Based on an average district non-domestic rate of 25.014p

Garden Centres and Nurseries

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many people are employed in garden centres and nurseries and whether there have been any job losses incurred as a consequence of the recent extreme weather.

(AQW 21481/11-15)

Mr Wilson: It is not possible to provide information on whether there has been any job losses incurred as a consequence of the recent extreme weather. NISRA collect information on the number of jobs at a particular point in time from all relevant businesses registered on the Inter Departmental Business Register and therefore can only provide the net change between two points in time.

Table 1 overleaf provides information on the number of employee jobs for the years 2007, 2009 and 2011 as measured by the biennial Census of Employment.

Table 1 Number of Jobs in Garden Centres and Nurseries

Year	Number of Employee Jobs	Employee Job Change
2007	811	
2009	757	-54
2011	871	114

Garden Centres and Nurseries

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many people were employed in garden centres and nurseries, in each of the last 5 years.

(AQW 21482/11-15)

Mr Wilson: It is not possible to provide information on the total number of jobs in garden centres and nurseries in each of the last 5 years as the Census of Employment is carried out biennially.

However, table 1 below provides information on the number of employee jobs for the years available.

Table 1 Number of Jobs in Garden Centres and Nurseries

Year	Number of Employee Jobs	Employee Job Change
2007	811	
2009	757	-54
2011	871	114

Peace III: Projects Awaiting Funding

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to list the projects approved for funding, including those awaiting departmental approval or Letter of Offer, under Priority One Sub Measure One, 1.1 - Building Positive Relations at a Local Level; and to detail (i) the funding allocated; (ii) the funding committed; and (iii) the expenditure on each of the projects to date in Euros.

(AQW 21484/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The table overleaf details (i) funding allocated; (ii) funding committed; and (iii) expenditure to date for each project approved by Steering Committee under PEACE III Theme 1.1, Building Positive Relations at the Local Level.

Lead Partner	Project Name	Funding allocated (€)	Funding committed (€)	Expenditure to date (€)
Arts Council of Northern Ireland	Re-imaging Communities Programme	2,038,962.02	2,038,962.02	0.00
Belfast City Council	Belfast Peace & Reconciliation Action Plan	6,395,414.54	6,395,414.54	6,281,696.39
Belfast City Council	Belfast Local Action Plan - Phase II	6,011,023.55	6,011,023.55	815,526.12
Cavan County Council	Cavan Peace & Reconciliation Action Plan	2,834,729.22	2,834,729.22	2,834,729.11

Lead Partner	Project Name	Funding allocated (€)	Funding committed (€)	Expenditure to date (€)
Cavan County Council	County Cavan Peace Partnership Peace & Reconciliation phase 2 Action Plan	3,127,807.00	3,127,807.00	1,405,179.55
CFNI / Abhaile Aris (Home Again)	Conflict Transformation from the Bottom Up	960,838.63	960,838.63	960,568.50
CFNI / Abhaile Aris (Home Again)	Conflict Transformation from the Bottom Up II	300,418.94 *	300,418.94	0.00
CFNI / An Eochair (The Key Charter)	Prison to Peace II	35,234.15 *	35,234.15	0.00
CFNI / Cairde (Friends)	Conflict Transformation from the Bottom Up	186,313.02	186,313.02	189,515.92
CFNI / Cairde (Friends)	Conflict Transformation from the Bottom Up II	68,255.11 *	68,255.11	30,773.80
CFNI / Charter	Prison to Peace II	70,628.48 *	70,628.48	0.00
CFNI / Coiste (Committee)	Prison to Peace II	29,205.72 *	29,205.72	0.00
CFNI / Coiste na n'Iarchimi (The Ex-Prisoners Committee)	Conflict Transformation from the Bottom Up II	381,734.42 *	381,734.42	157,423.79
CFNI / Coiste na Niarchimi (The Ex-Prisoners Committee)	Conflict Transformation from the Bottom up	1,641,300.85	1,641,300.85	1,653,115.37
CFNI / Eiri na Greine (The Rising of the Sun)	Conflict Transformation from the Bottom Up	4,450.76	4,450.76	4,334.62
CFNI / Eiri na Greine (The Rising of the Sun)	Conflict Transformation from the Bottom Up II	73,815.57 *	73,815.57	0.00
CFNI / Epic Belfast	Prison to Peace II	53,960.08 *	53,960.08	0.00
CFNI / Epic North Ulster	Prison to Peace II	35,830.44 *	35,830.44	0.00
CFNI / Failte Abhaile (Welcome Home)	Conflict Transformation from the Bottom UP	1,046,554.23	1,046,554.23	1,045,523.39
CFNI / Failte Abhaile (Welcome Home)	Conflict Transformation From Bottom Up II	298,013.04 *	298,013.04	0.00
CFNI / Failte cluain Eois (Welcome Clones)	Conflict Transformation from the Bottom Up	659,323.77	659,323.77	655,673.32
CFNI / Failte Cluain Eois (Welcome Clones)	Conflict Transformation from Bottom Up II	235,392.33 *	235,392.33	0.00
CFNI / Iar Chimi Ard Mhaca Theas (South Armagh Ex-Prisoners)	Conflict Transformation from the Bottom Up	339,810.98	339,810.98	339,637.45

Lead Partner	Project Name	Funding allocated (€)	Funding committed (€)	Expenditure to date (€)
CFNI / Iar Chimi Ard Mhaca Theas (South Armagh Ex-Prisoners)	Conflict Transformation from the Bottom Up II	98,921.36 *	98,921.36	22,207.20
CFNI / Iar Chimi Doire Theas (South Derry Ex-Prisoners)	Conflict Transformation from the Bottom Up	168,799.42	168,799.42	169,447.19
CFNI / Iar Chimi Doire Theas (South Derry Ex-Prisoners)	Conflict Transformation from the Bottom Up II	75,161.81*	75,161.81	33,111.77
CFNI / La Nua (A New Day)	Conflict Transformation from the Bottom Up	568,553.85	568,553.85	568,178.94
CFNI / La Nua (A New Day)	Conflict Transformation from the Bottom Up II	156,369.41 *	156,369.41	0.00
CFNI / Lisburn PSP	Prison to Peace II	63,015.64 *	63,015.64	0.00
CFNI / North Belfast CD & Transition Group	Prison to Peace II	53,929.25 *	53,929.25	0.00
CFNI / North Down Community Association	Prison to Peace II	45,217.42 *	45,217.42	0.00
CFNI / Tar Abhaile (Come Home)	Conflict Transformation from the Bottom Up	398,490.55	398,490.55	402,439.24
CFNI / Tar Abhaile (Come Home)	Conflict Transformation from the Bottom Up II	145,558.02 *	145,558.02	69,957.35
CFNI / Tar Anall (Come Over)	Conflict Transformation from the Bottom up	459,036.75	459,036.75	466,798.37
CFNI / Tar Anall (Come Over)	Conflict Transformation from the Bottom Up II	341,817.91 *	341,817.91	191,232.42
CFNI / Tar Isteach (Come In)	Conflict Transformation from the Bottom Up	1,002,951.22	1,002,951.22	1,015,226.79
CFNI / Tar Isteach (Come In)	Conflict Transformation from the Bottom Up II	311,874.60*	311,874.60	168,988.48
CFNI / Teach na Failte (The Welcome House)	Prison to Peace II	79,166.58 *	79,166.58	0.00
CFNI / The Hubb	Prison to Peace II	36,834.58 *	36,834.58	0.00
CFNI / Tus Nua (A New Beginning)	Conflict Transformation from the Bottom Up	407,337.22	407,337.22	407,323.42
CFNI / Tus Nua (A New Beginning)	Conflict Transformation from the Bottom Up II	134,922.04 *	134,922.04	0.00
CFNI / West Belfast PIP	Prison to Peace II	66,067.42 *	66,067.42	0.00
Coleraine Borough Council	North East Peace and Reconciliation Action Plan	3,734,987.14	3,734,987.14	3,715,371.46
Coleraine Borough Council	North East PEACE III Partnership	5,023,781.82	5,023,781.82	1,911,358.01
Community Foundation for Northern Ireland	Conflict Transformation from the Bottom Up	407,847.10	407,847.10	404,612.12

Lead Partner	Project Name	Funding allocated (€)	Funding committed (€)	Expenditure to date (€)
Community Foundation for Northern Ireland	From Prison to Peace: Building on Experience	3,569,197.83	3,569,197.83	3,517,687.12
Community Foundation for Northern Ireland	South East Antrim - Resourcing from Conflict to Hope (SEARCH)	483,947.50	483,947.50	450,940.88
Community Foundation for Northern Ireland	Prison to Peace Partnership: A Paradigm for Peacebuilding	120,617.68	120,617.68	0.00
Community Foundation for Northern Ireland	Conflict Transformation from the Bottom Up 11	309,986.91*	309,986.91	59,567.36
Co-operation Ireland	Irish Peace Centres	2,999,099.00	2,999,099.00	2,988,443.84
Co-operation Ireland	Family and Community Engagement Programme - FACE	1,168,602.18	1,168,602.18	0.00
County Leitrim Peace III Partnership	County Leitrim Phase 2 Plan 2011 - 2013	2,060,683.00	2,060,683.00	393,055.52
County Louth Peace & Reconciliation Partnership	Peace 3 Phase 2 Extension Plan	2,408,198.00	2,408,198.00	538,873.21
Derry City Council	North West Peace and Reconciliation Action Plan	5,186,452.71	5,186,452.71	5,194,320.59
Derry City Council	NW Cluster Phase II Action Plan	5,535,725.21	5,535,725.21	1,054,410.04
Donegal County Council	Donegal Peace & Reconciliation Action Plan	4,637,285.70	4,637,285.70	4,637,285.70
Donegal County Council	Donegal Peace III Action Plan - Phase II	4,737,600.00	4,737,600.00	1,756,724.97
EDGEHILL THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE (of Queen's University Belfast)	Edgehill Theological College Reconciliation and Integration Partnership Project	342,758.42	342,758.42	339,430.20
Edgehill Theological College Reconciliation and Integration Partnership Project	Edgehill Theological College Reconciliation and Integration Partnership Project (ETC-RIPP)	462,371.35	462,371.35	119,176.80
Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland	Stepping Towards Reconciliation In Positive Engagement	1,058,476.46	1,058,476.46	298,006.63
Groundwork Northern Ireland	Reconciling Communities through Regeneration	1,156,600.97	1,156,600.97	1,175,829.08
Intercomm Ireland	Communities and Policing in Transition - Future Generations	404,447.69 *	404,447.69	0.00
Intercomm Ireland Ltd	Communities and Policing in Transition	1,260,855.83	1,260,855.83	1,265,566.37

Lead Partner	Project Name	Funding allocated (€)	Funding committed (€)	Expenditure to date (€)
Leitrim County Council	Leitrim peace & Reconciliation Action Plan	1,897,568.09	1,897,568.09	1,897,568.09
Lisburn City Council	Lisburn Peace & Reconciliation Local Action Plan	1,792,656.39	1,792,656.39	1,736,299.95
Lisburn/ Castlereagh Peace III Partnership	Lisburn/ Castlereagh Peace III Partnership Peace III Action Plan- Phase II	2,839,436.67	2,839,436.67	176,096.38
Louth County Council	Louth Peace & Reconciliation Action Plan	2,702,878.76	2,702,878.76	2,497,694.73
Magherafelt District Council	South West Peace and Reconciliation Action Plan	3,617,639.31	3,617,639.31	3,553,555.54
Magherafelt District Council	Phase 2 Bid for SW PEACE III Cluster	4,162,399.41	4,162,399.41	526,014.47
Monaghan CDB Peace III Partnership	Phase II Action Plan - Monaghan	3,476,206.00	3,476,206.00	731,957.28
Monaghan County Council	Monaghan Peace & Reconciliation Action Plan	3,315,000.00	3,315,000.00	3,286,106.36
Newry and Mourne District Council	Southern Peace & Reconciliation Local Action Plan	4,947,688.46	4,947,688.46	4,923,618.52
Newry and Mourne District Council	Southern Peace III Strategy	5,857,958.96	5,857,958.96	1,847,409.85
Newtownabbey Borough Council	Newtownabbey Peace & Reconciliation Local Action Plan	2,029,930.79	2,029,930.79	1,969,920.08
Newtownabbey Borough Council	CAN Peace III Partnership Phase 2 2011-2013	2,972,609.47	2,972,609.47	702,908.19
North Down Borough Council	Phase II Peace III Action Plan for the North Down, Ards and Down Cluster	3,249,128.61	3,249,128.61	666,706.84
North Down District Council	North Down, Ards, Down Peace & Reconciliation Action Plan	2,492,571.85	2,492,571.85	2,492,177.00
Presbyterian Church in Ireland	Inter-Church Peace Programme - ICPP	1,558,073.70	1,558,073.70	0.00
Rural Community Network	The Rural Enabler	2,630,804.83	2,630,804.83	2,188,750.63
SELB (YESIP)	Children and Young People Building Positive Relations	3,769,567.54	3,769,567.54	3,512,964.83
Sligo County Council	Sligo Peace & Reconciliation Action Plan	1,871,867.94	1,871,867.94	1,871,867.94
Sligo County Council on behalf of Sligo Peace & Reconciliation Partnership Committee	Phase 2 Action Plan	2,155,977.00	2,155,977.00	231,096.56
TWN	Positive Relations Project	3,198,432.96	3,198,432.96	3,091,785.27

Lead Partner	Project Name	Funding allocated (€)	Funding committed (€)	Expenditure to date (€)
TWN	Extending Positive Relations	3,423,321.90	3,423,321.90	2,608,081.10

* The allocations to these projects were reduced due to the level of funds available in Theme 1.1. Should sufficient funds become available, increased Letters of Offer will be issued.

Peace III: Projects Awaiting Departmental Approval

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to list the projects approved for funding, including those awaiting departmental approval or Letter of Offer, under Priority One Sub Measure Two, 1.2 - Acknowledging the past; and to detail (i) the funding allocated; (ii) the funding committed; and (iii) the expenditure on each of the projects to date in Euros.

(AQW 21486/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The table overleaf details (i) funding allocated; (ii) funding committed; and (iii) expenditure to date for each project approved by Steering Committee under PEACE III Theme 1.2, Acknowledging and Dealing with the Past.

Lead Partner	Project Name	Funding allocated (€)	Funding committed (€)	Expenditure to date (€)
An Teach Bán: Centre for Peace Building	Remember and Change	529,324.20	529,324.20	158,556.95
Ashton Community Trust	Bridge Of Hope	455,026.41	455,026.41	460,039.31
Ashton Community Trust	Exploring the Past Together for a Better Future	476,378.17	476,378.17	27,394.77
Belfast Interface Project	Enabling Our Future	452,390.25	452,390.25	31,508.46
Belfast Unemployed Resource Centre	Citizenship and Fellowship Education [CAFE]	434,887.90	434,887.90	427,801.02
Best Cellars Music Collective	Peace Radio	179,532.49	179,532.49	177,179.53
BURC	DISC II	892,961.18	892,961.18	232,595.35
C.A.L.M.S	Gateways to Health	297,989.36	297,989.36	292,694.38
Calipo Theatre Co	Sharp Focus - Crossing the Divide	620,261.00	620,261.00	13,486.43
Cavan Family Resource Centre	Buandóchas (Eternal Hope) (B) Counselling	287,301.90	287,301.90	287,301.90
Communities Connect - Dundalk Institute of Technology	Deepening the peace, Widening the web - working title	565,837.87	565,837.87	565,837.87
Community Dialogue	Securing Our Future: 3 Steps to Dialogue	347,271.83	347,271.83	345,472.18
Community Workers Co-operative - Donegal Network	Harnessing Equality for Lasting Peace (HELP) Project	585,587.21	585,587.21	585,587.21
Community Workers Co-operative - Donegal Network	Collective Action for Positive Peace (CAPP) Project	486,335.00	486,335.00	112,366.63
Conflict trauma Resource centre	Beyond Conflict	471,582.71	471,582.71	346,057.56
Corpus Christi Services	Healing The Troubled Past	218,843.01	218,843.01	213,947.64
Creggan Neighbourhood Partnership	GOAL -	405,352.46	405,352.46	402,752.29
Crossfire Trust	restoring hope	319,835.48	319,835.48	320,754.32
Cunamh (Help)	Peace In Mind/Suaimhneas Intinne	325,098.59	325,098.59	321,954.25
Curriculum Development Unit	Education for Reconciliation	567,915.86	567,915.86	567,915.86

Lead Partner	Project Name	Funding allocated (€)	Funding committed (€)	Expenditure to date (€)
Diversity Challenges	The Green and Blue Across the Thin Line	256,001.20	256,001.20	0.00
Diversity Challenges Ltd	'The Way We Were' - Uncovering our shared past.	112,554.25	112,554.25	110,245.52
Expac	Future Resolutions	378,525.00	378,525.00	117,359.88
Expac Ltd	Conflicts of Interest	509,369.33	509,369.33	509,369.33
Falls Community Council	Belfast Conflict Resolution Consortium	965,964.69	965,964.69	962,545.51
Falls Community Council	Pieces of the Past	353,844.27	353,844.27	124,040.23
Falls Community Council	Belfast Conflict Resolution Consortium	975,265.50	975,265.50	355,839.10
Falls Women's Centre	Training & Employment Project	180,920.86	180,920.86	177,453.52
Families Acting for Innocent Relatives	SACRED - Support and Active Carer Respite for Excluded Dependents	177,086.71	177,086.71	146,610.80
Families Acting for Innocent Relatives	Conflict Archive Project And Border Lands Experience (CAPABLE)	216,828.55	216,828.55	152,978.26
Forthspring Inter Community Group	Five Decades	155,188.32	155,188.32	47,281.81
Forward Learning	Knowing Me Knowing You - A historical and cultural adventure!	169,384.90	169,384.90	129,812.52
Gaslight Media Trust	Epilogues Facilitating Understanding of the Other	272,658.47	272,658.47	271,568.00
Gaslight Media Trust	'The Arc: Acknowledging the Past, Negotiating the Present & Facing the Future'	462,607.05	462,607.05	79,856.07
Healing Through Remembering	Whatever You Say Say Something	941,777.21	941,777.21	948,607.08
Healing Through Remembering	Voyager	634,357.44	634,357.44	159,130.60
Holy Trinity Centre	Out Of Hours Community Counselling Service	197,121.14	197,121.14	195,969.07
INCORE	Journeys Out	488,905.18	488,905.18	488,485.11
Inishowen Development Partnership	YOUTH 52 - Securing the Future	637,923.29	637,923.29	637,923.29
Inishowen Development Partnership	Engage Youth	565,565.27	565,565.27	45,573.28
Institute for Counselling & Personal Development	RENEW-Community Challenge and change for peace & reconciliation	288,419.87	288,419.87	288,569.41
Ionad Forbartha Gnó Teo. t/a WESTBIC (Business Development Centre Ltd.)	Glórtha Aduaidh (Northern Voices)	653,513.00	653,513.00	68,146.65
Irish Football Association	Football For All Project	601,691.31	601,691.31	594,403.82
Irish Football Association	Football For All - 2012-2015 - Looking Back to Move Forward	644,135.72	644,135.72	141,205.35

Lead Partner	Project Name	Funding allocated (€)	Funding committed (€)	Expenditure to date (€)
Junior Achievement Ireland	Our World	594,148.00	594,148.00	267,611.23
Justice for Innocent Victims of Terrorism	Pathways to Justice	441,766.57	441,766.57	43,392.18
Latton Social Services and Development Ltd	Border Roads to Memories and Reconciliation	487,383.86	487,383.86	25,687.01
Monaghan Education Centre	Embracing Shared Communities	410,334.00	410,334.00	97,217.12
New Life Counselling	Victims and Survivors Counselling Project	244,277.68	244,277.68	242,506.83
North West Play Resource Centre	Theatre of Witness	552,488.35	552,488.35	113,196.18
North West Play Resource Centre (T/A The Playhouse)	Theatre of Witness	377,772.30	377,772.30	374,846.43
Northern Ireland Phoenix Organisation (NIPO)	Northern Ireland Phoenix Project	1,203,747.12	1,203,747.12	203,974.99
Northern Ireland Rural Development Council (RDC)	"Media Initiative for Rural Children Cross Borders" (Respecting Difference Programme)	498,192.70	498,192.70	10,756.22
Northern Ireland Trade Union Education and Social Centre	DISC- Development for Inclusion and Sustainable Communities	398,333.61	398,333.61	348,804.81
Pat Finucane Centre	Legacy Project	438,018.08	438,018.08	433,944.64
Peace and Reconciliation group	Dealing with Past, Shaping the Future (D.P.S.F.)	214,591.89	214,591.89	213,609.91
Queen Mary University of London	The Irish Peace Process: Layers of Recollection and Meaning	1,030,563.18	1,030,563.18	578,268.72
R.A.F.T. - Restorative Action Following the Troubles	Transcending Trauma	518,655.16	518,655.16	511,925.13
Relatives for Justice	Participative Transitional Support	634,940.25	634,940.25	632,474.17
Relatives for Justice	Transitional Legacies	290,088.45	290,088.45	0.00
SAVER/NAVER	Practical steps towards reconciliation	236,238.75	236,238.75	190,451.48
Seaview Enterprises Ltd	'Mes Que Un Club'	504,604.28	504,604.28	127,476.93
Smashing Times Theatre Company	The Memory Project	522,934.00	522,934.00	0.00
South Armagh Rural Women's Network	Behind the Masks	370,398.28	370,398.28	358,693.69
South East Fermanagh Foundation	The Phoenix Project	1,298,478.72	1,298,478.72	1,273,424.39
Survivors of Trauma	A Future Together	312,997.58	312,997.58	311,267.95
TARA CENTRE	Reconciliation: Individuals and Communities Acknowledging and Dealing with the Past	508,299.40	508,299.40	506,884.91
Taughmonagh community forum	Shared Futures	401,809.03	401,809.03	401,809.03

Lead Partner	Project Name	Funding allocated (€)	Funding committed (€)	Expenditure to date (€)
Taughmonagh community forum limited	Legacy	290,584.87	290,584.87	31,060.57
Teach Oscail (Open House)	Tullacmongan/Cavanaleck Cross Border Youth Project	391,153.57	391,153.57	391,153.57
The Bytes Project	Foundation for Reconciliation	112,391.69	112,391.69	113,899.10
The Corrymeela Community	Corrymeela Facing the Future with NICRAS	190,418.85	190,418.85	190,374.50
The Ely Centre	Project Elohim	328,221.35	328,221.35	328,541.15
The Pat Finucane Centre Ltd	Recovery of Living Memory Archive	751,735.72	751,735.72	276,318.39
The Peace Factory	P.A.Z. Peace Action Zone	346,740.63	346,740.63	343,409.66
Towards Understanding and Healing	Healing through Storytelling and Dialogue	268,267.61	268,267.61	268,291.82
Towards Understanding and Healing	Developing and Sustaining Storytelling and Dialogue Processes	416,970.57	416,970.57	53,106.87
Trademark	Consolidating the peace	299,003.27	299,003.27	298,350.41
Trauma Recovery Network	Connecting Head and Heart	260,567.77	260,567.77	245,949.53
Tyrone Donegal Partnership	Border Lives	496,532.70	496,532.70	46,449.94
Ulster Peoples College	THE PEOPLES HISTORY INITIATIVE	247,850.04	247,850.04	245,777.70
VERBAL ARTS CENTRE	Crows on the Wire	457,153.91	457,153.91	21,655.50
Victims and Survivors Trust	3 Tiers Project - Creating pathways for inclusion through active participation	238,107.58	238,107.58	240,220.10
WAVE Trauma Centre	WAVE- The Trauma Training Learning Pathway	772,705.01	772,705.01	766,620.04
WAVE TRAUMA CENTRE	Back to the Future - Building Peace Programme	252,054.92	252,054.92	247,910.02
WAVE Trauma Centre	Breaking the Cycle of the Troubles Legacy for our future Generations	369,107.83	369,107.83	0.00
WAVE Trauma Centre	Learning from the Past to educate our Future	641,935.76	641,935.76	103,196.27
Youth Initiatives	Crosslinks Culture Connections (CLCC or Crosslinks)	382,685.54	382,685.54	373,600.87
YOUTH INITIATIVES	Crosslinks Legacy Project	456,817.98	456,817.98	125,459.00
Youth Link: NI	Community Capacity Building Strategies	489,594.38	489,594.38	487,706.76
Youth Link: NI	Building Positive Sustainable and Integrated Communities	497,163.85	497,163.85	160,929.00
YouthAction NI	Peace Dividend For Young People	577,653.73	577,653.73	574,463.50
YouthAction Northern Ireland	Reconciling communities - champions for change	494,048.54	494,048.54	69,638.52
INCORE	Accounts of the Conflict in Northern Ireland	1,349,036.42	0.00	0.00

Lead Partner	Project Name	Funding allocated (€)	Funding committed (€)	Expenditure to date (€)
National Museums Northern Ireland	Facing the Past	2,227,990.04	0.00	0.00

Peace III: Projects Approved for Funding

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to list the projects approved for funding, including those awaiting departmental approval or Letter of Offer, under Priority Two Sub Measure One, 2.1 - Shared and Open Spaces; and to detail (i) the funding allocated; (ii) the funding committed; and (iii) the expenditure on each of the projects to date in Euros.

(AQW 21488/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The table overleaf details (i) funding allocated; (ii) funding committed; and (iii) expenditure to date for each project approved by Steering Committee under PEACE III Theme 2.1, Creating Shared Public Spaces.

Lead Partner	Project Name	Funding allocated (€)	Funding committed (€)	Expenditure to date (€)
Apex Housing Association	The Glen Community Complex (Bacon Factory) Redevelopment	4,182,767.32	4,182,767.32	441,496.95
Belfast City Council	Skatepark	471,017.25	471,017.25	412,089.41
Cavan County Council	Castlesanderson - All Ireland Scouting/Jamboree Centre	3,675,345.00	3,675,345.00	3,645,642.82
Craigavon Borough Council	Shared Process and Community Engagment (SPACE)	6,469,880.24	6,469,880.24	0.00
Department for Social Development	Restoration of the SS Nomadic	2,815,798.91	2,815,798.91	2,443,460.53
Donegal County Council	Pettigo / Tullyhommon - The Termon Project	8,006,841.00	8,006,841.00	922,617.34
Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland	Orange Interpretive and Educational Resource	4,260,557.94	4,260,557.94	0.00
Groundwork Northern Ireland	Sharing Our Space	3,767,805.47	3,767,805.47	760,783.98
Ilex URC Ltd	River Foyle Foot and Cycle Bridge	16,427,953.88	16,427,953.88	14,333,226.94
Inner City Trust	City Centre Garden of Reflection	2,519,763.97	2,519,763.97	0.00
Monaghan County Council	Clones Erne East Sports Partnership Project	7,803,451.00	7,803,451.00	1,059,544.81
Omagh District Council	OASIS - Omagh Accessible Shared Inclusive Space	5,145,185.21	5,145,185.21	123,895.46
Shankill Womens Centre	Small Wonders Childcare II	829,176.47	829,176.47	556,985.10
Skainos Ltd	The Skainos Project	7,127,763.31	7,127,763.31	7,148,166.42
The Trustees of the Apprentice Boys Memorial Hall	Heroes of the Great Siege Shared History & Visitor Centre	2,640,031.30	2,640,031.30	0.00
Belfast City Council	The Girdwood Community Hub	11,353,688.71	0.00	0.00
Donegal County Council	Reconciliation Through The Riverine	6,067,248.00	0.00	0.00

Peace III: Projects Approved

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to list the projects approved for funding, including those awaiting departmental approval or Letter of Offer, under Priority Two Sub Measure Two, 2.2 - Key Institutional Capacities are

developed for a shared society; and to detail (i) the funding allocated; (ii) the funding committed; and (iii) the expenditure on each of the projects to date in Euros.

(AQW 21490/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The table overleaf details (i) funding allocated; (ii) funding committed; and (iii) expenditure to date for each project approved by Steering Committee under PEACE III Theme 2.2, Key Institutional Capacities are Developed for a Shared Society.

Lead Partner	Project Name	Funding allocated (€)	Funding committed (€)	Expenditure to date (€)
Ashton Community Trust	Fab Lab	1,195,622.92	1,195,622.92	498,101.45
Belfast City Council	Growing a Shared City	365,737.23	365,737.23	319,867.25
Community Foundation for Northern Ireland	Gender and Peacebuilding-Developing a Framework of Understanding	457,480.71	457,480.71	57,433.12
Early Years - the organisation for young children	International Early Childhood Network on Peace Building and Reconciliation	687,027.01	687,027.01	673,588.45
Early Years the organisation for Young Children	Respecting Difference in the Education Sector	743,167.19	743,167.19	238,884.38
Families Acting for Innocent Relatives	EINSTEIN	28,778.00	28,778.00	0.00
Forward Learning Ltd	The Thin End of the Wedge	504,013.84	504,013.84	264,993.36
Groundwork NI	Democratising Governance in Transition	530,027.82	530,027.82	460,169.41
Institute of Spatial & Environmental Planning, Queen's University Belfast	Planning for Spatial Reconciliation	574,106.32	574,106.32	160,243.25
Irish Congress of Trade Unions	Trade Unions & Post Conflict Society	284,593.45	284,593.45	103,788.12
Maze / Long Kesh Development Corporation	Peace building and Conflict Resolution Centre	21,423,703.03	21,423,703.03	454,920.92
Mediation Northern Ireland	The Most Project – International Dialogue for Civic Leadership	816,845.43	816,845.43	689,321.45
NICVA(Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action)	Vital Links	555,899.79	555,899.79	453,414.95
North West Play Resource Centre	ICAN	521,481.71	521,481.71	388,961.36
Northern Ireland Prison Service	Challenging Hate Crime	1,035,432.30	1,035,432.30	916,354.18
Northern Ireland Rural Development Council (RDC)	Bric – Building Relationships in Communities	4,193,256.87	4,193,256.87	1,650,457.40
Sligo Vocational and Education Committee	Developing a Shared Society Through Youth Sport	693,000.00	693,000.00	692,342.77
The Nerve Centre	Teaching Divided Histories	559,951.39	559,951.39	122,876.42

Garden Centres and Nurseries

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what is the total rateable valuation of garden centres and nurseries.
(AQW 21497/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The total Net Annual Value (NAV) of properties recorded in the current Valuation List under garden centre and nurseries classification is £1,388,730.

Irish Bank Resolution Corporation Ltd

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what discussions he has had with the Minister of Finance in Dublin about the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation Ltd honouring the agreed severance terms for its 31 employees here and implementing a business plan for the liquidation process.

(AQW 21550/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I have not yet had any discussions with the Irish Finance Minister on this matter however I will be meeting him in the near future to discuss a range of ongoing banking issues. I have advised Minister Noonan that I wish to discuss the impact Irish bank restructuring was having on Northern Ireland operations, including the liquidation of the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation and the position of Northern Ireland based employees in the IBRC.

Translation Services: DFP Spend

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much his Department spent on translation services for visiting foreign nationals in each of the last five years.

(AQW 21560/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Expenditure on translation services by my Department in each of the last five years is provided in the following table. It is not possible to disaggregate the costs to distinguish whether the services provided were to visiting foreign nationals, tourists or UK residents.

Financial Year	Total Expenditure
2008/09	Nil
2009/10	£735
2010/11	£731
2011/12	£413
2012/13	£637

Rating of Empty Domestic Properties

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what impact the the introduction of rating on empty domestic properties has had on the number of empty properties.

(AQW 21675/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Since the introduction of the Rating of Empty Homes policy on 1st October 2011 the rate liability for vacant domestic properties has been assessed at 100%. There is currently no requirement for ratepayers to inform Land & Property Services that their property is vacant nor is there any financial advantage to doing so. As such, current information on the number of empty domestic properties may not be complete. Bearing this in mind, at the year-end before the introduction of Rating of Empty Homes (31st March 2011) a total of 50,494 or 6.6% of domestic properties were recorded as being vacant. The most recent year-end information available (31st March 2013) indicates that a total of 33,585 or 4.4% of domestic properties are recorded as being vacant. This is a 33.5% reduction in the recorded number of vacant domestic properties over this two year period.

National Asset Management Agency

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he has held any discussions recently with the relevant bodies regarding the position of properties in Northern Ireland which come under the stewardship of the National Asset Management Agency in the Irish Republic.

(AQW 21678/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I regularly meet with senior officials from NAMA including the Chairman, Frank Daly, and members of the Agency's Northern Ireland Advisory Committee. Indeed, I recently met with Mr Daly and a number of his colleagues on 22 April 2013 when we discussed a broad range of issues in relation to NAMA's activities in Northern Ireland.

Regional Rate

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what is the total amount that will be raised from households in this financial year through the regional rate; and how much of this amount is notionally in respect of charges for water and sewerage.

(AQW 21694/11-15)

Mr Wilson: My Department has estimated that for 2013/14 the revenue attributable to the domestic aspect of the regional rate could be up to £310 million, although the exact figure will not be known until outturn is settled at the end of the financial year.

As you may be aware separate water charges are not currently in place and the Executive has taken the decision to defer introduction for the life of current Assembly. Decisions have not been made therefore, on the way in which any such charges would be calculated and collected and it is not possible to give a notional cost to households.

Rates are however an unhypothecated tax, meaning that it is not directly ring fenced to the provision or consumption of particular services. Revenue from rates funds a wide range of public services including health, education, economic development, water, main roads and council functions.

Special EU Programmes Body

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel why the Special EU Programmes Body website is not up to date in publishing Steering Committee minutes and Quarterly Progress reports for PEACE III and Interreg funding and PEACE III monitoring documentation.

(AQW 21709/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) is currently undertaking a review of its publication scheme and website. The information referred to is included in that review and will be made available, as per the publication scheme, on the website when completed.

Independent of this review, SEUPB makes all Programme Steering Committee and Monitoring Committee documentation available upon request.

Peace III: Capital Build Projects

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what are the funding consequences if approved capital build projects under Peace III are not completed by 31 December 2015.

(AQW 21710/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Each project has an individual Letter of Offer specifying its end date. At that end date, funding from the programme—both European Regional Development Fund and national match—concludes. The final date for eligibility of expenditure within the programme is 31 December 2015.

At the time of submission of programme closure documents, the Member States will consider on a case-by-case basis any projects that remain incomplete, with a view to including project expenditure in the programme's final statement of expenditure should adequate justification exist.

Such inclusion would be conditional on the financial impact of the project justifying special treatment—the total cost of a project must be greater than €5 million, and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) contribution must represent no more than 10 per cent of the total programme allocation.

In order for the EU expenditure to remain eligible, projects must complete within two years of the programme closure via an alternative source of funding.

Should any project remain incomplete after this point, the Member States must reimburse the ERDF contribution.

Emigration from County Antrim

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many people in each District Council area in County Antrim have emigrated in search of employment over the last five years, broken down by age; and to which countries these people have emigrated.

(AQW 21767/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The tables overleaf show the estimates of out-migration from Northern Ireland to (a) Great Britain and (b) to all other countries for the years (i) mid-2006 to mid-2007, (ii) mid-2007 to mid-2008, (iii) mid-2008 to mid-2009, (iv) mid-2009 to mid-2010, and (v) mid-2010 to mid-2011. It is only possible to distinguish between out-migration to Great Britain and out-migration to all other countries. A summary table (vi) shows the total estimate of out-migration in each year for the period mid-2006 to mid-2011.

The tables are split into the eleven Local Government Districts (Antrim, Ballymena, Ballymoney, Belfast, Carrickfergus, Coleraine, Craigavon, Larne, Lisburn, Moyle and Newtownabbey) which cover County Antrim and is broken down by broad age bands. There are no estimates made of the reason for out-migration.

(i) Out Migration Estimates Mid 2006-Mid 2007

District	(a) Out Migration to Great Britain			
	Age			
	0-15	16-39	40-64	65+
Antrim	35	193	30	7
Ballymena	46	205	0	8
Ballymoney	12	95	17	0
Belfast	256	1,447	363	60
Carrickfergus	26	197	28	14
Coleraine	29	262	52	10
Craigavon	12	265	25	15
Larne	24	190	48	7
Lisburn	216	650	90	21
Moyle	14	86	10	0
Newtownabbey	50	234	23	12
NI	1,454	8,340	1,093	241

(b) Out Migration to all other countries			
Age			
0-15	16-39	40-64	65+
46	233	71	6
50	350	133	8
17	57	16	8
201	2,510	109	20
24	64	46	2
75	480	59	12
106	366	82	15
19	34	20	0
130	311	85	17
4	40	12	7
82	584	118	15
1,571	7,769	1,678	314

(ii) Out Migration Estimates Mid 2007-Mid 2008

District	(a) Out Migration to Great Britain			
	Age			
	0-15	16-39	40-64	65+
Antrim	26	212	25	6
Ballymena	27	252	15	0
Ballymoney	8	107	16	3
Belfast	173	1,383	298	69
Carrickfergus	33	215	27	3
Coleraine	16	277	33	10
Craigavon	49	301	32	7
Larne	28	141	16	4
Lisburn	184	625	74	12
Moyle	8	101	7	1
Newtownabbey	44	267	41	6
NI	1,240	8,284	963	215

(b) Out Migration to all other countries			
Age			
0-15	16-39	40-64	65+
47	205	36	4
37	221	69	3
10	37	12	0
394	2,655	292	45
20	72	27	9
31	404	64	6
66	338	82	6
24	43	27	2
92	291	79	14
10	31	3	6
60	469	46	16
1,620	7,579	1,596	244

(iii) Out Migration Estimates Mid 2008-Mid 2009

District	(a) Out Migration to Great Britain			
	Age			
	0-15	16-39	40-64	65+
Antrim	26	206	34	2
Ballymena	25	249	23	4
Ballymoney	29	142	22	2
Belfast	163	1,344	267	35
Carrickfergus	24	205	27	3
Coleraine	23	286	39	9
Craigavon	44	273	23	7
Larne	20	151	22	2
Lisburn	128	603	76	9
Moyle	10	96	7	7
Newtownabbey	21	267	18	2
NI	934	8,144	956	164

(b) Out Migration to all other countries			
Age			
0-15	16-39	40-64	65+
53	210	46	7
26	239	66	6
13	26	3	0
402	2,652	382	74
26	74	29	6
29	435	56	10
95	320	96	8
14	27	6	0
142	267	103	15
9	28	6	5
76	485	59	6
1,772	7,609	1,598	250

(iv) Out Migration Estimates Mid 2009-Mid 2010

District	(a) Out Migration to Great Britain			
	Age			
	0-15	16-39	40-64	65+
Antrim	46	233	36	2
Ballymena	27	242	43	9
Ballymoney	12	147	13	3
Belfast	210	1,235	231	43
Carrickfergus	19	185	30	8
Coleraine	38	360	38	10
Craigavon	42	345	34	5
Larne	14	176	24	8
Lisburn	161	618	87	7
Moyle	16	104	17	3
Newtownabbey	49	313	48	3
NI	1,213	8,704	1,156	206

(b) Out Migration to all other countries			
Age			
0-15	16-39	40-64	65+
47	221	38	1
40	220	63	1
11	30	10	1
360	3,016	391	50
9	52	19	2
38	561	50	8
96	332	62	9
1	22	7	5
134	278	95	11
5	24	6	5
63	592	81	0
1,525	7,918	1,601	218

(v) Out Migration Estimates Mid 2010-Mid 2011

District	(a) Out Migration to Great Britain			
	Age			
	0-15	16-39	40-64	65+
Antrim	37	231	38	9
Ballymena	31	265	40	9
Ballymoney	6	115	16	6
Belfast	200	1,102	228	60
Carrickfergus	16	201	42	8
Coleraine	42	353	29	7
Craigavon	45	360	50	8
Larne	25	176	25	6
Lisburn	166	604	64	9
Moyle	15	118	17	5
Newtownabbey	44	303	40	4
NI	1,189	8,580	1,124	228

	(b) Out Migration to all other countries			
	Age			
	0-15	16-39	40-64	65+
	35	231	55	4
	39	260	53	5
	3	27	5	0
	414	4,317	488	93
	21	85	34	4
	41	511	49	8
	107	350	87	12
	10	23	17	3
	167	385	100	11
	4	37	5	3
	55	630	51	12
	1,813	9,869	1,860	282

(vi) Out Migration, 2006-7 to 2010-11, all ages, all countries

District	2006-7	2007-8	2008-9	2009-10	2010-11
Antrim	621	561	584	624	640
Ballymena	800	624	638	645	702
Ballymoney	222	193	237	227	178
Belfast	4,966	5,309	5,319	5,536	6,902
Carrickfergus	401	406	394	324	411
Coleraine	979	841	887	1,103	1,040
Craigavon	886	881	866	925	1,019
Larne	342	285	242	257	285
Lisburn	1,520	1,371	1,343	1,391	1,506
Moyle	173	167	168	180	204
Newtownabbey	1,118	949	934	1,149	1,139
NI	22,460	21,741	21,427	22,541	24,945

National Asset Management Agency: Ramada Hotel, Portrush

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, following the decision by National Assets Management Agency (NAMA) to place the Ramada Hotel in Portrush into administration, what immediate potential consequences NAMA's action could have, not just in the Causeway Coast, but throughout the property market given its extensive portfolio, and to outline what urgent action he will take to address such consequences
(AQW 21772/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I understand the concerns you have raised about the placing into administration of the Ramada Hotel in Portrush. Clearly this is a difficult time for all involved including the staff and those in the local business community with links to the hotel. While it wouldn't be appropriate for me to comment on the specifics of this particular case, it is my hope that the administrator will find a way to keep the business going and to protect the economic activity that is associated with that.

NAMA has acquired a significant amount of loans and assets in Northern Ireland and it is an added factor we have to deal with. However, it is important to also recognise that the creation of NAMA was a necessary step to restore liquidity and confidence in the Irish financial system. While I was initially concerned about the impact it would have locally, NAMA has kept to its commitments on avoiding a 'firesale' locally. Indeed I believe NAMA is playing a positive role in Northern Ireland in making finance available to debtors seeking to develop assets and for potential buyers of commercial property.

I will be meeting with the NAMA Chairman next week when I will be discussing with him the broad range of issues around the Agency's activities in Northern Ireland.

Civil Service Equal Pay Settlement

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline his position on Northern Ireland Office staff who were informed that they were Department of Finance and Personnel employees at the time of joining the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) but who were subsequently left out of the 2009 Equal Pay settlement on the grounds that they did not qualify as NICS staff.

(AQW 21778/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Staff seconded to the NIO were lawfully excluded from the terms of the NICS equal pay settlement because the NIO, not the NICS, was responsible for determining their pay. The position in terms of eligibility has been clear from the outset of the equal pay settlement and this has now been upheld in the County Court, which found that the settlement applied only to periods of service in the 11 NICS departments and did not apply to bodies such as the NIO, who had lawfully received delegation for pay matters, which was still in effect during the relevant time period.

Net Fiscal Balance Report

Ms Fearon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether there are any distinctions between the methodology employed by his officials to identify the proportion of other taxes and royalties in the Net Fiscal Balance Report published in November 2012 and the new Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland methodology used in the Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland report published in 2012.

(AQW 21794/11-15)

Mr Wilson: As stated in the Net Fiscal Balance report, the methodology applied is generally consistent with that designed to produce the Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland (GERS) report, however, there are some instances where there are minor technical variations in how certain specific elements of the individual estimates are derived.

My previous response to AQW 18531/11-15 outlined the methodology used to estimate NI's share of UK other taxes and royalties.

There is a minor technical difference with respect to the renewable energy obligations element of the overall other taxes and royalties revenue estimate, where my department's report apportions this on the basis of NI's share of UK electricity consumption. GERS uses figures provided directly by ONS.

I would re-iterate that the purpose of the Net Fiscal Balance Report is to provide an overview of public sector finances in Northern Ireland. It is not intended to provide an accurate estimate of individual expenditure or revenue items – many of these have been estimated, in the absence of actual regional data, on the basis of high level assumptions and apportionment factors. Rather the report provides an overall assessment of Northern Ireland's aggregate fiscal position, and as such, the report indicates that individual estimates should be interpreted with caution. At an aggregate level the minor technical variations referred to above are not considered to have any material bearing on the Northern Ireland's net fiscal balance position.

Net Fiscal Balance Report: Interest and Dividends

Ms Fearon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether there are any distinctions between the methodology employed by his officials to identify the proportion of interest and dividends in the Net Fiscal Balance Report published in November 2012 and the new Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland methodology used in the Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland report published in 2012.

(AQW 21795/11-15)

Mr Wilson: As stated in the Net Fiscal Balance report, the methodology applied is generally consistent with that designed to produce the Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland (GERS) report, however, there are some instances where there are minor technical variations in how certain specific elements of the individual estimates are derived.

My previous response to AQW 18845/11-15 outlined the methodology used to estimate NI's share of UK interest and dividend revenue.

There is a minor technical difference with respect to the central government and local government elements of the overall interest and dividend revenue estimate, where my department's report apportions these on the basis of NI's share of UK public sector GVA. GERS apportions central and local government interest and dividends based on Scotland's share of UK population.

I would re-iterate that the purpose of the Net Fiscal Balance Report is to provide an overview of public sector finances in Northern Ireland. It is not intended to provide an accurate estimate of individual expenditure or revenue items – many of these have been estimated, in the absence of actual regional data, on the basis of high level assumptions and apportionment factors. Rather the report provides an overall assessment of Northern Ireland's aggregate fiscal position, and as such, the report indicates that individual estimates should be interpreted with caution. At an aggregate level the minor technical variations referred to above are not considered to have any material bearing on the Northern Ireland's net fiscal balance position.

Net Fiscal Balance Report: Gross Operating Surplus and Rent

Ms Fearon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether there are any distinctions between the methodology employed by his officials to identify the proportion of gross operating surplus and rent and other current transfers in the Net Fiscal Balance Report published in November 2012 and the new Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland methodology used in the Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland report published in 2012.

(AQW 21796/11-15)

Mr Wilson: As stated in the Net Fiscal Balance report, the methodology applied is generally consistent with that designed to produce the Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland (GERS) report, however, there are some instances where there are minor technical variations in how certain specific elements of the individual estimates are derived.

My previous response to AQW 18847/11-15 outlined the methodology used to estimate NI's share of UK gross operating surplus, while my response to AQW 18848/11-15 outlined the methodology used to estimate NI's share of UK rent and other current transfers – which are all apportioned according to NI's share of UK public sector GVA.

GERS takes a more disaggregated approach and apportions the various components of gross operating surplus and rent and other current transfers individually using a variety of other methods. These include on the basis of Scotland's share of overall UK GVA, Non-Market Capital Consumption and land area. These are detailed in full in its methodology note, which is available on the Scottish Government website.

I would re-iterate that the purpose of the Net Fiscal Balance Report is to provide an overview of public sector finances in Northern Ireland. It is not intended to provide an accurate estimate of individual expenditure or revenue items – many of these have been estimated, in the absence of actual regional data, on the basis of high level assumptions and apportionment factors. Rather the report provides an overall assessment of Northern Ireland's aggregate fiscal position, and as such, the report indicates that individual estimates should be interpreted with caution. At an aggregate level the minor technical variations referred to above are not considered to have any material bearing on the Northern Ireland's net fiscal balance position.

Barnett Formula

Ms Fearon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what consideration he has given to approaching the Treasury with a view to reviewing the Barnett formula.

(AQW 21797/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Statement of Funding Policy which sets out the spending framework for all Devolved Administrations is reviewed concurrently with the UK Government's Spending Reviews. The Chief Secretary to the Treasury has therefore written to the Devolved Administrations clarifying his intention not to review the Statement of Funding Policy for the 2015-16 single year Spending Round in June. This allows time for it to be comprehensively reviewed at the next formal Spending Review in two years time.

It will be for the Finance Minister, acting on behalf of the Executive to negotiate any changes to the Statement of Funding Policy at that stage.

Live Births

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the change in the number of live births, by mothers whose origin is from outside Northern Ireland, between 2007 and 2012.

(AQW 21818/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The table overleaf details the number of births registered in Northern Ireland, broken down by mother's country of birth, for the registration years 2007 to 2011.

Figures for 2012 will not be available until publication of Births in Northern Ireland, 2012 in May 2013.

Table 1: Number of Births by Country of Birth of Mother, 2007 to 2011

Regis- tration Year	All Births	Country of Birth of Mother					
		Northern Ireland	Other UK countries (including Isle of Man and Channel Islands)	Republic of Ireland (including Ireland, part not specified)	A8 countries ¹	All other countries	Not stated
2007	24,451	20,325	1,456	723	775	1,170	2
2008	25,631	21,095	1,410	779	1,080	1,267	-
2009	24,910	20,539	1,364	689	1,113	1,205	-

Regis- tration Year	All Births	Country of Birth of Mother					
		Northern Ireland	Other UK countries (including Isle of Man and Channel Islands)	Republic of Ireland (including Ireland, part not specified)	A8 countries ¹	All other countries	Not stated
2010	25,315	20,805	1,323	714	1,235	1,238	-
2011	25,273	20,808	1,296	692	1,210	1,267	-

1 The A8 countries are the eight countries from Eastern Europe that joined the European Union in May 2004. They are Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia.

Deaths from Cancer

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of deaths from cancer in each District Electoral Area in each of the last five years.

(AQW 21888/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The table overleaf details the number of deaths registered in Northern Ireland, where cancer¹ has been recorded as the primary cause of death, for 2007 to 2011.

1 International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision codes C00-C97

Table 1: Number of Deaths from Cancer¹ Registered in Northern Ireland by District Electoral Area, 2007-2011

District Electoral Area Name	Registration Year				
	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Antrim					
Antrim North West	28	20	23	42	20
Antrim South East	39	34	32	29	34
Antrim Town	37	44	33	33	44
Ards					
Ards East	48	51	53	45	51
Ards Peninsula	46	42	50	46	49
Ards West	43	39	31	48	39
Newtownards	48	36	50	50	45
Armagh					
Armagh City	43	40	39	40	32
Crossmore	23	21	26	32	19
Cusher	24	33	36	33	36
The Orchard	24	24	32	24	25
Ballymena					
Ballymena North	38	37	39	37	47
Ballymena South	32	36	33	37	42
Bannside	34	33	25	28	36
Braid	20	24	33	39	36
Ballymoney					
Ballymoney Town	31	21	25	31	27
Bann Valley	21	23	26	19	20
Bushvale	19	15	17	17	17

District Electoral Area Name	Registration Year				
	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Banbridge					
Banbridge Town	20	37	32	36	25
Dromore	22	29	19	27	29
Knockiveagh	18	39	32	26	36
Belfast					
Balmoral	75	70	82	62	88
Castle	74	75	73	101	85
Court	95	97	81	83	88
Laganbank	78	60	50	64	58
Lower Falls	78	87	64	69	68
Oldpark	80	104	99	81	94
Pottinger	84	100	74	87	99
Upper Falls	98	88	76	80	86
Victoria	109	120	107	117	97
Carrickfergus					
Carrick Castle	33	22	25	32	25
Kilroot	49	34	32	40	35
Knockagh Monument	41	29	22	31	37

Table 1: Number of Deaths from Cancer¹ Registered in Northern Ireland by District Electoral Area, 2007-2011 (continued)

District Electoral Area Name	Registration Year				
	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Castlereagh					
Castlereagh Central	40	46	48	43	44
Castlereagh East	63	62	61	59	62
Castlereagh South	30	30	24	30	30
Castlereagh West	41	35	32	41	45
Coleraine					
Bann	39	43	32	41	30
Coleraine Central	33	37	35	36	40
Coleraine East	22	24	31	29	21
The Skerries	24	20	37	38	38
Cookstown					
Ballinderry	27	24	26	30	17
Cookstown Central	16	28	22	21	23
Drum Manor	17	16	19	21	13
Craigavon					
Central	47	48	67	49	50
Loughside	38	47	50	39	47
Lurgan	43	54	65	46	47

District Electoral Area Name	Registration Year				
	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Portadown	38	37	56	44	45
Derry					
Cityside	35	34	33	20	38
Northland	53	46	47	53	62
Rural	35	31	43	51	48
Shantallow	27	31	30	41	46
Waterside	53	45	51	53	57
Down					
Ballynahinch	38	25	23	36	29
Downpatrick	43	36	51	41	62
Newcastle	49	36	41	35	44
Rowallane	28	41	22	34	33
Dungannon					
Blackwater	22	22	22	25	19
Clogher Valley	33	26	22	18	33
Dungannon Town	21	22	28	30	33
Torrent	12	45	38	39	26
Fermanagh					
Enniskillen	51	41	41	43	52
Erne East	28	31	36	36	27
Erne North	29	34	24	21	29
Erne West	30	26	34	24	17
Larne					
Coast Road	24	27	20	31	18
Larne Lough	18	36	25	23	25
Larne Town	26	32	36	39	27

Table 1: Number of Deaths from Cancer¹ Registered in Northern Ireland by District Electoral Area, 2007-2011 (continued)

District Electoral Area Name	Registration Year				
	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Limavady					
Bellarena	24	37	23	21	24
Benbradagh	13	19	16	14	19
Limavady Town	16	17	22	26	18
Lisburn					
Killultagh	36	27	32	35	41
Downshire	36	34	37	33	32
Dunmurry Cross	49	50	57	75	62
Lisburn Town North	51	49	52	62	54
Lisburn Town South	49	47	48	47	46

District Electoral Area Name	Registration Year				
	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Magherafelt					
Magherafelt Town	22	29	34	19	33
Moyola	25	15	24	26	29
Sperrin	33	27	29	26	24
Moyle					
Ballycastle	10	13	14	16	20
Giant's Causeway	7	15	12	12	6
The Glens	16	12	16	15	18
Newry & Mourne					
Crotilieve	52	46	45	54	45
Newry Town	50	56	45	46	50
Slieve Gullion	25	29	26	37	27
The Fews	28	27	32	37	39
The Mournes	35	37	34	26	29
Newtownabbey					
Antrim Line	50	54	38	51	63
Ballyclare	27	44	32	48	37
Macedon	52	62	67	55	52
University	49	54	51	55	52
North Down					
Abbey	36	57	45	47	47
Ballyholme and Groomsport	51	52	53	54	63
Bangor West	66	61	43	54	60
Hollywood	43	41	43	39	50
Omagh					
Mid Tyrone	30	32	30	24	36
Omagh Town	38	31	38	37	30
West Tyrone	40	25	32	28	29
Strabane					
Derg	22	32	17	25	25
Glenelly	33	19	22	26	23
Mourne	31	39	33	22	30
Northern Ireland	3,870	3,971	3,885	4,018	4,059

- 1 Cancer deaths were defined using the International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision (ICD-10) codes C00-C97.

DHSSPS: Resources

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the allocation of resources from his Department to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.
(AQO 3869/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The DHSSPS received the most generous budget settlement to any department for the 2011-15 budget period. However, there are limitations on how the Executive can respond to the growing pressures and demands on our health and

care system. The Health Minister is seeking to manage these through the Transforming Your Care programme, to ensure this happens in a way that secures best outcomes for health provision. I fully support the Health Minister in how he is addressing these challenges and welcome his determination to deliver projects as soon as possible, thus delivering the key components of the reform of health and social care. I believe that the Health Minister's proposals on the Transforming Your

Care programme offer us the opportunity to make changes and improve outcomes across the Health and Care system in Northern Ireland which are safe, sustainable and resilient into the future.

Budget: June Spending Round

Ms McCorley asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the strategy for engaging with the Treasury regarding the announcement on 20 March that the Budget could be adjusted in June.

(AQO 3870/11-15)

Mr Wilson: In his 20th March Budget the Chancellor of the Exchequer declared that there would be a 2015-16 Spending Round process, the outcome of which would be announced in June 2013.

My officials are in the process of agreeing the appropriate budget baselines with HM Treasury, however because the Devolved Administrations are funded through the Statement of Funding Policy once baselines are agreed there is no further direct involvement in the UK Spending Round process.

After the UK Spending Round process has concluded in June, Devolved Administrations will then receive a Barnett consequential share of any additions or reduction applied to comparable programmes in England.

It will then be for the Devolved Administrations to factor these Barnett changes into their own internal budget-setting processes for 2015-16.

Fiscal Powers

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in light of the announcement on delaying the decision on devolving Corporation Tax, to outline the Executive's priorities and strategy for devolution of additional fiscal powers.

(AQO 3871/11-15)

Mr Wilson: While we are obviously very disappointed that the Prime Minister does not intend to make a decision on the devolution of corporation tax until after the referendum on Scottish independence in autumn 2014, the Executive remains committed to securing these powers. This remains our number one priority and officials are examining the actions that could be taken forward now, so that a devolved rate could be implemented as soon as possible after a positive decision by the UK Government.

I personally would be reluctant to seek additional fiscal powers that required a block grant reduction while the possibility of securing corporation tax powers remains.

Welfare Reform: Rate Rebate Replacement

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline any initial findings from the responses to the consultation on the Rate Rebate Replacement Arrangements.

(AQO 3872/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The preliminary consultation process officially closed on the 10th April, however, my Department extended the deadline for a week or so to afford those organisations that had met with my officials, a little more time to write up their formal responses.

All these responses will be presented in full on the Department's website in a few days time and a summary report will also be published shortly.

Given the short period since the consultation closed it is too early to report findings. What I can say, however, is that the responses themselves broadly fell within two polarised camps.

The first advocating a consolidation or rationalisation of the existing range of rate support measures, as a means of preserving as much as possible the current coverage of the main rate rebate scheme.

The second – put forward reluctantly as the 'least worst' option - advocates a flat rate cut in entitlement to rate rebate across the board without cutting other support measures.

It is clear that the choices facing the Executive will not be easy ones.

My Department is modelling a range of options for me to present to the Executive to help Ministers decide on the preferred solution or solutions. This will then need to go out to a further round of public consultation, accompanied by an initial integrated impact assessment before final decisions are made in the Autumn.

Pension Reforms

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the cost to the block grant of not implementing pension reforms.

(AQO 3873/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The overall projected cost of not implementing pension reform in the devolved public service pension schemes is estimated in excess of £262m per year. Costs for each of the main public service schemes are: Teachers - £62m; Police - £18m; Civil Service - £60m; Fire fighters - £23m; Health - £100m.

These figures are estimates based on the Government Actuary's Department calculations to establish the recurring annual cost of reduced public service pension liabilities if schemes were not reformed.

Members should be in no doubt that HM Treasury would employ an equivalent calculation to reduce our block funding if we failed to deliver the required reforms. A penalty will be applied proportionately for each and every day of any slippage in reforming our public service schemes to the timescales required by HM Treasury. The scale of these costs would have serious impacts for Departmental budgets and the delivery of public services.

The Executive has already agreed to implement these pension reforms on 8 March 2012. In the current economic climate there can be no justification for any further delay. We need to move quickly and minimise as far as possible the financial risks. I expect all members of this Assembly to lend their full support to the smooth passage of the Public Service Pensions Bill which I will introduce in June.

Budget: A5 Western Transport Corridor

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what impact the court decision of 8 April on the A5 Western Transport Corridor will have on the 2013/14 and 2014/15 budget discussions.

(AQO 3874/11-15)

Mr Wilson: It will be for the Regional Development Minister to assess the implications of the Court decision for his budget and update the Executive on the consequences of that, including returning any reduced requirements for reallocation by the Executive.

Once the Regional Development Minister updates the Executive on the position, a decision will be taken on how any additional capital is utilised across the remainder of the Budget period.

Budget: Financial Process Review

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the Review of the Financial Process.

(AQO 3875/11-15)

Mr Wilson: In February 2011 the Executive commissioned a Review of the Financial Process in Northern Ireland to be carried out by my officials. Following consultation with key stakeholders, including this Assembly, I circulated a paper to the Executive in March 2012 reporting the outcome of that Review. To date, no agreement has been reached by the Executive on the report recommendations.

The remaining hurdle is the intransigence of the DE Minister who refuses to agree procedures that would allow the Executive to have some comfort that he was not diverting genuine reduced requirements – which should come back to the Executive – into other DE areas.

He might portray this as not being prepared to be accountable to DFP but this is not what this is about. It is about being accountable to the Executive and the Assembly. The Monitoring process succeeds because the Executive has confidence that Ministers bring forward Reduced Requirements for reallocation to other priority areas. The DE Minister wants to remove himself from this collegiate approach.

This is an opportunity for this Executive to deliver a significant, positive reform and failure to agree this report will be to the detriment of financial transparency for this Assembly.

Corporation Tax

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in the event that the power to set the rate of Corporation Tax is devolved, what was the cost agreed with the UK government for reducing it to 12.5%.

(AQO 3876/11-15)

Mr Wilson: A final cost for the devolution of Corporation Tax has not yet been agreed with the Government. There are still a number of outstanding issues to be resolved in this regard.

Pensions

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the move from the Retail Price Index to the Consumer Price Index for pension increases and the effect that this will have on the purchasing power of pensioners in the longer term.

(AQO 3877/11-15)

Mr Wilson: There are a number of reasons why the Consumer Prices Index (CPI) is considered a more suitable inflation measure to use for pension uprating than the Retail Price Index (RPI). CPI takes better account of how behaviour changes in response to changes in prices and more accurately represents the inflation experience of pensioners and benefit recipients – RPI excludes low income households including pensioners who receive a significant proportion of their income from the State. Furthermore CPI is less volatile than RPI, which by way of illustration, was actually negative during 2009.

The UK Government also met its commitment to restore the earnings link for the basic State Pension, and has also given a “triple guarantee” that the basic State Pension will increase by the highest of the growth in average earnings, price increases or 2.5 per cent, which going forward, will help prevent the erosion in the value of the basic state pension.

Budget 2013

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what are the implications of the Budget 2013.

(AQO 3878/11-15)

Mr Wilson: In its March Budget the UK Government has continued to ‘protect’ the delivery of education and health services in England. This means that these sectors, on which Northern Ireland has full Barnett comparability, have been exempted from the full rigour of the one per cent Resource DEL (RDEL) reductions imposed on Whitehall departments.

However there were still some £38.2 million of Resource DEL Barnett reduction consequentials applied to Northern Ireland over the next two years as a result of the Budget. The profile of these Barnett reductions is £20.7 million in 2013-14; and £17.5 million in 2014-15.

There were also £93.7 million of Capital DEL Barnett consequentials allocated to Northern Ireland over the next two years. However, with the exception of £0.3 million in 2013-14 and £4.0 million in 2014-15, these score as a financial transaction and can only be used to offer loans or equity investment.

In addition to the funding implications there were some other measures announced which should have a positive impact on the Northern Ireland economy:

- **Employment Allowance** – A £2,000 per annum National Insurance Contribution offset for businesses to be applied from 2014-15.
- **Personal Income Tax** – The personal Income Tax allowance is to be extended to £10,000 from April 2014.
- **Childcare Relief** – Working families will get 20% of childcare costs for each child under 12. This measure will support 80,000 families in Northern Ireland.
- **Corporation Tax** – The rate of Corporation Tax is to be reduced to 20% ensuring a single rate for businesses in April 2015.
- **Carbon Price Floor** – Confirmation of the exemption for Northern Ireland energy producers.

The Chancellor’s announcement of a cancellation in the planned rise in fuel duty is to be particularly welcomed, especially in Northern Ireland where we pay some of the highest prices. This will greatly assist motorists and hauliers at a time when many are struggling to cope with the high cost of fuel.

Net Fiscal Balance Report: Accurate Revenue Data

Mr Lynch asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what additional mechanisms are being developed to address the absence of accurate revenue data sources within the Net Fiscal Balance Report.

(AQO 3681/11-15)

Mr Wilson: My officials are not taking any specific steps to develop additional mechanisms to address the absence of accurate revenue data sources in the Net Fiscal Balance Report. Where actual data for Northern Ireland is readily available we will use it. However in most cases regional tax data is not routinely published by HMRC and their systems are not designed to produce this. Therefore, and in keeping with the methodology originally designed to produce the “Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland” (GERS) publication, apportionments are made based on reasoned assumptions.

I would re-iterate to the Member that the purpose of the Net Fiscal Balance Report 2009-10 and 2010-11 is to provide an overview of public sector finances in Northern Ireland for the financial years 2006-07 to 2010-11. It is not intended to provide an accurate estimate of individual expenditure or revenue items. Rather the report provides an overall assessment of Northern Ireland’s aggregate fiscal position, and as such, the report indicates that individual estimates should be interpreted with caution.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Continuing Care

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people have been assessed as requiring continuing care in each year since 2006.

(AQW 21356/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): This information is not collected centrally.

However, information on the number of completed care management assessments, for which a main form of care was recommended, i.e. residential care, nursing care or domiciliary care, can be found in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Year	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Care Management Assessments Completed with a Main Form of Care Recommended	6,921	6,897	7,626	5,806	5,272	5,236	5,620

Source: CC4 Return, Community Information Branch - DHSSPS

These figures only include assessments that were completed during the year for adults aged 18 and over.

Continuing Care

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people, assessed as requiring continuing care, are having their needs met in a nursing home; and whether these costs are met by Health and Social Care Trusts.

(AQW 21357/11-15)

Mr Poots: This information is not collected centrally.

Information on the number of care management assessments completed, for which nursing home care was the main form of care recommended, is available. During quarter ending 31 December 2012, 4261 care management assessments recommended nursing home care.

Information on the number of individuals who are in receipt of a nursing home care package is available. The latest information available on the number of individuals whose main form of care is in a nursing home, as recommended following a care management assessment, refers to 31 December 2012. At this date, there were 8,3282 nursing home care packages in effect.

The current charging policy for nursing home care is based on the principle that help should be given to those who cannot afford to help themselves. The Health and Personal Social Services (Assessment of Resources) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1993 prescribe that capital limits are used to determine how much a person should contribute to the cost of their nursing home care. Therefore, responsibility for these care home costs will be determined on an individual, case by case basis.

All nursing home placements do, however, attract a £100 per week statutory contribution to the cost of nursing care.

Mental Health

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the £13 million to be invested in mental health, through Transforming Your Care, will be in addition to other funding; and how the investment will be used.

(AQW 21360/11-15)

Mr Poots: The £13m investment in adult mental health services referred to in my statement on 19 March 2013 is additional funding which has been made available for the continued implementation of the Bamford Action Plan. This is phased investment between 2012 and 2015, across a broad range of adult mental health services to support the resettlement of people with mental health conditions, currently residing in hospitals, the development of community services to support earlier intervention and increased use of psychological therapies to promote better outcomes for individuals.

Registered Day Nurseries: Foyle Constituency

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the name and capacity of the registered day nurseries in the Foyle constituency; (ii) the waiting lists for each nursery over the last three years; and (iii) the average cost per year of daycare in the Foyle constituency.

(AQW 21389/11-15)

Mr Poots: There are currently 14 day nurseries registered in the Foyle constituency, with 530 places. The location and maximum number of places at each nursery is listed in the table at Annex A.

My Department has no role in monitoring attendance at, or price of, day nurseries and does not hold information about their waiting lists or costs.

My Department is considering measures to enable providers of childcare to provide parents with information on their services, including on vacancies and costs, through the family support website, www.familysupportni.gov.uk

Annex A

Day Nurseries and Registered Places in the Foyle Constituency

Name	Post Code	Places
Stepping Stones Day Nursery	BT48 9XD	38
Happy Days Child Care Centre	BT48 0LY	28
Hilltop Day Nursery	BT48 8IY	41
Hollybush Day Nursery	BT48 8JL	42
Kiddi-Kare Day Nursery	BT47 3DW	38
Rascals (NI) Ltd	BT47 6FE	50
Small World Day Nursery	BT48 0LZ	30
Stepping Stones	BT47 6BA	33
Wee Bears Day Nursery	BT48 0LB	36
Foyle Day Care Ltd	BT48 6RF	45
Foyle Day Care Ltd	BT47 2TA	29
Foyle Day Care Ltd	BT47 6DB	33
Magee Day Nursery	BT48 7JL	34
Kids Montessori	BT47 3DN	53
	Total	530

Rowan Sexual Assault Referral Centre

Ms Brown asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the development of the Sexual Assault Referral Centre has drawn on global models of best operational practice.

(AQW 21430/11-15)

Mr Poots: A SARC Project Steering Group oversaw the development of the Rowan. Research was undertaken on evidence-based SARC service frameworks and other sexual assault services primarily across the UK. A review of evidence-informed research papers on SARCs in the UK and Sexual Assault Treatment Units in the Republic of Ireland was also carried out. Visits were arranged to SARCs in the UK including a visit to the SARC at St Mary's Manchester. Established in 1986 and the first Centre of its kind in the UK, the St Mary's SARC delivers training to and assists in the establishment of SARCs around the world. In developing the Rowan, St Mary's SARC have continued to provide valuable on-going support to the Project Steering Group.

The Rowan is an established member of the SARC Forum in the UK where best practice is shared both online (E-Forum) and at National Conferences.

The Rowan, a bespoke model, has been developed from best practice elements from a number of SARCs whilst being cognisant of and sensitive to the needs of the local population and in the context of the integrated Health and Social Care system in Northern Ireland.

Rowan Sexual Assault Referral Centre

Ms Brown asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the Rowan Sexual Assault Referral Centre will offer a self-referral style system for first-time access to services; and whether staff will develop an action plan, in conjunction with the victim, which will specifically meet their individual needs.

(AQW 21431/11-15)

Mr Poots: Any victim of sexual violence will be able to self refer to the Rowan.

A victim who is referred to or attends the Rowan will be offered a range of services including a comprehensive assessment of their needs and depending upon those assessed needs, various support/ agreed care pathways will be followed. The emotional needs and psychological wellbeing of the victim will be considered as part of the consultation. For those adult

victims who self refer into the Rowan, staff will support the victim in making a report to the PSNI regarding the crime, where they choose to do so.

This process will enable the victim to make informed choices about what they might require to meet their specific needs at a given time. An individual care plan will be agreed with the victim and/or family, where appropriate.

Rowan Sexual Assault Referral Centre

Ms Brown asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the provisional operational hours of the Rowan Sexual Assault Referral Centre.

(AQW 21432/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Rowan will provide 24 hour care and support, 365 days a year to victims of sexual crime. Initially, the Rowan will be open each week day from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday, with an on-call response service from 5pm to 9am and 24/7 at weekends and bank holidays.

The Rowan service model may change as the service develops to reflect the needs of victims as they emerge.

Northern Health and Social Care Trust

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why the Chairperson of the Northern Health and Social Care Trust was dismissed.

(AQW 21437/11-15)

Mr Poots: Against a background of very serious and unresolved issues with the performance of the Northern Health and Social Care Trust on emergency care, I needed to be sure that the leadership team were all working together to resolve these.

I considered it highly inappropriate for the former Chairperson, Mr Stewart, to comment on these issues as he did in a media interview on Monday, 10 December. His statement was very damaging to the reputation of the Trust and confirmed that Mr Stewart does not share my view that much better performance against the 12-hour standard for A&E Departments is both possible and essential.

I firmly believe that public service values must be at the core of Health and Social Care. Non-executive members who are appointed to the boards of HSC bodies are placed in positions of responsibility, and as such, must demonstrate the highest standards of corporate and personal conduct based on recognition that patients and clients always come first. Regrettably, in addition to a number of performance issues at the Northern HSC Trust, upon which the Chair was challenged by my Department, Mr Stewart fell short of these high standards in the days prior to his position being terminated. I took all factors into account and decided that in the interests of the organisation that his position as Chair should be terminated.

Fire and Rescue Service: Stolen Parts

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 20837/11-15, why his Department paid compensation for the stolen car parts; and to whom the compensation was paid.

(AQW 21464/11-15)

Mr Poots: A condition of the supply of the deregistered cars which were no longer roadworthy was a fixed amount for their delivery and collection once NIFRS had ceased using them for training purposes on the basis that there was an inherent value in the returned vehicles for parts and scrap. Consequently, when those parts were stolen, the company sought compensation for the value of the stolen parts. The compensation was paid to Two Trees Recovery Services.

Health and Social Care Trusts: Infection Control

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 21151/11-15, how each Health and Social Care Trust is actively improving infection control and the safety of patients and hospital visitors.

(AQW 21476/11-15)

Mr Poots: Each Trust's approach to tackling healthcare-associated infections (HCAIs) comprises a range of measures such as promoting good hand hygiene on the part of staff, visitors and patients; good clinical practice including the use of high-impact interventions – also known as care bundles – to prevent surgical site infections, ventilator-associated pneumonias and other infections; implementation of the regional dress code including the use of personal protective equipment; improving environmental cleanliness and hygiene, and using the Regional Healthcare Hygiene and Cleanliness Audit Tool to assess environmental cleanliness and hygiene within the Trust; prudent prescribing of antibiotics, to reduce the risk of *Clostridium difficile* infection and to address the global problem of antimicrobial resistance; diarrhoea risk assessment and the isolation of patients where necessary; water management plans, to reduce the risk of infection by water-borne organisms such as *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* and *Legionella*; the use of HCAI surveillance; training and continuous professional development in respect of infection prevention and control (IPC), including the use of the online Regional Infection Prevention and Control Manual; restrictions on visiting; the targeted use of MRSA screening and the isolation of patients; the use of escalation procedures for a potential or identified outbreak, including cohort nursing and the isolation of patients; improving communications with patients and carers; and board-to-ward assurance processes for ensuring compliance with and implementation of the Trust's IPC policies.

Using these and other measures the Trusts have achieved significant reductions in HCAs. Since 2006/07 MRSA bloodstream infections in in-patients have been reduced by 72%, and since 2008/09 cases of Clostridium difficile infection in in-patients aged 2 years and over have been reduced by 65%. Since 2006/07 cases of Clostridium difficile infection in in-patients aged 65 and over have been reduced by 67%.

While I welcome this progress, which should reassure patients, their families and the general public, the culture in the health service has to be zero tolerance of preventable infections, and the service still has some way to go. In the near future I will set new HCAI reduction targets for 2013/14, taking into account the Trusts' performance in 2012/13 and the performance of the best comparable trusts in England.

A core principle of Changing the Culture 2010 is that infection prevention and control is everyone's business. It is not just a matter for doctors, nurses, cleaners and managers, but for everyone involved in the planning and delivery of healthcare. Visitors to hospitals and patients themselves have their part to play in preventing infections.

My answer to AQW 21151/11-15 referred to "Changing the Culture 2012". This should have read "Changing the Culture 2010".

Dental Care

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to the proposed changes to health service dental care, for his assessment of the impact on public health of removing 3 and 6 month descaling, especially on levels of kidney disease; and the likelihood of a requirement for periodontal treatments resulting from this decision.

(AQW 21477/11-15)

Mr Poots: In order to address the pressures on the General Dental Services budget, my Department has consulted on a number of proposed changes to General Dental Services which were chosen because they would help reduce the pressures on the General Dental Services whilst minimising the impact on patient's oral health and the ability of practices to provide ongoing care and treatment in the Health Service. These included changing the proposed timescales for providing scale and polish treatments from 3 to 9 months for most patients. The consultation on these proposals has recently finished and my Department is analysing the responses. I will consider all the information provided before making decisions on the way forward.

An international review of the evidence base for routine scale and polish at different time intervals concluded that the effects on periodontal (gum) health were unclear. Treatment for patients with chronic periodontal disease, or other health conditions, would continue to be available through the Health Service, as required.

Dental Care

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to the proposed changes to Health Service dental care, whether his proposals to cut 10 percent from the dental budget will result in the closure of practises and knock-on additional costs to the Health Service.

(AQW 21478/11-15)

Mr Poots: As set out in the tables below, my Department has made considerable investments in General Dental Services since 2007 and further increases are planned until 2014/15.

General Dental Services Budget 2007/08 – 2011/12

	2007-08 £m	2008-09 £m	2009-10 £m	2010-11 £m	2011-12 £m
Initial GDS budget allocation	73.1	73	83.9	86.9	89.2

Indicative General Dental Services budget allocation 2012/13 – 2014/15

	2012/13 £m	2013/14 £m	2014/15 £m
General Dental Services Budget	89.4	91.7	94.2

These figures are net of income from patient contributions which are retained by dental practitioners

The proposed changes to General Dental Services did not include a 10 percent cut in the dental budget but instead included a number of proposals to help mitigate the pressures on the budget and so help ensure the best use of the available resources across the Health and Social Care sector. My Department has consulted on these changes which were chosen because they would help reduce the pressures whilst minimising the impact on patient's oral health and on the ability of practices to provide ongoing care and treatment in the Health Service. The consultation on these proposals has recently finished and my Department is currently analysing the responses.

I am aware of concerns over the potential viability of dental practices in Northern Ireland raised during the consultation and these will be considered as part of the consultation analysis.

Dental Care

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to the proposed changes to Health Service dental care, for his assessment of the concerns of dental practices that patients will be required to pay privately for treatments currently available on the Health Service; and the impact this may have on those practices that currently receive the higher practice allowance.

(AQW 21479/11-15)

Mr Poots: In order to address the anticipated pressures on the General Dental Services budget, my Department has consulted on a number of proposed changes to General Dental Services which were chosen because they would help reduce the pressures on General Dental Services whilst minimising the impact on patient's oral health, and on the ability of practices to provide ongoing care and treatment in the Health Service. The consultation on these proposals has recently finished and my Department is analysing the responses.

Where clinically necessary, all treatments will remain available to patients under the Health Service. My Department is currently assessing as part of the analysis of the consultation responses the concerns raised about the potential impact on claims for the higher level of practice allowance. As the Departmental consultation document explained, the intention remains to reward those practices with a clear Health Service commitment.

Prisoners: Mental Health

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many (i) male; and (ii) female prisoners were transferred out of prison for mental health treatment in 2012.

(AQW 21539/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested is set out in the table below.

	Male	Female
Prisoners transferred out of prison for mental health treatment	23	2

Life Expectancy Rates

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps are being taken to reduce the difference in life expectancy rates between people who live in more deprived areas and people who live in less deprived areas.

(AQW 21542/11-15)

Mr Poots: Health and wellbeing are influenced by a range of complex and inter-related socio-economic and environmental influences on daily life, as well as factors such as age, sex, hereditary factors and lifestyle.

Improving health and wellbeing, and in particular reducing health inequalities – the gap in health status between more affluent and disadvantaged communities and population groups – therefore requires collective and sustained effort across government and all sectors, including the statutory and the voluntary and community sectors.

Improving health and reducing health inequalities continues to be a key priority for my Department and its agencies – I have committed in the Programme for Government to increasing the overall percentage of the health allocation to public health, and the PHA, Trusts and others are working with other sectors, and with disadvantaged communities at local level, to invest in building capacity and in the design and delivery of targeted programmes.

In addition the new strategic framework for public health, currently being finalised, will seek to re-invigorate and strengthen collaboration and co-ordinated efforts across all levels of society to improve health and wellbeing and reduce differences in health outcomes between population groups and areas.

Vitamin D Intake

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he will take steps to issue advice on Vitamin D intake, particularly aimed at people who may be prone to bone related conditions.

(AQW 21543/11-15)

Mr Poots: Advice on vitamin D intake was issued to Health Professionals by the Chief Medical Officer's in the UK in February 2012. This advice reminded health professionals of the significant difference to people's health they could make by raising awareness of the risk of vitamin D deficiency, particularly by ensuring that those most of risk are aware of how important it is to get enough vitamin D and how they can get access to these important daily supplements.

The advice also included information about prescribing and recommending vitamin D supplements to those groups of the population most at risk including all pregnant and breastfeeding women, all infants and young children aged 6 months to 5 years and older people aged 65 years and over who are not exposed to much sun.

In addition the Public Health Agency is training childcare providers in essential nutrition information which includes vitamin D and is developing initiatives aimed at addressing nutrition in older people where vitamin D supplementation is a key issue.

Rowan Sexual Assault Referral Centre

Ms Brown asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the operational roles of (i) Independent Sexual Violence Advisors; and (ii) Independent Domestic Violence Advisors within the Rowan Sexual Assault Referral Centre. (AQW 21552/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department recognises the importance of advocacy in making a real difference to people in their daily lives and in May 2012 I published a guidance document 'Developing Advocacy Services: A Policy Guide for Commissioners'.

Where sexual violence occurs within a domestic setting, victims presenting to the Rowan who are considered to be at high risk of domestic violence, will be referred through to the MARAC Process to receive the appropriate support.

Work has been ongoing with my Department, the Department of Justice and the Police Service for Northern Ireland to define and develop the roles of the Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) Service and the Independent Sexual Violence Advisor (ISVA) Service. The business case for the IDVA service has recently been approved and it is anticipated that a service provider will be appointed by the end of 2013.

It is expected that the IDVA and ISVA roles will evolve as the Rowan becomes more embedded within Northern Ireland.

Rowan Sexual Assault Referral Centre

Ms Brown asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how his Department will work with the voluntary sector in the day-to-day running of the Rowan Sexual Assault Referral Centre. (AQW 21553/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Rowan will be hosted and directly managed by the Northern Health and Social Care Trust. The Rowan, as a regional service, will work with voluntary sector service providers through developed protocols and pathways, referring victims to relevant support services when required and with the victim's consent.

The Rowan is a collaborative service which will continue to make good the working relationships in place to promote the best outcomes for victims and their families, where applicable.

Rowan Sexual Assault Referral Centre

Ms Brown asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the consultation process which was followed during the development of the Rowan Sexual Assault Referral Centre. (AQW 21554/11-15)

Mr Poots: A draft strategy for addressing sexual violence in Northern Ireland "Hidden Crimes, Secret Pain" was issued for public consultation in 2007 and made a number of wide ranging proposals including the setting up of a Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) to deliver co-ordinated services for victims of sexual violence in Northern Ireland. There was overwhelming support from the responses to the consultation on "Hidden Crimes, Secret Pain" for the provision of a SARC for Northern Ireland.

A multiagency SARC Project Steering Group was established in 2007 to oversee the establishment of the Rowan. The facility has been developed from best practice elements from a number of SARCs whilst being cognisant of and sensitive to the needs of the local population and in the context of the integrated Health and Social Care system in Northern Ireland.

Translation Services: DHSSPS Spend

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much his Department spent on translation services for visiting foreign nationals in each of the last five years. (AQW 21561/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information on the cost to this Department and Health and Social Care organisations for translation services for visiting foreign nationals is not recorded and therefore is not available.

However, the total cost to this Department and Health and Social Care organisations in Northern Ireland for translation services, in each of the last five years, was as follows:

2011/12	2010/11	2009/10	2008/09	2007/08
£2,048,030	£1,926,285	£1,754,105	£1,300,186	£1,191,964

Omagh Hospital

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what services are (i) planned for; and (ii) confirmed at the new hospital in Omagh. (AQW 21564/11-15)

Mr Poots: The new hospital in Omagh is designed to accommodate all clinical services planned and confirmed in the approved business case. These include inpatient beds for intermediate care, palliative care and cardiac assessment; renal

dialysis services; outpatients; day surgery; endoscopy suite; urgent care; imaging including CT scanning; children's centre; woman's health unit; cardiac investigations; specialist care; rapid response service; chronic disease management; pharmacy; ophthalmology; physiotherapy; chiropody; and occupational therapy. There will also be a new Hospital Sterilisation and Disinfection Unit for instrument sterilisation.

The facility will also accommodate all services currently delivered from Omagh Health Centre including four GP practices; treatment room; community dental; community paediatrics; district nursing and health visiting. Community mental health teams will also move to the new facility.

Children in Residential Care

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of children in residential care; and (ii) the total cost to his Department of providing care for these children, in each month of the last five years.

(AQW 21566/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information on the number of children in residential care is not centrally available monthly. Table A below contains the number of children in residential care at 31 March for each of the last five years. This information can be found in 'Children's Social Care Statistics 2011/12' on the Department's website at the following link:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/stats-cib/statistics_and_research-cib-pub/children_statistics/stats-cib-children_order.htm

Costs of providing residential care are also not centrally available monthly. Costs for each of the last five years are set out in Table A below.

Table A: The Number of Children in Residential Care at 31 March 2007/08 – 2011/12 and cost of providing this care.

Year	*Number of Children in Residential Care	**Total Cost of Providing Care £m
2007/08	319	£23.4m
2008/09	308	£25.7m
2009/10	287	£26.6m
2010/11	239	£25.8m
2011/12	231	£26.7m

Source: *Community Information Branch, DHSSPSNI

** Health & Social Care Trusts

Children in Foster Care

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of children in foster care; and (ii) the total cost to his Department of providing care for these children, in each month of the last five years.

(AQW 21568/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information on the number of children in foster care is not held centrally by month. Table A below contains the number of children in foster care at 31 March for each of the last five years. This information can be found in 'Children's Social Care Statistics 2011/12' on the Department's website at the following link:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/stats-cib/statistics_and_research-cib-pub/children_statistics/stats-cib-children_order.htm

Costs of providing Foster Care are also not centrally available monthly. Costs for each of the last five years are set out in Table A below

Table A: The Number of Children in Foster Care at 31 March 2007/08 – 2011/12 and costs of providing this care.

Year	*The Number of Children in Foster Care	**Total Cost of providing Foster Care
2007/08	1,376	£25.7m
2008/09	1,607	£25.6m
2009/10	1,687	£28.9m
2010/11	1,862	£29.5m
2011/12	1,946	£32.0m

Rowan Sexual Assault Referral Centre

Ms Brown asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether an information sharing agreement with relevant voluntary organisations will be operational for the opening of the Rowan Sexual Assault Referral Centre.
(AQW 21582/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Rowan has commenced drafting an Information Sharing Agreement (ISA). The Rowan will seek guidance from the Information Commissioner to ensure the ISA developed is robust and meets the required information governance standards as would be expected from any HSC body.

Due to the very extent and nature of the work and number of agencies that the Rowan will potentially liaise with, this work will be on-going and will not be completed before the first phase of the service goes live on 7 May 2013. However, the Rowan will follow best practice in respect of information sharing and will obtain consent from a victim for referral onto other services if required. All referral forms will differ according to each agency/service and these will be completed with and signed off by the victim where appropriate. Only information that is essential will be shared with the receiving agency.

Taskforce on Protestant Working Class Communities

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) to detail the initiatives introduced by his Department in response to the 2004 Report from the Taskforce on Protestant Working Class Communities; (ii) which initiatives currently focus on the issues raised in the 2004 report; and (iii) the results of any evaluations into initiatives designed to address the issues raised in this report.
(AQW 21600/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) Renewing Communities was issued in 2006 as a response to the issues raised by the Taskforce Report. The response contained an action plan with more than 60 actions 9 of which related to my Department. These actions related to: additional speech and language therapists; expansion of the Community in School Programme and Parenting Support Programme; an employability initiative in Health and Social Services; extension of part-time nursing training; youth mentoring and support; a walk-in crisis centre; the New Strategic Direction to Combat Drug and Alcohol Misuse; and Mental Health Investment through the provision of trauma and counselling services.
- (ii) The Taskforce report identified specific health issues relating to mental health, alcohol and drug abuse, suicide and self harming, poor diet, obesity, speech and language problems, teenage pregnancy, and sexual health. The main vehicle for addressing such health inequalities at a strategic and cross cutting level is the public health strategy Investing for Health 2002–2012 which can be viewed on the Department's website at <http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/showconsultations?txtid=10415>. This is underpinned by a wide range of individual strategies which address the specific issues.
- (iii) A review of Investing for Health was published in 2010 and can be viewed on the Department's website at - http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/health_development-final_report_-_september_2010.pdf.

Following a consultation exercise in 2012 an updated strategic public health framework is currently being finalised - <http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/fit-and-well-consultation-document.pdf>. Key aims of the new framework will be to strengthen collaboration at strategic, regional and local levels, to improve health and wellbeing overall, and to reduce differences in health outcomes between population groups and areas, which result from a wide range of social determinants.

Ambulances: Ballymena

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many ambulances are based in Ballymena; and whether these ambulances are equipped to deal with a full range of medical emergencies.
(AQW 21602/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service provides a range of ambulance cover based in Ballymena. This is as follows:

Accident and Emergency Fleet

There are five A&E ambulances and one rapid response vehicle (RRV) equipped to deal with the full range of medical emergencies and non-emergency calls. The RRV does not transport patients.

Patient Care Service (Non-Emergency) Fleet

One sitting case vehicle, one intermediate care vehicle and one bariatric vehicle provide transport for non-emergency patients and do not respond to 999 emergencies.

It is important to bear in mind that the nearest ambulance resource is assigned to an incident, irrespective of incident location; therefore an emergency response to the Ballymena area may not necessarily be attended by a vehicle based in that area.

Carlisle House, Belfast

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the criteria for admittance to Carlisle House, Belfast.

(AQW 21604/11-15)

Mr Poots: Carlisle House is an independent provider and, therefore, they set the criteria for admission to the service. Details can be found on their website: <http://www.carlislehouse.org/index.php>.

Both the Belfast and Northern Health and Social Care Trusts commission services from Carlisle House – and both Trusts have agreed referral pathways in place to clients to access the service. This means that if a person lives within the Belfast Trust area, an application form can be requested directly from Carlisle House, or referral can be made through the local Community Addiction Team. If resident within the Northern Trust area, individuals will need to contact the local Community Addiction Teams based at either Parkmore Avenue in Ballymena, or Railway Street in Ballymena, who can refer clients on to Carlisle House. Normally, clients will have been referred to their local Community Addiction Teams by their General Practitioner.

Individuals residing in other Trust areas can self-refer privately – this can be done by completing an application form available on request or online, and by sending it to Carlisle House.

Drug and Alcohol Addiction

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what ‘drying out’ facilities are available for people who have an addiction to alcohol or drugs.

(AQW 21605/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Health & Social Care Board and the Public Health Agency commissions a full range of detoxification and stabilisation programmes in each Health and Social Care Trust area. These services are normally provided or managed by the local Community Addiction Teams.

In line with guidance from the National Institute of Clinical Excellence, detoxification programmes can often be delivered within the community (i.e. in an individual’s own home or within a family environment) as part of a shared care partnership arrangement with the individual’s own GP. Admission to an inpatient facility can also be arranged in instances where detoxification cannot be provided safely in a community setting, or where previous community-based attempts to provide such care have failed. The exact provider/unit, however, will depend upon individual specific needs – it may in the first instance be more appropriate to initiate detoxification within a medical inpatient facility, e.g. if there are significant medical issues (risk of seizure/epilepsy or other co-existing medical conditions).

Drug and Alcohol Strategy

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many steering groups have been set up by Health and Social Care Trusts to implement the Drug and Alcohol strategy; (ii) to outline the process by which people are appointed to the steering groups; and (iii) what role the Public Health Agency plays.

(AQW 21608/11-15)

Mr Poots: I launched the revised strategy to prevent and address the harm related to alcohol and drugs, known as the New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs (NSD) Phase 2, in January 2012. Implementation of the non-Departmental outcomes in the strategy is led by the Public Health Agency (PHA).

In terms of local implementation, the PHA has established five Drug and Alcohol Co-ordination Teams (DACTs) to drive forward action at the local level – the Trusts have not been asked to establish any formal structures in respect of the NSD Phase 2. Membership of the DACTs is broadly drawn from the following groups but reflects local needs:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|
| ■ Health and Social Care Trusts | ■ PHA |
| ■ PSNI | ■ HSCB |
| ■ Local Government | ■ NIHE |
| ■ Education and Library Boards | ■ PBNI |
| ■ Voluntary and Community Sector | ■ Service Users |

Each DACT is also supported by an independent sector forum that represents the views of local community and voluntary sector organisations that are involved in addressing substance misuse. Any organisation or individual, who wishes to be involved in the work of their local DACT or independent sector forum, should contact their local PHA office in the first instance (<http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/offices>).

A number of regional groups are also in place to oversee policy development and implementation.

Drug and Alcohol Addiction

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans his Department has under the Fit and Well - Changing Lives strategy to help people who have an addiction to alcohol or drugs.

(AQW 21609/11-15)

Mr Poots: The intention of the new strategic framework for public health, currently being finalised, is to provide overarching strategic direction to strengthen co-ordinated effort across society to tackle the wide range of factors that influence health and inequalities in health and wellbeing, thereby creating the conditions to support improved population health. The public health framework will continue to be underpinned by strategies that focus on specific issues such as alcohol and drug misuse; suicide and self-harm prevention; and mental health promotion.

In 2012, I launched the revised cross-departmental strategy to prevent and address the harm related to alcohol and drugs, known as the New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs Phase 2. 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.

This Strategy seeks to direct action across five pillars: education, prevention and early intervention; harm reduction; treatment and support; law and criminal justice; and monitoring, evaluation and research. It also contains a number of priority areas for action including: developing a regional commissioning framework for alcohol and drug services; tackling drug-related anti-social behaviour; targeting those at risk and vulnerable; reducing the availability of illicit drugs; and addressing local community issues.

In addition, the link between alcohol, drugs and suicide is well established, and in 2012 I also launched the refreshed Protect Life suicide prevention strategy which identifies drugs and alcohol misuse as a key target area in its revised action plan. Protect Life funding supports counselling for those experiencing emotional distress and suicidal thoughts due to problems with addiction.

Alcohol: Misuse Among Young People

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans are in place to tackle alcohol misuse among vulnerable adults and young people.

(AQW 21619/11-15)

Mr Poots: Preventing and addressing the harm related to alcohol and drug misuse is a key priority for my Department. To tackle this issue, I launched the New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs Phase 2 in January 2012.

This Strategy recognises the need to take a universal preventative approach to addressing substance misuse, but also acknowledges the need to target particular actions and support at those who are at risk and vulnerable – including young people. This includes the provision of information, education, life skills and early interventions.

In addition, the Public Health Agency commissions a range of local alcohol and drug counselling and mentoring services for children and young people across Northern Ireland. A Regional Initial Assessment Tool has also been developed allowing non-specialist workers to screen and assess a young person's alcohol and drug misuse, provide initial intervention, and signpost those who require additional support into the correct service. Recently, a "one-stop-shop" initiative to support young people around substance misuse and other health issues was successfully piloted and is now being rolled out across Northern Ireland.

At the local level, Drug and Alcohol Co-ordination Teams develop local action plans and commission a range of services to meet the needs of their local populations – as part of this work they are specifically tasked with identifying, and putting in place services to support those at risk or vulnerable to substance misuse.

Fluoridation

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether his Department will undertake a study to assess the intake of fluoride by the population in advance of any decision on introducing fluoride to the drinking water.

(AQW 21629/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am still considering my position on fluoridation of the water supply in Northern Ireland and continue to consult with Executive colleagues on the matter before I come to a decision. If a proposal to fluoridate the water supplies is made, we are required under, The Water and Sewerage Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 to consult and ascertain public opinion. Given the resource implications of such an assessment, it would be inappropriate to make a commitment at this time however, should such a consultation proceed, appropriate scientific and medical evidence will also be gathered and considered at that stage.

Prescribing Formula for Drugs

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given that a formula for prescribing drugs was designed in the Lothian area of Scotland, (i) why the Health and Social Care Board is designing a new local prescribing formula for drugs; (ii) to outline the purpose of the new pharmacy software; (iii) how much has been spent on the new prescribing formula, including the cost of the new software; (iv) how long the process has taken.

(AQW 21662/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) My Department requested in Priorities for Action 2010/11, that the Health and Social Care Board should establish a formulary for Primary and Secondary Care by the end of March 2011. Formularies from other areas of the UK,

including Lothian, were reviewed and consideration was given to adopting them for use in Northern Ireland. However, it was noted that this may not lead to local engagement with the formulary; may not provide for delivery or consistent outcomes and ultimately could lead to legal or clinical challenge. The Board, therefore, developed and consulted on a local process which is considered to be robust, transparent and will withstand scrutiny from various interested parties.

- (ii) The Northern Ireland formulary will be presented on the internet and will be designed to enable its use by prescribing clinicians.
- (iii) My Department allocated £80k per year, to the Board, on a non-recurrent basis in 2012/13 and 2013/14 for staff and other expenses to establish the formulary. A separate IT project has been initiated to enable the use of the formulary via a website. To date no money has been spent on this.
- (iv) Between November 2011 and March 2013 individual therapeutic chapters were developed and published. The establishment of a Northern Ireland formulary for Primary and Secondary Care is largely complete and the focus for future work will be on review, refinement and monitoring of the formulary

Prescriptions: Processing Cost

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much is spent annually by the Business Services Organisation (BSO) on processing paper prescriptions; (ii) why the process has not been computerised; and (iii) how the BSO plans to ensure that quality and safe prescribing is not compromised.

(AQW 21663/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) I have been advised by the Business Services Organisation (BSO) that the annual amount associated with processing prescriptions is £1.4million.
- (ii) Much of the actual processing of prescription forms by the BSO is automated and in recent years the organisation has invested heavily in further automation of the process. I have been advised that the computerisation of prescription submission remains an aspiration of the Health and Social Care (HSC) Board.
- (iii) The BSO is commissioned by the HSC Board to pay Pharmaceutical Contractors accurately and promptly for the prescriptions they dispense. It is the responsibility of the Board to ensure safety and quality in prescribing and the Board monitors this through its contracts with GP practices and other prescribers.

Rapid Response Vehicles

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of rapid response vehicles that are operational through the 24hr cycle in each Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 21671/11-15)

Mr Poots: Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) rapid response vehicles (RRVs) are deployed on the basis of its divisional areas which are broadly coterminous with Health and Social Care Trust areas. RRVs operate between 0800hours and midnight and are currently deployed as follows:

Health & Social Care Trust	Belfast	South Eastern	Western	Northern	Southern	Total
0800-1400hrs	3.5	4	3.5	3.5	3	17.5
1400-2000hrs	7	8	7	7	6	35
2000-Midnight	3.5	4	3.5	3.5	3	17.5

Note: Where a figure indicates a half, this illustrates daily variability ie alternating between 3 and 4 vehicles.

It is important to bear in mind that the nearest available emergency resource is assigned to an incident, irrespective of incident location; therefore, an emergency response to a particular area may not necessarily be attended by a vehicle based in that area.

Hip Replacement Surgery

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of people in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust area that were assessed as needing hip replacement surgery in each of the last three years.

(AQW 21673/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information is not readily available on the number of people in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust area that were assessed as needing hip replacement surgery.

However, information is available on the number of patients on the waiting list for hip replacement surgery for those patients who reside in the Northern Local Commissioning Group (NLCG) area. The table below details the number of patients waiting

at 31st December 2012, the most recent quarter for which official statistics are available, and at the end of the same quarter in each of the two years previous.

Quarter Ending	Total Number of Patients from the NLCG Waiting
December 2010	189
December 2011	371
December 2012	346

Source: DHSSPS Inpatient Waiting Times Dataset

In addition, information is available on the number of hip replacement procedures carried out in HSC Hospitals in Northern Ireland for those patients who reside in the Northern Local Commissioning Group area, in each of the last three years.

Year	Number of Procedures Completed for Patients Residing in the NLCG	
	Elective	Non-elective
2009/10	515	255
2010/11	488	275
2011/12	542	282

Source: Hospital Inpatient System

It should be noted that hip replacement procedures were identified using the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys tabular list of operations and procedures (OPCS-4) codes W37, W38, W39, W46, W47, W48, W93, W94 and W95. The figures in the answer refer to operations carried out in the primary procedural position only.

Hip Replacement Surgery

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail for each Health and Social Care Trust the (i) average; and (ii) longest waiting time for hip replacement surgery, in each of the last three years. (AQW 21674/11-15)

Mr Poots: Hip replacement surgery, in the T & O specialty, is only provided in the Belfast, Southern and Western HSC Trusts.

My Department collects waiting time information on the basis of how long patients are currently waiting for inpatient admission and not the completed length of time they waited before admission. Information relates to patients still waiting for inpatient admission at the end of each quarter.

- (i) The average number of weeks waiting for hip replacement surgery in the T & O specialty in each HSC Trust, at 31st December 2012, the most recent quarter for which official statistics are available, and the position at the end of the same quarter in each of the two years previous, is detailed in the table below.

Quarter Ending	Average Waiting Time (Weeks Waiting), by HSC Trust		
	Belfast	Southern	Western
December 2010	10.0	12.0	27.0
December 2011	17.6	18.2	20.2
December 2012	14.2	16.3	22.4

Source: DHSSPS Inpatient Waiting Times Dataset

- (ii) The table below presents information on the longest waiting time position of those patients still on the waiting list for hip replacement surgery, during each of the last three years.

Year	Longest Waiting Time Position (Weeks Waiting), by HSC Trust		
	Belfast	Southern	Western
2010	72.9	51.6	63.2
2011	44.1	48.5	67.2
2012	72.1	29.2	61.5

Source: DHSSPS Inpatient Waiting Times Dataset

It should be noted that hip replacement procedures were identified using the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys tabular list of operations and procedures (OPCS-4) codes W37, W38, W39, W46, W47, W48, W93, W94 and W95. The figures in the answer refer to operations carried out in the primary procedural position only.

National Pensioners Convention: Dignity Code

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what progress has been made on the implementation of the National Pensioners Convention's Dignity Code.

(AQW 21679/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Dignity Code, developed by the National Pensioners Convention, is an excellent piece of work which looks to uphold the rights and dignity of our elderly population.

I put great importance on maintaining the dignity of our elderly population, and the work done by organisations such as the National Pensioners Convention will be invaluable in ensuring this is achieved.

I forwarded the Dignity Code in September last year, and again on April 18th of this year, to the Chief Executive of the Health and Social Care Board, with a request that the code be publicised throughout the HSC sector.

Audiology Clinics

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail current levels of administrative support for each audiology clinic.

(AQW 21681/11-15)

Mr Poots: The staffing levels requested are shown in the tables below. These figures were obtained from the Health and Social Care Trusts and have not been validated by the Department.

AQW 21681/11-15

Administrative support staff in Audiology clinics at April 2013

Trust	Grade	Headcount	WTE
Belfast HSC Trust	Band 2 Admin	1	0.38
	Band 3 Admin	2	1.2
	Band 2 Admin (agency)	3	2.0
Northern HSC Trust	Band 2 Admin	2	1.6
	Band 3 Admin	2	2.0
Southern HSC Trust	Band 2 Admin	2	0.9
	Band 3 Admin	4	3
	Band 4 Admin	1	1
South Eastern HSC Trust	Band 2 Admin	1	1
	Band 8a Audiology Manager	1	0.8
Western HSC Trust	Band 2 Admin	1	0.5

AQW 21682/11-15

Audiology clinic staffing at April 2013

Abbreviations- Assistant Technical Officer (ATO); Medical Technical Officer (MTO); Newborn Hearing Screening Programme (NHSP)

Trust	Grade	Headcount	WTE/Clinic Hours
Belfast HSC Trust	Band 2 ATO (NHSP)	7	4.05
	Band 5 MTO	8	7.5
	Band 5 MTO (Agency)	5	5.0
	Band 6 MTO	4	3.6
	Band 7 MTO	2	1.8
	Band 8A MTO	2	2.0
	Band 8B MTO	1	1.0

Trust	Grade	Headcount	WTE/Clinic Hours
Northern HSC Trust	Band 2 ATO	1	0.6
	Band 3 ATO (NHSP)	8	4.39
	Band 5 MTO	9	6.96
	Band 6 MTO	1	1.0
	Band 7 NHSP Co-ordinator (MTO)	1	0.8
	Band 7 MTO	2	2.0
	Band 8 MTO	1	1.0
Southern HSC Trust	Band 2 ATO (NHSP)	7	3.5
	Band 4 ATO	3	2
	Band 5 MTO	1	1
	Band 6 MTO	8	7
	Band 7 MTO	4	4 (inc. 0.5 dedicated to NHSP)
	Band 8a MTO	1	1
	Locum Audiologists*	2 (plus 1 'as and when required')	0.4 (plus 'as a when required')
South-Eastern HSC Trust	Band 2 ATO	2	1.06
	Band 5 MTO	5	4.54
	Band 6 MTO	3	2.63
	Band 8a MTO	1	0.2
Western HSC Trust	Band 2 ATO	1	0.42
	Band 3 ATO	1	1.0
	Band 5 MTO	4	3.33
	Band 6 MTO	6	5.5
	Band 8a MTO	2	1.88

*The Southern HSC Trust employ two locums working one day a week, and a third on an "as-and-when" basis in order to reduce waiting list time.

Audiology Staffing

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the current level of audiology staffing in each Health and Social Care Trust, including locum support.

(AQW 21682/11-15)

Mr Poots: The staffing levels requested are shown in the tables below. These figures were obtained from the Health and Social Care Trusts and have not been validated by the Department.

AQW 21681/11-15

Administrative support staff in Audiology clinics at April 2013

Trust	Grade	Headcount	WTE
Belfast HSC Trust	Band 2 Admin	1	0.38
	Band 3 Admin	2	1.2
	Band 2 Admin (agency)	3	2.0
Northern HSC Trust	Band 2 Admin	2	1.6
	Band 3 Admin	2	2.0

Trust	Grade	Headcount	WTE
Southern HSC Trust	Band 2 Admin	2	0.9
	Band 3 Admin	4	3
	Band 4 Admin	1	1
South Eastern HSC Trust	Band 2 Admin	1	1
	Band 8a Audiology Manager	1	0.8
Western HSC Trust	Band 2 Admin	1	0.5

AQW 21682/11-15**Audiology clinic staffing at April 2013**

Abbreviations- Assistant Technical Officer (ATO); Medical Technical Officer (MTO); Newborn Hearing Screening Programme (NHSP)

Trust	Grade	Headcount	WTE/Clinic Hours
Belfast HSC Trust	Band 2 ATO (NHSP)	7	4.05
	Band 5 MTO	8	7.5
	Band 5 MTO (Agency)	5	5.0
	Band 6 MTO	4	3.6
	Band 7 MTO	2	1.8
	Band 8A MTO	2	2.0
	Band 8B MTO	1	1.0
Northern HSC Trust	Band 2 ATO	1	0.6
	Band 3 ATO (NHSP)	8	4.39
	Band 5 MTO	9	6.96
	Band 6 MTO	1	1.0
	Band 7 NHSP Co-ordinator (MTO)	1	0.8
	Band 7 MTO	2	2.0
	Band 8 MTO	1	1.0
Southern HSC Trust	Band 2 ATO (NHSP)	7	3.5
	Band 4 ATO	3	2
	Band 5 MTO	1	1
	Band 6 MTO	8	7
	Band 7 MTO	4	4 (inc. 0.5 dedicated to NHSP)
	Band 8a MTO	1	1
	Locum Audiologists*	2 (plus 1 'as and when required')	0.4 (plus 'as a when required')
South-Eastern HSC Trust	Band 2 ATO	2	1.06
	Band 5 MTO	5	4.54
	Band 6 MTO	3	2.63
	Band 8a MTO	1	0.2

Trust	Grade	Headcount	WTE/Clinic Hours
Western HSC Trust	Band 2 ATO	1	0.42
	Band 3 ATO	1	1.0
	Band 5 MTO	4	3.33
	Band 6 MTO	6	5.5
	Band 8a MTO	2	1.88

*The Southern HSC Trust employ two locums working one day a week, and a third on an "as-and-when" basis in order to reduce waiting list time.

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust: Audiology Staff

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when recruitment will take place for audiology staff in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 21683/11-15)

Mr Poots: Recruitment is a matter for individual Health and Social Care Trusts based on service needs and available resources. The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust has confirmed that a recruitment exercise in Audiology is underway at present with posts currently advertised on the HSC Recruit website (as of 16/04/2013).

Royal Victoria Hospital: Audiology Clinic

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the audiology clinic at the Royal Victoria Hospital in Belfast will be relocated; and if so, what the timeline is for the relocation.

(AQW 21684/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust has advised that it has no plans to relocate the audiology clinic based at the Royal Victoria Hospital. However the Trust has also advised that it will be undertaking the installation of sound-proof booths in the audiology rooms to improve the quality of the hearing testing environment in order to meet quality standards with regards to soundproofing.

Children in Foster Care

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the percentage; and (ii) the total number of children placed with a foster carer from an independent provider, in each of the last five years; and (iii) the total cost of providing this care, broken down by each provider.

(AQW 21702/11-15)

Mr Poots: (i) and (ii)

Table A below sets out the number and percentage of children placed with an independent foster care provider at 31 March. Information is only available centrally for 2011 and 2012.

Table A Number and percentage of children placed with independent foster care providers at 31 March*

	31 March 2011	31 March 2012
Number of children placed with independent foster care provider	25	81
Number of children placed in foster care	1,862	1,946
Percentage of fostered children placed with independent foster care provider	1%	4%

Source: HSCB Delegated Statutory Functions Corporate Parenting Returns

* Please note that this covers the number of children in care at one point in time and not the total number of children during the year.

(iii) Table B shows the total cost of funding provided by the Department to Independent Foster Care Providers in each of the last five years. As a result of reconfiguration of systems and financial records under the Review of Public Administration some Trusts are unable to provide a breakdown or an analysis over 5 years in the time available.

Table B Cost of funding to Independent Foster Care Providers

Independent Provider	07/08	08/09	09/10	10/11	11/12
Action for Children	n/a	n/a	n/a	£621,084	£739,269
Barnardos	£732,060	£829,648	£717,111	£888,634	£867,971

Independent Provider	07/08	08/09	09/10	10/11	11/12
Foster Care Associates/ Core Assets	£518,572	£897,874	£1,290,850	£3,057,360	£3,196,935
Kindercare Fostering	£52,578	£108,669	£281,124	£562,500	£498,547
Perpetual Fostering	n/a	n/a	n/a	£59,279	£6,731
Total	£1,303,210	£1,836,191	£2,289,085	£5,188,857	£5,309,453

Source: HSC Trusts

Foster Care

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people have undertaken foster care, in each month of the last five years; and to detail (i) the number; and (ii) the percentage of foster carers who provided care to children at no cost to the Department during that period.

(AQW 21703/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information on the number of people who have undertaken foster care in each month of the last five years is not centrally available. Table A sets out the number of registered foster carers in each month from April 2010.

Table A Number of registered foster carers¹, April 2010 to February 2013

	Number of registered foster carers			
	2010	2011	2012	2013
January		1,960	2,004	2,105
February		1,973	2,019	2,119
March		1,969	2,010	
April	1,938	1,955	2,016	
May	1,966	1,977	2,033	
June	1,991	1,981	2,036	
July	1,953	1,967	2,046	
August	1,944	1,976	2,073	
September	1,976	1,977	2,076	
October	1,949	1,981	2,083	
November	1,942	1,995	2,093	
December	1,937	2,003	2,089	

Source: Priority 5 monitoring, Health Social Care Board

1 Foster carers may or may not have a child or children placed with them at each point in time.

(i) (ii) All registered foster carers, including kinship foster carers, in Northern Ireland receive a maintenance allowance for those children placed with them under the Model Payment Scheme. The Scheme was introduced in Northern Ireland in 2006.

Measles, Mumps and Rubella Vaccine

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what assessment has been made of the percentage of children who have not been given the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine.

(AQW 21733/11-15)

Mr Poots: In Northern Ireland, the percentage of children who had not received the first dose of MMR vaccine by the age of five years was about 3% in each of the last three years. In 2012, we were the first UK country to achieve 95% uptake by 2 years of age for the first dose. The percentage of children here who had not received the second dose of MMR vaccine by the age of five was under 10% in each of the last three years.

This high uptake and the resulting good herd immunity means that, although there are some unimmunised or incompletely immunised children, even if sporadic cases of measles occur, any resulting outbreaks are likely to be small and readily contained.

MMR can be given to individuals of any age. I would encourage parents of children who have not been given the MMR to contact their GP to ensure their children are given the best protection against these serious diseases.

Measles, Mumps and Rubella Vaccine

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action is being taken to increase the uptake amongst children of the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine.

(AQW 21734/11-15)

Mr Poots: Increasing the uptake rate of MMR vaccine has been given priority for many years in Northern Ireland and by doing so we have consistently achieved uptake rates above the UK average. In 2012 NI became the first UK country to achieve 95% uptake by 2 years of age for the first dose.

Measures that have contributed to these high rates include:

- providing high quality information and training to those health professionals who are dealing directly with parents so that they can educate them and answer their concerns;
- providing information for parents, ranging from leaflets to detailed question-and-answer briefings so that parents can choose the level of information they require;
- issuing press statements to counter misinformation, reassure parents and provide information about the vaccine and about measles, mumps and rubella;
- giving GPs, health visitors and other nurses feedback on their uptake rates, in order to help those who encounter lower rates to find ways to raise them including visiting practices with comparatively low rates and discussing ways of improving; and
- running workshops for areas with comparatively low rates.

The Public Health Agency closely monitors the number of cases of measles in Northern Ireland and takes appropriate action where necessary.

Eating Disorders

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what specialised (i) services; (ii) facilities; and (iii) staff are available for treating people with eating disorders, in each Health and Social Care Trust area.

(AQW 21744/11-15)

Mr Poots: Eating Disorder Services are provided by specialist community-based teams in each Health & Social Care Trust area. The Belfast Trust provides these services for the South Eastern Trust. In addition to the Health Service provision a number of voluntary and community groups also provide valuable support services.

Since 2010 adult inpatient treatment for eating disorders has been provided in each Trust area. These beds are managed by specially trained medical/psychiatric staff, supported on an in-reach basis by staff from community based eating disorder teams.

Inpatient care for children and adolescents with eating disorders is provided at Beechcroft, the Regional Child and Adolescent Mental Health Inpatient Unit, which has a consultant who specialises in the treatment of eating disorders.

The Eating Disorder teams include Consultant Psychiatrists, Eating Therapists and Dieticians.

Eating Disorders

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people in each Health and Social Care Trust area have been diagnosed with anorexia nervosa or bulimia nervosa, in each of the last five years; and how the most recent annual figure available compares to (i) 10; and (ii) 20 years ago.

(AQW 21745/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information is not available centrally on the number of people diagnosed with anorexia nervosa or bulimia nervosa.

However information is available on the number of admissions to a HSC Trusts in Northern Ireland with a diagnosis of either anorexia nervosa or bulimia nervosa in each of the last five years.

HSC Trust	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Belfast	19	36	27	22	31
South Eastern	17	21	22	35	25
Northern	15	19	12	20	21
Southern	3	10	11	10	17
Western	16	12	14	27	19
NI Total	70	98	86	114	113

Source:- Hospital Inpatient System

Note that the figures shown above exclude anyone admitted under a mental health specialty.

It is possible to compare the number of admissions to hospital with a diagnosis of either anorexia nervosa or bulimia nervosa in 2011/12 to the number admitted in 2001/02. However information is not available for the 1991/92 year.

HSC Trust	2001/02	2011/12
Belfast	25	31
South Eastern	10	25
Northern	28	21
Southern	18	17
Western	6	19
NI Total	87	113

Source:- Hospital Inpatient System

Note that the figures shown above exclude anyone admitted under a mental health specialty.

The following International Classification of Diseases 10th Revision (ICD10) codes were used to identify admissions with a diagnosis of anorexia nervosa or bulimia nervosa, in any diagnostic position:-

F50.0 – Anorexia Nervosa

F50.2 – Bulimia Nervosa

Looked-after Children and Young People

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how he ensures that all young people and their families receive the appropriate support under looked after children and young persons plans.
(AQW 21754/11-15)

Mr Poots: There are a number of mechanisms already in place by which my Department ensures that all looked after children and young people and their families receive appropriate support. These include a statutory process of review of all children looked after by Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts, voluntary organisations or in a privately run registered children's homes. In addition, a Scheme for the Delegation of Statutory Functions is in place. Under that Scheme, HSC Trusts are required to report to the Health and Social Care Board on their performance in respect of all of their statutory functions, including those functions which relate to looked after children. In turn, the HSC Board is required to report to the Department on an annual basis on the HSC Trusts' performance of its statutory functions.

We are in the process of strengthening current arrangements by way of the development of standards and regulations; including Minimum Standards for Children's Homes and Fostering Services Standards and Regulations. It is also intended that the Adoption and Children Bill, scheduled for introduction in the Assembly next year, will include provision which will place the current system of looked after children care planning on a statutory basis.

Finally, my Department's Commissioning Plan Direction to the HSC Board requires it to ensure that statutory responsibility to assess the needs, safeguard, protect and support vulnerable groups will be met. It also requires that the Board's Commissioning Plan demonstrates how the HSC Trusts, as corporate parents, will be expected to meet the specific needs of looked after children by providing high quality enduring placements for them and supporting their transition out of care and into adult life.

Paediatric Congenital Cardiac Services

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when he will make an announcement on the future of paediatric congenital cardiac services in Belfast.
(AQW 21773/11-15)

Mr Poots: Following public consultation the Paediatric Congenital Cardiac Surgical services (PCCS) Working Group, established by the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB), produced a post-consultation framework which identified 8 options for the future commissioning of PCCS for Northern Ireland. The Working Group has been asked to consider these options and recommend to the HSCB a preferred way forward (PWF) for the future commissioning of this service. It is expected that the HSCB will receive the recommended PWF later this month and if it is approved by the Board it will be forwarded to my Department for consideration by me. I am aiming to announce my final decision on the arrangements for the future commissioning of PCCS services shortly after receiving the Board's recommendation.

Cancelled Surgical Appointments

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an estimate of the cost to the public purse of surgical appointments being cancelled at short notice, through no fault of the patients; and what steps he plans to take

to ensure that Health and Social Care Trusts improve their performance in this regard and that patients will no longer be inconvenienced by short notice cancellations.

(AQW 21798/11-15)

Mr Poots: It is currently not possible to quantify the cost to the public purse of outpatient appointments cancelled by hospitals as not all clinics recorded as being cancelled result in a loss of capacity.

The Integrated Elective Access Protocol (IEAP) requires consultants to give at least six weeks notice of planned annual or study leave. Compliance with the protocol reduces the likelihood of hospital cancellations at short notice as Trusts can be confident that planned clinics will take place. It should be noted however, that there will always be occasions when short notice hospital cancellations are unavoidable if, for example, a consultant becomes unavailable due to sickness, bereavement etc.

The position in relation to the number of outpatient appointments cancelled by hospitals has improved over the last four years, from 12.5% in 2008/09 to 10.8% in 2011/12 which indicates measures are having a positive impact.

Foster Care

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to list each independent foster carer provider which his Department has funded; and for a breakdown of the funding provided in each month of the last five years.

(AQW 21800/11-15)

Mr Poots: Independent foster care providers funded by Health and Social Care Trusts over the last five years are:

Independent Provider	07/08	08/09	09/10	10/11	11/12
Action for Children	n/a	n/a	n/a	£621,084	£739,269
Barnardos	£732,060	£829,648	£717,111	£888,634	£867,971
Foster Care Associates/Core Assets	£518,572	£897,874	£1,290,850	£3,057,360	£3,196,935
KinderCare Fostering	£52,578	£108,669	£281,124	£562,500	£498,547
Perpetual Fostering	n/a	n/a	n/a	£59,279	£6,731

Where relevant, a breakdown of the funding provided on a monthly basis over the last five years is attached separately. As a result of reconfiguration of systems and financial records under the Review of Public Administration, some Trusts are unable to provide a detailed breakdown or an analysis over 5 years in the time available.

Action for Children

	07/08	08/09	09/10	10/11	11/12
April	£0	£0	£0	£6,351	£42,053
May	£0	£0	£0	£0	£66,976
June	£0	£0	£0	£72,758	£62,222
July	£0	£0	£0	£24,876	£72,864
Aug	£0	£0	£0	£19,124	£52,790
Sept	£0	£0	£0	£62,896	£53,179
Oct	£0	£0	£0	£52,094	£90,315
Nov	£0	£0	£0	£143,582	£75,702
Dec	£0	£0	£0	£49,069	£42,125
Jan	£0	£0	£0	£95,085	£68,299
Feb	£0	£0	£0	£50,199	£54,422
Mar	£0	£0	£0	£45,051	£58,322
Total	£0	£0	£0	£621,084	£739,269

Barnardos

	07/08	08/09	09/10	10/11	11/12
April	£61,486	£64,410	£57,036	£68,015	£62,883
May	£51,808	£11,351	£58,742	£83,742	£75,414
June	£92,782	£89,251	£59,602	£66,724	£71,821
July	£60,634	£45,677	£58,813	£80,861	£74,726
Aug	£78,158	£46,583	£59,029	£63,582	£82,626
Sept	£25,156	£171,193	£60,176	£99,504	£71,810
Oct	£72,506	£59,383	£64,035	£74,917	£70,473
Nov	£70,317	£54,548	£61,540	£79,856	£72,008
Dec	£145,829	£105,393	£63,667	£63,791	£73,941
Jan	£50,915	£45,806	£58,921	£73,372	£73,941
Feb	£14,236	£54,741	£59,156	£8,469	£64,336
Mar	£8,233	£81,312	£56,394	£125,802	£73,992
Total	£732,060	£829,648	£717,111	£888,634	£867,971

Foster Care Associates/Core Assets

	07/08	08/09	09/10	10/11	11/12
April	£90	£4,819	£2,235	£177,256	£133,261
May	£93	£52	£158,865	£193,080	£309,109
June	£15,918	£0	£118,441	£186,304	£216,904
July	£9,393	£55,974	£118,337	£215,887	£230,601
Aug	£9,172	£4,949	£45,072	£178,913	£218,014
Sept	£5,309	£14,411	£167,228	£180,198	£188,688
Oct	£0	£5,088	£133,246	£191,181	£186,864
Nov	£4,984	£83,608	£14,267	£193,639	£314,907
Dec	£5,903	£48,197	£199,100	£178,477	£210,186
Jan	£4,911	£59,978	£72,905	£363,024	£200,780
Feb	£9,949	£54,285	£103,230	£135,339	£222,964
Mar	£97	£92,904	£54,761	£271,791	£289,251
Sub Total	£65,817	£424,266	£1,187,687	£2,465,088	£2,721,529
	£452,755*	£455,608*	£103,163*	£592,272*	£475,406*
Total	£518,572	£879,874	£1,290,850	£3,057,360	£3,196,935

* Figures cannot be broken down by month.

Kindercare Fostering

	07/08	08/09	09/10	10/11	11/12
April	£0	£60	£12,706	£25,463	£38,414
May	£0	£0	£13,145	£36,046	£63,634
June	£0	£6,129	£33,641	£63,478	£51,191
July	£0	£18,572	£13,599	£45,236	£48,684
Aug	£0	£0	£20,677	£60,802	£55,100
Sept	£0	£18,555	£27,572	£76,027	£4,441

	07/08	08/09	09/10	10/11	11/12
Oct	£0	£0	£23,657	£2,997	£67,832
Nov	£297	£277	£16,693	£39,529	£34,816
Dec	£6,592	£12,711	£30,824	£22,537	£28,379
Jan	£989	£12,504	£27,319	£99,410	£51,031
Feb	£6,129	£18,756	£32,191	£4,922	£36,182
Mar	£5,734	£12,009	£27,323	£86,053	£17,278
Sub Total	£19,741	£99,574	£279,345	£447,765	£496,984
	£32,837*	£9,095*	£1,779*	£0	£1,563*
Total	£52,578	£108,669	£281,124	£562,500	£498,547

* Figures cannot be broken down by month

Perpetual Fostering Ltd

	07/08	08/09	09/10	10/11	11/12
April	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0
May	£0	£0	£0	£0	£6,713
June	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0
July	£0	£0	£0	£6,514	£0
Aug	£0	£0	£0	£6,713	£0
Sept	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0
Oct	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0
Nov	£0	£0	£0	£19,977	£0
Dec	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0
Jan	£0	£0	£0	£13,246	£0
Feb	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0
Mar	£0	£0	£0	£12,811	£0
Total	£0	£0	£0	£59,279	£6,731

Alzheimer's Society 'Low Expectations' Report

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of the findings of the February 2013 Alzheimer's Society 'Low Expectations' report, whether he will consider advising care homes in the statutory, voluntary and private sectors to use 'This is Me' as a means of supporting people with dementia to live well while resident in care homes in all the Health and Social Care Trusts.

(AQW 21806/11-15)

Mr Poots: You will be aware that I published the regional Dementia Strategy in November 2011. The importance of providing care for the whole person, with awareness of the person's background, history and personal preferences, is acknowledged within the strategy.

The Alzheimer's Society has representation on the Dementia Strategy Implementation Group, which is co-chaired by the HSCB and PHA, and which is tasked with implementing the actions from the regional Dementia Strategy.

The Alzheimer's Society is ideally placed to bring tools, such as "This is me" forward for consideration by the Group as they work towards improving the care and support provided to people living with dementia.

Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm Screening Programme

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, following the introduction of the abdominal aortic aneurysm screening programme in June 2012 for men aged 65 and over, to outline the early results of the tests.

(AQW 21820/11-15)

Mr Poots: The aim of the Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm (AAA) screening programme is to reduce AAA-related mortality by providing a systematic population-based screening programme for men in the year they turn 65 and, on request, for men over 65. Research shows that screening men aged 65, using an ultrasound scan, will reduce the death rate from ruptured AAAs by around 50%.

Since the introduction of the Northern Ireland AAA Screening Programme in June 2012, just over 6,000 men have been screened, giving an uptake rate of 82%. Eighty six men have been detected with an AAA. Aneurysms only require treatment when they reach 5.5cms. Twelve of the aneurysms identified have been 5.5 cm and over. Men with an AAA less than 5.5 cm are kept under surveillance by the programme.

Stroke Lysis Treatment

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many times, in the last twelve months, a patient at the (i) Causeway Hospital; and (ii) Antrim Area Hospital, who suffered a stroke, did not receive stroke lysis treatment despite being in the hospital within the three hour time frame required for treatment.

(AQW 21822/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) For the twelve months April 2012 – March 2013 42 patients presented at Causeway Hospital within the 3 hour timeframe required for stroke lysis treatment but did not receive stroke lysis treatment. All of the patients had been assessed for their suitability for stroke lysis treatment but were deemed unsuitable due to contraindications.
- (ii) For the twelve months April 2012 – March 2013 72 patients presented at Antrim Area Hospital within the 3 hour timeframe required for stroke lysis treatment but did not receive stroke lysis treatment. All of the patients had been assessed for their suitability for stroke lysis treatment but were deemed unsuitable due to contraindications.

Antrim Area Hospital and Causeway Hospital: Accident and Emergency

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety on how many occasions in the last twelve months a Serious Adverse Incident was deemed to have occurred at the (i) Causeway Hospital; and (ii) Antrim Area Hospital due to the capacity or staffing in Accident and Emergency and hospital wards.

(AQW 21824/11-15)

Mr Poots: Since 1 May 2010, Health and Social Care (HSC) organisations have been required to report to the HSC Board any Serious Adverse Incident relating to the services they provide. Prior to that date, incidents were reported to the Department.

The total number of Serious Adverse Incidents reported to the Health and Social Care Board due to the capacity or staffing in Accident and Emergency and hospital wards in the last twelve months by (i) Causeway Hospital is one; and (ii) Antrim Area Hospital is two.

Oakridge Social Education Centre, Dungannon

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the cost per capita for people with disabilities attending Oakridge Social Education Centre, Dungannon.

(AQW 21833/11-15)

Mr Poots: The estimated budgeted cost per capita (i.e. per place) in Oakridge Social Education Centre for 2012/13 was approximately £12,500.

Older People: Learning Disabilities

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what progress has been made (i) in improving services and plans for future service provision for older people with a learning disability and their families, including having up to date and accurate information about their needs and wishes; and (ii) early planning to minimise the need for crisis interventions and reviewing funding allocations to take account of the increasing numbers of older people with a learning disability.

(AQW 21841/11-15)

Mr Poots: Planning for the future needs of older people with a learning disability and their families is a priority for the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) and HSC Trusts.

- (i) The recently published (March 2013) Bamford Action Plan 2012- 2015 requires the HSCB and the Trusts to carry out a scoping exercise to enable drawing up of plans for services aimed at meeting older parents'/carers' needs. To this end, the Trusts have been asked to identify numbers of older carers in their area. These returns will be considered at the May meeting of the Bamford Learning Disability Sub Group and thereafter, costed plans will be developed.
- (ii) These actions will improve needs assessment and planning to inform the future commissioning of services to meet growing service demands. There will also be further development of services in the community to include short break/ respite services, additional domiciliary support and leisure and social activities e.g. – caring breaks models.

The HSC will continue to work with the NI Housing Executive to address the housing and support needs of those living with disabilities.

Older People: Learning Disabilities

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what services are in place to support older people with a learning disability who, because of their age, will no longer receive day services.

(AQW 21842/11-15)

Mr Poots: There are no plans to cease day services for people with a learning disability on the basis of their age.

The Health and Social Care Board has advised that services for people with a learning disability are commissioned and delivered on the basis that it is a lifelong condition.

A key priority for the Board is to respond to the growing number of older people with a learning disability across a range of needs. This includes day services and day opportunities which are more age appropriate, and short breaks which benefit the individual and their carer.

Older People: Learning Disabilities

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has to work with the Minister for Social Development to minimise the need for crisis moves by identifying and responding early to the housing and support needs of older people with a learning disability and their families.

(AQW 21844/11-15)

Mr Poots: I recognise the importance of transition planning for older people with a learning disability and their families. Housing needs and associated care and support has to be planned and based on the specific needs of individuals.

Through the Inter-Departmental Ministerial Group on Bamford and 1:1 meetings, I will continue to work with my ministerial colleagues on these issues. Co-operation is ongoing through the Supporting People Commissioning Body and Local Area Supporting People Partnerships, which are composed of both HSC and Housing representatives, working closely to meet the needs of those with a learning disability and also other groups of people with social housing needs.

In addition to this, the HSC Board and the NI Housing Executive co-chair a Mental Health and Learning Disability Community Integration Project. The primary function of which is to plan housing with care for adults with a learning disability and/or mental health needs, who wish to live independently. The work of this group will be shaped by a scoping exercise on needs.

Registered Day Nurseries: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to list the name and capacity of each registered day nursery in North Down.

(AQW 21849/11-15)

Mr Poots: There are currently 18 day nurseries registered in the North Down constituency, with 835 places. The location and maximum number of places at each nursery is listed in the table at Annex A.

Annex A

Day Nurseries and Registered Places in the North Down Constituency

Name	Post Code	Places
Rockport School Day Nursery	BT18 0DD	40
Glencraig Integrated Children's Centre Day Nursery	BT18 0DJ	40
Merdyn Day Nursery	BT18 9DF	66
Oakey Dokey Day Care	BT18 9EL	36
Tiggers Palace Day Nursery	BT18 9RD	59
Bright Beginnings Day Nursery	BT19 1RB	47
Little Bears Day Nursery	BT19 6EU	46
Primacy Day Nursery	BT19 7PQ	20
Little Stars Private Day Nursery	BT19 7PU	52
Stepping Stones Day Nursery	BT20 3EQ	53
Cabbage Patch Private Day Nursery	BT20 4JZ	40

Name	Post Code	Places
Blue Bell Lodge Private Day Nursery	BT20 4QU	62
Big Red Balloon	BT20 4RG	36
Country Kids Day Nursery	BT21 0LJ	67
Happy Days Day Nursery	BT21 0PZ	60
Happy Days Day Nursery	BT23 7PT	41
Playhouse Day Nursery	BT23 7PT	50
Little Kingdom Kids	BT20 5EX	20
	Total	835

Prisons: Illicit Drug Trading

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 21082/11-15, for his assessment of these dispensing arrangements in terms of tackling illicit drug trading in prisons.

(AQW 21857/11-15)

Mr Poots: As outlined previously in AQW 21082/11-15, the current arrangements for the distribution of prescription medicines to prisoners are based on the Department of Health / HM Prison Service document "A Pharmacy Service for Prisoners" (2003) and aims to meet the HM Inspectorate of Prisons Expectation no. 39 which states "Prisoners are cared for by a pharmacy service which assesses and meets their needs and is equivalent to that in the community."

The South Eastern H&SC Trust (SET) is working closely with the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) to address the issue of illicit drug use in prisons.

In respect of the trading of prescription medications, the SET has taken a number of steps to tackle the problem:

- In September 2012, within HMP Hydebank Wood and HMP Magilligan, the SET moved a number of highly tradable prescription medications onto its list of those medications which can only be administered directly to a prisoner by nursing staff ("supervised swallow"). This initiative has proven very successful and has removed these highly tradable medications from the prison environment at these establishments.
- Following the successful introduction of this policy in HMP Hydebank Wood and HMP Magilligan, the SET and Northern Ireland Prison Service are now working towards its implementation in HMP Maghaberry.
- A successful pilot scheme in Lagan House, using a new 'medication' room to ease pressures on the existing treatment room, was completed in March 2013 and this will now be implemented throughout HMP Maghaberry. On completion of this work, the Trust will move all tradable medications prescribed in HMP Maghaberry onto the "supervised swallow" list.
- A number of initiatives are also being considered by SET's Primary Care GPs to reduce the prescribing of these tradable medications in the prison environment in line with the RCGP guidelines 'Safer Prescribing in Prisons' (2011).

Antrim Area Hospital: Accident and Emergency

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given that Antrim Area Hospital Accident and Emergency Department was designed to deal with 30,000 patients per year but receives 72,000 patients per year, what additional resources have been made available to staff in the Accident and Emergency Department.

(AQW 21876/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Health and Social Care Board has made significant additional funding available to the Northern Health and Social Care Trust to improve emergency care performance at Antrim Area Hospital. Additional resources have been allocated to provide additional staff, implement an Emergency Department Action Plan and address winter pressures.

The Northern Trust has advised that since 2010/11, bed capacity at Antrim Area Hospital has increased by 25% and medical staffing levels in Medicine and Surgery have increased. The emergency consultant complement has increased from four to eight, and non-consultant grade doctors have increased from one to four. The nursing staff complement has increased from 54.89wte nurses to 60.89wte. There has also been investment in bank, agency and overtime nursing to support the emergency department in dealing with significant pressures. A new 24 bed ward opened on 17 April 2013 which will improve waiting times for people who need to be admitted to hospital from the emergency department and allow expansion of the Medical Assessment Unit.

Despite this investment, there are significant space constraints within the current emergency department which can impact adversely on patient flow within the department. A new £9 million state of the art emergency department has been constructed which will cater for up to 90,000 attendances a year. The new unit is expected to be operational from 26 June 2013.

Cancer Rates

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the cancer rates in each District Electoral Area in each of the last five years, broken down by type of cancer.

(AQW 21890/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested is not available.

The data requested does not have large enough numbers to provide robust and meaningful comparisons.

Antrim Area Hospital: Accident and Emergency

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the new Accident and Emergency Department for the Antrim Area Hospital, including when the facility will be operational.

(AQW 21895/11-15)

Mr Poots: Work on the new Accident and Emergency Department is nearing completion and the facility is expected to be handed over to the Northern Trust on 29 April 2013. The new unit is due to be operational from 26 June 2013.

Mid Ulster Hospital: Programmes of Care

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to list the Programmes of Care that were available in the Mid Ulster Hospital for (i) inpatients; (ii) day cases; and (iii) outpatients as of (a) 31 March 2012; and (b) 31 March 2013.

(AQW 21905/11-15)

Mr Poots: In the 2011/12 and 2012/13 financial years, the Mid Ulster Hospital provided services within the Programmes of Care indicated in the table below.

	2011/12	2012/13
Inpatients	Acute Programme of Care Elderly Care Programme of Care	Acute Programme of Care Elderly Care Programme of Care
Day cases	Acute Programme of Care	Acute Programme of Care
Outpatients	Acute Programme of Care Maternity and Child Health Programme of Care	Acute Programme of Care Maternity and Child Health Programme of Care

A breakdown of the specialties provided at the Mid Ulster Hospital is published on the Department's website at www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/hospital-stats.htm

Muckamore Abbey Hospital

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many staff were recruited to work at Muckamore Abbey Hospital in 2011-12.

(AQW 21932/11-15)

Mr Poots: Staff recruited to Muckamore Abbey Hospital during the specified period is detailed in the table below. This information has been supplied by the Belfast HSC Trust and has not been validated by the Department.

Grade	Headcount	WTE
Admin & Clerical Band 3	2	1.80
Domestic Services Band 2	8	3.96
Laundry Worker Band 1	1	0.80
Learning Disability Social Worker Support Band 5	3	3.00
Learning Disability Nurse Band 5	12	12.00
Learning Disability Nurse Band 6	2	2.00
Mental Health Nurse Band 6	1	1.00
Nurse Manager Band 8B	1	1.00
Total	30	25.56

General Anaesthetic

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) to what extent are patients, who have received surgery requiring a general anaesthetic, discharged the same day as admission; (ii) under what circumstances is this the preferred option; (iii) whether these patients can elect to be discharged on the same day; and (iv) to outline the benefits to the patient and the facility of a same day discharge.

(AQW 21961/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) This information is not available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.
- (ii) The decision about when day case surgery is the preferred option will depend on both the operation and the patient. Many procedures are suitable for day surgery, and both the British Association of Day Surgery and the Audit Commission have suggested lists of procedures which could normally be undertaken as day surgery. The Patients will be assessed for any underlying condition that would make day surgery inappropriate.
- (ii) Any decision of the fitness of a patient to be discharged the same day is a matter of clinical judgement, which rests with clinicians responsible for their care.
- (iv) If procedures are carried out as daycases this will ensure more efficient utilisation of staff and resources. The higher bed turnover will improve occupancy rates, reduce the number of hospital admissions and will positively impact on waiting lists, so enhancing the patient experience.

Congenital Cardiac Services

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the review of congenital cardiac services in Belfast.

(AQW 21989/11-15)

Mr Poots: Following public consultation the Paediatric Congenital Cardiac Surgical services (PCCS) Working Group, established by the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB), produced a post-consultation framework which identified 8 options for the future commissioning of PCCS for Northern Ireland. The Working Group has been asked to consider these options and recommend to the HSCB a preferred way forward (PWF) for the future commissioning of this service. This will be considered by the Board on 25 April 2013 and, if approved, the PWF will be forwarded to my Department for consideration by me. I am aiming to announce my final decision on the arrangements for the future commissioning of PCCS services shortly after receiving the Board's recommendation.

Suicide Prevention Co-Ordinator: East Belfast

Mr Copeland asked Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the progress of the proposed appointment of a Suicide Prevention Co-Ordinator for east Belfast.

(AQW 22001/11-15)

Mr Poots: Senior staff in the Public Health Agency have reviewed East Belfast Community Development Agency's (EBCDA) proposal for an additional Suicide Prevention Co-ordinator for east Belfast. After discussion with colleagues from the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust and the Health and Social Care Board, it was agreed that clarification was required from EBCDA on a number of issues in their application. The Public Health Agency wrote to the Chair of EBCDA on 17 April 2013 to seek a meeting. A date has not yet been finalised for this meeting.

Antrim Area Hospital: Accident and Emergency

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of the seven consultants' concerns regarding the safety of the Accident and Emergency Department at Antrim Area Hospital, for an update on the situation.

(AQW 22069/11-15)

Mr Poots: I visited Antrim Area Hospital on Monday 22 April 2013 to hear at first hand the consultants' concerns. I am advised by the Northern Health and Social Care Trust that it is working with the emergency department consultants to mitigate the potential risks within the hospital's emergency department. The Trust has put in place a range of measures to ensure patient safety at the emergency department including: expanding the Medical Assessment Unit which allows GPs direct access to specialist assessment beds; increasing support for triage and reviewing and strengthening the escalation process; and, making further investment in nursing staff and increasing paediatric support. The Trust is also looking at improvements in other areas of the hospital to help improve patient flows in and through the emergency department.

Department of Justice

Sexual Offences Prevention Orders

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to Joseph McCabe, to detail (i) whether he took part in any treatment programs whilst in custody; (ii) when he was released from prison; (iii) the terms of his release/licence; (iv) which agencies were tasked with monitoring him after release; and (v) whether he has breached any terms of release and/or Sexual Offences Prevention Orders on any occasion since his release.

(AQW 21379/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): Disclosure of information relating to Mr McCabe's attendance at treatment programs whilst in custody would be contrary to the Data Protection Act 1998.

Mr McCabe was released from prison on 17 February 2013 and was being monitored by PBNi who took recent breach action.

Mr McCabe was sentenced under Article 26 of the Criminal Justice Order (NI) 1996 which required him to serve a period of time in custody followed by a period of time on a supervised licence in the community. Licencing conditions are individually tailored to manage each offender and therefore cannot be disclosed under the Data Protection Act.

Prisoner Riots: Televisions

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 19335/11-15, whether any televisions have been destroyed as a result of prisoner riots, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 21390/11-15)

Mr Ford: I refer the Member to my response to AQW/20188/11-15.

Prison Service: Code of Conduct and Discipline

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 20453/11-15 and AQW 19382/11-15 and given that a number of staff were suspended for up to thirty months each, to detail (i) why all cases are not given precedence in terms of reaching speedy conclusions, commensurate with Code of the Conduct and Discipline timecales, legislative requirements and procedures; and (ii) whether the Northern Ireland Prison Service will implement procedures to ensure that timescales are adhered to, so the length of suspensions are kept to the minimum and that Prison Service funding is spent with care and propriety whilst treating staff fairly and reasonably.

(AQW 21392/11-15)

Mr Ford:

- (i) The Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) deals with disciplinary cases as quickly as possible taking account of any relevant issues which may cause delay.
- (ii) The new disciplinary system, which is shortly to be introduced for NIPS staff, will introduce new procedures with regard to the suspension of employees.

Data Protection Act 1998: Disclosure of Requested Information

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 19382/11-15, to detail the section of the Data Protection Act 1998 that prevents the disclosure of the requested information.

(AQW 21450/11-15)

Mr Ford: The data protection principles as mentioned at Section 4, and detailed within Schedule 1, of the Data Protection Act 1998 prevent the Northern Ireland Prison Service from disclosing the information the Member has sought.

Flags at Courthouses

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether the requirements for flying flags at courthouses is contained within the assignment instructions for contracted staff.

(AQW 21451/11-15)

Mr Ford: I can confirm that the requirements for flying flags at courthouses are contained within the assignment instructions and operational management instructions for contracted staff.

Legal Aid Costs

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether Legal Aid was granted to the individual to pursue case number 12/079265/01 at East Tyrone Magistrates Court; and to detail the Legal Aid and all other costs incurred on his behalf in this case.

(AQW 21455/11-15)

Mr Ford: There is no record of legal aid being granted under case number 12/079265/01

Legal Aid Application Criteria

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Justice to outline the Legal Aid application criteria for applicants with financial assets. (AQW 21459/11-15)

Mr Ford: The legal aid criteria varies depending on the legal aid scheme to which the application applies.

Criminal legal aid is granted by the court, under Part III of the Legal Aid, Advice and Assistance (Northern Ireland) Order 1981, and subject to two tests, the means test and the merits test. The means test requires the judge to determine whether the defendant has sufficient means to mount his own defence in circumstances where legal representation is necessary. There is currently no fixed financial limit applied to the means test. The merits test requires the judge to determine whether the interests of justice require that the defendant be legally represented. If these tests are satisfied the court can grant criminal legal aid.

In civil proceedings, legal aid is granted by the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission in accordance with means and merits criteria as set out in the Legal Aid Advice and Assistance (Northern Ireland) Order 1981, the Legal Advice and Assistance Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1981 and the Legal Aid (Assessment of Resources) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1981.

For Legal Advice and Assistance the disposable capital limit is £1,000. Applicants with disposable capital above this limit are ineligible for funding.

For Assistance by Way of Representation the disposable capital limit is £3,000. Applicants with disposable capital above this limit are ineligible for funding unless they are on income support, income based job seekers allowance, guaranteed state pension credit, or income related employment and support allowance.

For Civil Legal Aid the lower disposable capital limit is £3,000 with an upper disposable capital limit of £6,750 which is increased to £8,560 in personal injury claims. Applicants with disposable capital above the upper limit are ineligible for funding. Applicants with disposable capital below £3,000 may be granted free Civil Legal Aid, whereas applicants between the two thresholds may be granted funding but be liable for contributions towards the costs of their Civil Legal Aid.

Republican Action Against Drugs

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice why there is a variance within some court divisions in respect of persons seeking reporting restrictions due to alleged threats from Republican Action Against Drugs; and whether the law on reporting restrictions is open to interpretation. (AQW 21493/11-15)

Mr Ford: The application and interpretation of legislation covering reporting restrictions is an issue for the trial judge taking account of the details of each individual case.

Agency Staff

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether agencies that are contracted to provide staffing and services to his Department, are compliant with all regulations, particularly in employment matters, which the Department practises. (AQW 21499/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department of Justice follows the procurement guidance as laid out by the Central Procurement Directorate (CPD), Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) which is a Centre of Procurement Excellence (CoPE).

Contractors appointed by CPD, Supplies and Services Division, to deliver services are contractually obliged to comply with all legislation and good practice pertaining to their industry.

Prison Service Trust Outreach Workers

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the effectiveness and importance of Prison Service Trust outreach workers. (AQW 21521/11-15)

Mr Ford: Any assessment of the effectiveness and importance of Prison Service Trust Outreach Workers is a matter for the Board of Directors of the Prison Service Trust.

Public Prosecution Guidelines

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice whether he has plans to introduce public prosecution guidelines to ensure that individuals who have committed serious offences involving sexual or violent crimes are sentenced appropriately. (AQW 21529/11-15)

Mr Ford: The issue of guidelines for the prosecution of offences is a matter for the Director of Public Prosecutions. A Code for Prosecutors, available on the PPS website, provides guidance on the general principles to be applied in determining, in any case, whether criminal proceedings should be instituted.

Where criminal proceedings are instituted, the legislative framework provides a range of disposals for those convicted of sexual or violent crimes. Determining the appropriate sentence within this framework is a matter for the judiciary.

The Policing Board has a statutory responsibility to ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of the PSNI. It is for the Board to determine how best to exercise its authority in this regard in holding the Chief Constable to account.

Public Prosecution Guidelines

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice whether he has plans to meet with the Policing Board to ensure that police officers are not merely cautioning individuals who have committed serious sexual or violent offences.

(AQW 21531/11-15)

Mr Ford: The issue of guidelines for the prosecution of offences is a matter for the Director of Public Prosecutions. A Code for Prosecutors, available on the PPS website, provides guidance on the general principles to be applied in determining, in any case, whether criminal proceedings should be instituted.

Where criminal proceedings are instituted, the legislative framework provides a range of disposals for those convicted of sexual or violent crimes. Determining the appropriate sentence within this framework is a matter for the judiciary.

The Policing Board has a statutory responsibility to ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of the PSNI. It is for the Board to determine how best to exercise its authority in this regard in holding the Chief Constable to account.

Policing and Community Safety Partnerships

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) how much funding will be made available through the Policing and Community Safety Partnerships for 2013/14; (ii) the purpose of the funding; and (iii) how can communities access this funding. (AQW 21538/11-15)

Mr Ford: Just over £5.1m is being provided jointly by my Department and the Policing Board to fund the Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs) in 2013/14. It is worth adding, however, that many PCSPs also attract match-funding from their local councils or other sources.

The purpose of this funding is to support the PCSPs in the implementation of their local action plans, which are aimed at improving community safety by tackling crime and anti-social behaviour, and supporting community confidence in policing by working in partnership with communities to ensure local accountability.

The Action Plans may include funding for community-based projects; however, the decision on how funding is accessed and allocated is the responsibility of each PCSP, on the basis of consultation, community engagement and research carried out to identify local priorities.

In addition to funding for delivery against PCSP Action Plans, my Department will also be providing, through PCSPs, additional funding, in the region of £100,000 for Priority Youth Interventions. This initiative is aimed at providing programmes during the summer, and at high risk times, to engage young people in a range of diversionary, intervention and developmental activities.

Finally, in 2011/2012 and 2012/2013 approximately £500,000 was also made available to PCSPs from the Assets Recovery Community Scheme (ARCS). As the money for ARCS is derived from criminal confiscation receipts, it is not possible to know in advance the quantum of funding which may be available in any given year; however, it is my intention that the PCSPs will be able to make bids to ARCS during the 2013/14 period.

Translation Services: DOJ Spend

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Justice how much his Department spent on translation services for visiting foreign nationals in each of the last five years.

(AQW 21562/11-15)

Mr Ford: Expenditure on translation services for visiting foreign nationals cannot be provided as the Department and its Agencies does not record translation costs in a way that makes this possible.

Prisoner Release

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice which agencies deemed Kenneth Douglas fit for release on 23 April 2012 having already been returned to custody on 12 March 2010; and whether therapy afforded to him and his wife was considered, on both occasions, when a decision was made regarding the release.

(AQW 21614/11-15)

Mr Ford: I refer the Member to the response I provided to AQW 20041/11-15.

All information available would have been considered by the multi disciplinary case conference when making decisions regarding the release of Mr Douglas.

Prisoner Deaths in Custody

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 18760/11-15, to detail (i) the number of prisoner deaths in custody between 1 January 2008 and 31 March 2013 and in how many of those cases the Prisoner Ombudsman recommended that disciplinary investigations be conducted; (ii) the number of cases arising from complaints made by prisoners; and (iii) the number of death in custody and other cases into which the Northern Ireland Prison Service conducted investigations of its own accord.

(AQW 21615/11-15)

Mr Ford: There have been 31 deaths recorded by NIPS between 1 January 2008 and 31 March 2013. Although two deaths occurred while the prisoner was on release from the prison, NIPS still record them as the Prisoner Ombudsman is required to complete an investigation.

Of the investigations completed, the Prisoner Ombudsman has recommended that disciplinary investigations be conducted in one case.

The Prisoner Ombudsman has made four recommendations for disciplinary investigations arising from complaints received from prisoners during the aforementioned dates.

NIPS conducted two further investigations of its own accord having received death in custody reports and will continue to do this in all cases where there is alleged or suspected misconduct.

Prison Service: Code of Conduct and Discipline

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 21068/11-15 given that the Code of Conduct Discipline and the Northern Ireland Prison Service Managers Discipline Handbook has not been updated to meet legislative requirements and that appeals by prison staff continue to be upheld on the grounds that dismissal decisions by the Northern Ireland Prison Service were unfair and that procedures are not being followed, to detail the basis for his satisfaction.

(AQW 21616/11-15)

Mr Ford: As previously stated, I am satisfied that prison staff are, and will be, afforded the necessary safeguards throughout the disciplinary process.

With any disciplinary system there will always be cases that are upheld on appeal.

RUC Reserve Gratuity Fund

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Justice for an update on RUC Reserve Gratuity Fund and his he plans for the £392,000 remaining in the fund.

(AQW 21617/11-15)

Mr Ford: This residue will be retained until the Department is confident that no further payments may be made. No decisions have yet been taken on how the residue can and should be used, but my Department is considering a number of options.

Prisoner Granted Temporary Leave

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 20234/11-15, whether the prisoner was able to obtain temporary release from the Prisoner Assessment Unit to attend a wedding; and if so, (i) on what date was he (a) released; and (b) returned; (ii) what was his relationship to the persons getting married; (iii) did he fully meet the criteria for this release; (iii) what level of staff approved the temporary release; (iv) what grade of Prison Service staff accompanied the prisoner during his release; and (v) whether he was in preparation for full release from custody when granted this leave, and if so on what date was he subsequently released.

(AQW 21633/11-15)

Mr Ford: Having met the necessary criteria, Mr Parker was granted an Accompanied Temporary Release from Maghaberry prison to attend his daughter's wedding. He was released from Maghaberry on 21 June 2008, accompanied by a Governor and an officer, and returned to the Prisoner Assessment Unit (PAU) at 20.00 hours on 21 June 2008.

Mr Parker was assessed as being suitable for a period of Accompanied Temporary Release by a multi disciplinary board. His application was approved by the Governor in charge of Life Management Unit.

Accompanied Temporary Release forms part of the process for the eventual release of each prisoner on the Pre Release scheme. Mr Parker was subsequently released from custody on 10 January 2012.

Prison Service: Code of Conduct and Discipline

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 21140/11-15 and AQW 20186/11-15, (i) why the Prison Service does not have a policy that sets out additional mandatory requirements that are not contained in the Code of Conduct; (ii) for his assessment of the impact on Prison Service staff of the lack of a suspension policy; and (iii) what assurances he can give that these issues will be addressed prior to the new disciplinary system becoming operational.

(AQW 21635/11-15)

Mr Ford: As previously explained suspension from duty is made in accordance with the procedures outlined in the current Code of Conduct and Discipline. There is therefore no requirement for any additional policy to support such procedures.

Trial Costs

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) on what grounds the murder convictions against Christopher Francis Kerr and Aaron Cavana Wallace were quashed; (ii) for a breakdown of the costs to date involved in each trial, appeal and any other relevant proceedings, including Legal Aid; and (iii) for an estimate of the final costs.

(AQW 21644/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Court of Appeal delivered a judgment in this case on 19 December 2012 ruling the convictions to be unsafe. A copy of the summary judgment is available on the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service website in the "Judicial Decisions" section.

The tables below show a breakdown of estimated costs of court proceedings.

Table 1 details the estimated costs to date and includes those attributed to the seven defendants charged in the original trial, along with those that subsequently proceeded with an appeal. Table 2 provides an estimate of the total cost of the case. However, costs in respect of one defendant in the Court of Appeal are currently being assessed and are not available at this stage.

Table 1 - Estimated Cost to Date

Cost Type	Estimated Cost £
PSNI ¹	Not Available
PPS Prosecution ²	£217,627.00
Defence (Legal Aid Costs) ³	£5,259,367.60
Court (Judiciary and Staff Costs)	£117,775.12
Jury Costs	£26,137.96
Facilities (e.g. Courtroom Accommodation)	£10,510.00
Total	£5,631,417.68

- 1 The PSNI have indicated that all duty associated with the case was pre-detailed duty and no additional costs were incurred.
- 2 This figure represents the costs paid to date, however final costs for all fees for counsel and witness expenses have not yet been invoiced.
- 3 Includes defendants' legal aid costs for Crown Court and Court of Appeal cases. Costs in respect of one defendant in the Court of Appeal are not currently available and are not included in the table.

Table 2 - Estimated Total Cost

Cost Type	Estimated Cost £
PSNI ¹	Not Available
PPS Prosecution ²	£400,000.00
Defence (Legal Aid Costs) ³	£5,447,551.60
Court (Judiciary and Staff Costs)	£119,160.86
Jury Costs	£26,137.96
Facilities (e.g. Courtroom Accommodation)	£10,680.00
Total	£6,003,530.42

- 1 The PSNI have indicated that all duty associated with the case was pre-detailed duty and no additional costs were incurred.
- 2 Estimated that final PPS costs will not exceed £400,000.
- 3 Includes defendants' legal aid costs for Crown Court and Court of Appeal cases. Costs in respect of one defendant in the Court of Appeal are not currently available and are not included in the table.

Sexual Offences Prevention Order Breach

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice on what dates in 2012 was Stuart Townsend (i) jailed; and (ii) released from custody for breaching a Sexual Offences Prevention Order.

(AQW 21645/11-15)

Mr Ford: Mr Townsend was remanded into custody on a charge of Breach of a Sexual Offences Prevention Order on 18 January 2012 and released on bail on 23 January 2012. He then served a sentence of imprisonment for a number of offences including Breach of a Sexual Offences Order between 15 June and 8 October 2012.

Jury Service

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Justice whether he would consider excusing those called for Jury Service, in the event of cases which extend beyond ten working days, when the impact of their continued service would be deemed detrimental to the economy.

(AQW 21728/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Juries (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 sets out the categories of person who are disqualified, ineligible or excusable from jury service as of right. Individuals may also apply to the Juries Officer to have jury service deferred until a later date or ask to be excused if they have a valid reason which may include business or economic issues. Applications for excusal may also be considered by the trial judge. However, juror excusals need to be considered along with the requirements of the court including the need to have sufficient numbers of jurors and a representative jury.

Given the existing powers to grant discretionary excusal, I have no plans to reform the eligibility criteria for jury service.

Newtownards Courthouse

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice what adaptations or alterations will be made to Newtownards Courthouse to accommodate any increase in the volume of users as a result of the closure of Bangor Courthouse.

(AQW 21757/11-15)

Mr Ford: Newtownards Courthouse has adequate facilities to accommodate the increase in the volume of users as a result of the closure of Bangor Hearing Centre.

An additional consultation room has been provided at minimal cost which equips the courthouse with five consultation rooms.

Courts: Cost of Youth Justice Services

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Justice how he proposes to minimise the cost of the courts system relating to youth justice and the probationary help for young offenders.

(AQW 21774/11-15)

Mr Ford: My Department is committed to working collaboratively on early intervention with other Government Departments under the umbrella of Delivering Social Change.

Within Justice, my Department, in conjunction with other justice agencies and the voluntary and community sector, seeks to divert young people away from crime through a variety of measures including Reducing Offending in Partnership and Policing and Community Safety Partnerships, as articulated in the Community Safety Strategy and the emerging Reducing Offending Strategic Framework.

We are also currently piloting Youth Engagement Clinics in Belfast. This innovative approach seeks to divert young people who offend both from court and from future offending. At the core of the approach is the idea that earlier engagement with young people who offend, with a view to helping them make an informed decision about their options, will improve the rates of diversion from the courts. The pilot will end on 31st May and will be subject to a full evaluation to help inform a decision on whether Youth Engagement Clinics should be continued and introduced in other areas.

Ultimately, these measures should contribute to keeping young people out of court, thereby reducing the cost of the court system.

Illegal Fuel

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Justice to detail how much illegal fuel has been seized and how it has been disposed and the cost, in the last eight years.

(AQW 21776/11-15)

Mr Ford: Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs have provided the following information. The figures below detail the quantities of fuel seized in Northern Ireland in each of the years requested. Seized fuel is disposed of under a contract as recycled, non-motor, oil for industrial use. The process is licensed and closely governed. The cost for disposal of seized fuel is incorporated into an overall contract for all goods seized by HMRC; the individual costs for disposal of seized fuel cannot be disaggregated.

Year	Fuel seized (litres)
05/06	1.08m
06/07	0.84m
07/08	0.82m
08/09	1.09m
09/10	1.04m
10/11	0.64m
11/12	1.13m
12/13	0.68m

Private Car Park Fines

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Justice to outline the legal position regarding fines imposed by private car park companies within retail developments.

(AQW 21829/11-15)

Mr Ford: The charging of a fine for parking on private land is a matter of civil law.

Prisoners: Distribution of Prescription Drugs

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 21082/11-15, whether he is satisfied that the dispensing arrangements described, including whereby prisoners can in some circumstances obtain a 28 day supply of drugs and a 7 day supply of potentially dangerous drugs, are compatible with tackling the illicit trading in drugs in prisons.

(AQW 21887/11-15)

Mr Ford: All prisons throughout the UK have a policy in place for prisoners to access in-possession medication. This is entirely appropriate, and allows prisoners the opportunity to take personal responsibility for their own medication similar to being in the community.

Both the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) and the South Eastern Trust (SET) are keen to reduce the potential for abuse. Procedures have been introduced by SET in relation to certain prescription medications which only permit the supervised administration of these to prisoners by nursing staff. This has reduced the opportunity for abuse of prescribed medication.

Prisoners who have been risk assessed can access in-possession medication for up to one month.

I am content that NIPS and SET will continue to work in close partnership around the issues of medication distribution and in-possession medication to prevent abuse and illicit trading in drugs in prisons.

Access NI Checks

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Justice if there are plans to allow Access NI checks to be transferred between jobs.

(AQW 22024/11-15)

Mr Ford: I have accepted a recommendation made by Sunita Mason, the Independent Advisor for Criminality Information in England and Wales, that a system of portable disclosures and updated online checking be introduced in Northern Ireland. The change requires legislation provision and the introduction of changes to the current computer system. I am planning to introduce the former in the next Justice Bill. The work on the changes to the computer system has begun.

Once the change is implemented, citizens may not need to re-apply for an AccessNI check as they move between employers.

Operation Loft

Mr Irwin asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 21152/11-15, whether a meeting has taken place to discuss issues surrounding Operation Loft and in particular, the possibility of suspects receiving privileged information.

(AQW 22115/11-15)

Mr Ford: I understand that a debrief regarding the operation has been held by the relevant Agencies.

Department for Regional Development

Extreme Weather Conditions: DRD Equipment

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development whether equipment supplied by his Department was used to clear farm lane ways of snow during the recent heavy snow.

(AQW 21483/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): My Department's Roads Service made its resources available to the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to assist with the clearance of farm lanes in emergency situations.

Extreme Weather Conditions: Rescue of Cars and Passengers

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how many cars and passengers had to be recovered and rescued by Roads Service during the recent heavy snow.

(AQW 21485/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: During the recent heavy snowfall, which has been unequalled in recent years, my Department's Roads Service worked continuously to keep the strategic road network open and subsequently, as resources permitted, continued to work to open minor roads in the more rural areas.

The vast majority of rescue incidents, involving the recovery of passengers and vehicles, were carried out in conjunction and cooperation with the emergency services. In these instances, Roads Service carried out the physical work to reopen roads to enable the emergency services to gain access and secure the rescue and recovery of stranded motorists.

Roads Service does not maintain full and detailed records of instances where it is involved in the provision of assistance to stranded motorists. However, based on the available information it is estimated that Roads Service was involved in the provision of assistance to around seventy stranded motorists.

Extreme Weather Conditions: Clearing Contractors

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how many contractors were commissioned to assist in clearing snow in rural areas following the recent heavy snowfall.

(AQW 21487/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: During the recent heavy snowfall, my Department employed several contracting firms and agencies of different sizes, along with a range of plant and equipment.

Larger firms, including sub-contractors, were able to deploy resources to various locations at any one time, to reflect operational priorities and taking account of specific needs, and worked in both rural and urban environments. Roads Service's internal contractor, Roads Service Direct, also deployed manpower, plant and equipment, supported at some locations by Rivers Agency and Newtownabbey Borough Council to deal with problems that arose in that specific council area.

In total, approximately 118 external contractors were utilised by Roads Service alongside the Agencies mentioned above.

A5 Road Project

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Regional Development, in relation to the proposed A5 road project, why his Department did not carry out an appropriate assessment of the Rivers Foyle and Finn Special Areas of Conservation under the Habitats Directive.

(AQW 21541/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department is responsible for carrying out an appropriate assessment under the Habitats Directive. As allowed by the Habitats Directive, a screening exercise was carried out on behalf of my Department. In carrying out this level of assessment, design and construction commitments were considered. It was concluded that it was unlikely the proposed scheme would have an adverse effect on the integrity of the River Foyle and tributaries and River Finn Special Areas of Conservation (SAC).

The findings of the screening exercise were issued to the two relevant statutory bodies: the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) and National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS). Both Statutory Bodies agreed with the conclusions of the screening exercise. The Loughs Agency and the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure were also consulted but did not respond.

Following the Judge's recent ruling, I have decided it is more effective to address the defect, rather than appeal the judgement. I have asked for a report to be prepared to address, amongst other things, impacts on the SACs and proposed mitigation. This report will be publically consulted upon and the findings of this exercise will allow me to undertake an appropriate assessment sometime this summer. I have also asked for a third party review of the project consultant's work in respect of the entire appropriate assessment process, including the scope of the report referred to above, in order to assist my deliberations.

A5 Road Project

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Regional Development, in relation to the proposed A5 road project, to detail the organisation responsible for carrying out an appropriate assessment of the Rivers Foyle and Finn Special Areas of Conservation under the Habitats Directive.

(AQW 21567/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would refer the Member to my answer to his Assembly Question, AQW 21541/11-15.

A5 Road Project

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Regional Development, in relation to the proposed A5 road project, whether he will conduct an inquiry into why carry an appropriate assessment of the Rivers Foyle and Finn Special Areas of Conservation was not carried out under the Habitats Directive.

(AQW 21573/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would refer the Member to my answer to his Assembly Question, AQW 21541/11-15.

Strategic Investment Board: DRD Assets

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 17631/11-15, to detail the nature of the £22.05m in assets that his Department has identified to the Asset Management Unit of the Strategic Investment Board, broken down by year.

(AQW 21586/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department and its Arm's Length Bodies, Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company and Northern Ireland Water, regularly review the assets they hold to establish whether they are still required, will be needed for future projects / operational purposes or can be declared surplus to requirements.

This ongoing process of reviewing asset holdings results in a rolling programme of asset disposals. This process also informed the capital receipt target identified for my Department.

The capital receipt target identified for my Department was based on proposed disposals of former operational depots / sites, land, properties, car parks and redundant water and wastewater treatment works and pumping stations. Each year a range of these different types of assets have / will be disposed of either on the open market or through transfers to housing associations.

Electric Cars

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what measures his Department has in place to encourage people to use electric cars.

(AQW 21597/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department, along with the Department of the Environment, leads the ecar project, a consortium of public and private sector partners working to bring electric vehicle charging infrastructure to Northern Ireland with grant funding from the Office for Low Emission Vehicles. By the Summer of 2013, 14 rapid 50kW charge posts and 160 fast 22kW charging posts will have been installed. Each fast charge post can charge two vehicles simultaneously.

A number of activities have been undertaken to increase awareness and encourage the uptake of electric vehicles, including:

- (i) developing an ecar website www.ecarni.com and mobile phone 'app',
- (ii) a major 3-day test-drive event at Titanic Belfast; and
- (iii) a number of marketing videos and advertisements.

The ecar Project will continue to provide a number of marketing and communications activities in the coming year.

My Department is offering a grant of up to £1,500 for the installation of a home or workplace charge point for the first 180 people to buy a new electric vehicle before the end of March 2014. The general cost of an installation ranges from £1000 - £1500.

There are also several UK wide incentives available to increase the uptake of electric vehicles, such as grants of up to £5,000 towards the purchase of an electric car and up to £8,000 towards an electric van. Other incentives include exemption from fuel duty, vehicle excise duty, company car tax, van benefit charge, fuel benefit charge and enhanced capital allowances for businesses to relieve the entire cost of an electric car or van against taxable profits in the first year of acquisition.

Winter Weather Vehicles

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans are in place to reduce the average age of the fleet of winter weather vehicles designed to remove snow from the roads network.

(AQW 21624/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has produced a detailed business case outlining the need for increased and sustained investment in the winter service fleet. It is hoped that the Executive will recognise the importance of this key activity and give it priority in the capital allocations to my Department. Should sufficient funding be made available, it will be possible for Roads Service to invest in new snow blowers, in addition to the replacement of gritters and snow ploughs.

A26 Road Project

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development at what stage is the A26 project; and what steps are being taken to expedite the project.

(AQW 21649/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Member may be aware that a Public Inquiry for the A26 scheme took place from 5-7 November 2012. The Inspector's report on the Public Inquiry is expected to be provided to the Department by the end of April 2013. The Department will then be able to assess if any additional work or changes may be necessary to advance the project. It is anticipated the Departmental Statement indicating the way forward, will issue later this year.

At present, there is insufficient funding within the current budget period 2011-15 to commence the construction of this scheme. However, the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland 2011-2021 includes the A26 project as part of a £390 million package of high priority strategic road improvements, to be funded through alternative finance in the period 2015/16 to 2020/21. The Executive agreed the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland 2011-21 on 8 October 2012.

A commitment to fund the revenue consequences of this roads package will be required, and so the timing depends on future resource budgets. In the event of alternative finance not being available, the scheme could be included, together with other priority schemes, in the bidding process for conventional capital funds, within the next Budget period.

In the meantime, my officials will continue to develop the scheme to the point where the Orders can be published and the procurement could commence, should additional funding become available.

Abercorn Bridge, Newtownstewart

Mr Byrne asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline a timescale for the reconstruction of the Abercorn Bridge in Newtownstewart.

(AQW 21652/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service is carrying out on site investigatory work to determine the most efficient and cost effective method of repairing and strengthening Abercorn Bridge.

A considerable amount of investigative and design work has still to be undertaken before a definite commitment can be given as to the timing of works to the bridge. It is anticipated the first phase of work, to strengthen the approach to the bridge from Newtownstewart, could begin in autumn 2013. Subsequent phases of work are also expected to be carried out to repair the bridge deck and substructure of the main spans over the river.

Beragh Bridge

Mr Byrne asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline a timescale for the completion of the new bridge in Beragh as part of the flood relief scheme.

(AQW 21653/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service commenced work to widen Beragh Bridge and provide a new footway connection between McFarland Terrace and Main Street, in January 2013. The work on site is expected to be completed during June 2013.

During the development of this scheme, officials liaised with DARD's Rivers Agency to confirm that the widened bridge would be compatible with future flood protection measures.

Door-2-Door Transport

Mr Girvan asked the Minister for Regional Development, in light of Disability Action being awarded the Door to Door Transport Scheme on an interim basis only, what are the future plans for the scheme in Antrim.

(AQW 21667/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department will consider how best to meet the transport needs for people with disabilities across Northern Ireland in the future informed by potential pilots and consultation with all stakeholders. It is too early at this stage to indicate the details of what scheme may be proposed but Disability Action have no plans to change services in Antrim.

Railways: Larne Line Stations

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the works for the railway stations along the Larne Line, including platform extensions and a footbridge for Jordanstown station.

(AQW 21668/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Officials have liaised with Translink which has confirmed that a project to construct a footbridge at Jordanstown Halt is included in Translink's current Capital Plan. Subject to completion of a business case and availability of funding, it is planned to build the footbridge in 2015/16.

Many of the platforms at stations and halts were extended as part of the New Trains Two Programme. The platform extension work is being taken forward over two phases. Phase 1, which included work at Yorkgate, Whiteabbey, Jordanstown, Carrickfergus, Downshire, Whitehead, Larne Town and Larne Harbour, is complete.

Phase 2 is well underway, having started on site at the end of February 2013. This phase includes Greenisland, Trooperslane and Clipperstown. It is planned to have these all completed by summer 2013.

A20 Newtownards to Portaferry Road

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the cost of resurfacing the A20 Newtownards to Portaferry road, in each of the last 5 years.

(AQW 21722/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has completed a number of resurfacing schemes on the A20 Newtownards to Portaferry Road during the last five years at a total cost of £782,000.

Details of the schemes, including the associated costs, are set out in the table below:

Resurfacing Schemes on the A20 Newtownards to Portaferry Road during the last five years

Year	Location	Cost
2009/10	Londonderry Park – Teal Rocks	£235,000
2011/12	Deerpark Road at Ardkeen	£167,000
2012/13	Maltings – Finlays Road	£380,000
	Total	£782,000

A20 Newtownards to Portaferry Road

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) how much has been spent on road safety measures on the A20 Newtownards to Portaferry road; and (ii) the location of the works, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 21723/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of road safety schemes carried out by my Department along the A20 Newtownards to Portaferry Road in the last five financial years, along with their associated costs, are set out in the table below:

Year	Location	Description of Works	Cost
2012 - 13	A20 Main Street Kircubbin	New Puffin Controlled pedestrian crossing	£33,000
2011 - 12	N/A	-	-
2010 - 11	A20 Rowreagh Road / Gransha Road junction	Junction improvement scheme and associated carriageway resurfacing	£126,000
	A20 Portaferry Road Greyabbey	Reflective Marker posts renewal	£750
2009 - 10	A20 Newtownards – Portaferry Road (various locations)	Reflective road studs / reflective marker posts placed at various pre-determined locations agreed with the PSNI Road Policing unit locations include: 1 Finlay's Road junction 2 Mountstewart Road junction 3 Gas works adjacent to Mountstewart 4 Spring Lane junction Greyabbey	£3,500
2008 - 09	N/A	-	-
		Total	£163,250

Roads Service officials will continue to monitor and inspect this route, in conjunction with the PSNI Road Policing Unit, and implement additional traffic management measures to promote roads safety, where such measures are considered to be appropriate.

Street Lighting: Darragh Road and Dermott, Comber

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development how much has been spent, to date, on the current programme of installing new street lighting on the Darragh Road and Dermott areas of Comber; and when this work will be completed.
(AQW 21725/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The street lighting replacement work at Darragh Road, Dermott Road, Dermott Crescent, Dermott Park and Dermott Gardens in Comber has cost approximately £90,000 to date. It is estimated the overall scheme costs will be in the region of £125,000.

My officials anticipate that the excavation and column installation work will be completed by the end of April 2013, with the follow up electrical installation work and the provision of electricity supplies being completed by the end of June 2013.

Extreme Weather Conditions: Additional Cost of Clearing Roads

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the additional cost for clearing roads following the recent severe weather and whether this money was allocated from his Department's existing budget.
(AQW 21732/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Member may be aware there was significant private sector input involved in clearing roads as a result of the recent heavy snow. It may be some time before my Department's Roads Service receives all the invoices from contractors, therefore, I am not yet in a position to provide accurate details on the associated costs. However, it is estimated the total cost for my Department will be around £3million, which will be met from within existing budgets.

Water Supply: External Lead Pipes

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development what action his Department is taking to ensure the removal of all external lead water supply pipes to domestic buildings.
(AQW 21769/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that some properties built before 1970 may be connected to the public water mains by a lead service pipe. The part of the service pipe from the customer's tap to the property boundary, which is known as the supply pipe, is the responsibility of the customer while responsibility for the part of the pipe from the property boundary to the water main, which is known as the communication pipe, rests with NIW.

NIW has a 25 year programme to identify and replace lead pipes within its infrastructure. As part of this programme customers are informed when lead communication pipes have been replaced and are encouraged to replace their lead supply pipe work. At the request of a customer, NIW will replace the communication pipe free of charge provided that the customer replaces their supply pipe.

The programme, which has been in operation for some 10 years, has been allocated funding of £500,000 per year for 2013/14 and 2014/15.

Extreme Weather Conditions: Financial Assistance for Farmers

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Regional Development what financial assistance will be provided to farmers who have had their roadside fences and hedges damaged by snow clearance operations conducted by Roads Service.
(AQW 21861/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would refer the Member to my Ministerial Statement on my Department's response to Severe Winter Weather (Official Report 9 April 2013), and confirm that where my Department has inadvertently damaged or taken action that has subsequently resulted in damage to fences, it will consider compensation claims that are supported with appropriate evidence.

Guidance notes on how to make a claim can be found on the NI Direct internet site at the following web address: www.nidirect.gov.uk/property-damage-compensation-claim-form.pdf

My Department will endeavour to process these claims as quickly as possible.

Narrow Water Bridge Project

Mrs McKevitt asked the Minister for Regional Development when his Department will publish the Bridge Order for the Narrow Water Bridge project.
(AQW 21885/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: This project is being progressed by Louth County Council and my Department's Roads Service is working with the Council's representatives and their technical advisers to prepare a draft Bridge Order, under Article 4 of the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993, and a Diversion and Extinguishment Order, under Articles 5 & 6 of that Order. The draft Orders are now cleared for publication by the Department of Finance and Personnel's Departmental Solicitor's Office and my Department proposes to publish notice of the Orders during weeks commencing 22 and 29 April 2013.

The Orders need to be advertised for two successive weeks followed by a statutory consultation period of at least 30 days, and subject to any objections received, I will have to consider whether a Public Inquiry is required and follow due process.

NI Water: Pumping System

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the reasons why NI Water's pumping system was unable to prevent flooding in Downpatrick on 17 April 2013.

(AQW 21925/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that it has restored Market Street Wastewater Pumping Station to normal operation following the internal flooding of properties in Downpatrick on 17 April 2013.

NIW is now interrogating all available data on the Pumping Station for the preceding period to ascertain the cause of the flooding. It aims to complete its investigations and issue a statement by 26 April 2013.

A5 Road Project

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development whether there are any plans to reinstate lands disturbed by preliminary works undertaken in preparation for the A5 road scheme; and what compensation arrangements exist for affected landowners.

(AQW 22022/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department recognises that some of the preliminary works already completed will need to be reversed and is willing to instruct its contractors, to carry out such works at the request of landowners. Roads Service officials have already written to landowners in this regard.

The timescales for completing these works will be dependent upon the number of requests received. Where landowners arrange for the works to be carried out privately, appropriate payments will be made, subject to there being prior agreement with the Department regarding the scope and nature of the works.

I acknowledge that many landowners have submitted compensation claims for vested lands, and some advance payments have been made. Officials will be writing again to these particular landowners advising of the following three available options:

- the Department vacates the lands and reinstates boundaries, in agreement with landowners, with compensation for loss of use of lands paid to landowners;
- the Department vacates the lands and carries out no further works on the understanding that the landowner will reinstate boundaries and lands. Compensation for this work would be paid by the Department, subject to prior agreement regarding the extent of works and rates. Compensation for loss of use of lands will again be paid to landowners; and
- fences and lands are left in their current state until further decisions are made regarding the overall scheme and landowners are compensated for ongoing loss of use of their land.

Department for Social Development

Factory Girls Sculpture in Harbour Square, Derry

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister for Social Development how he will ensure the completion of the Factory Girls sculpture in Harbour Square, Derry as part of the City of Culture 2013.

(AQW 21361/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): Following a meeting between officials from my Department and officers of the City Council of Londonderry, it has been agreed that a Pre-Application Discussion will be arranged with Planning Service to establish if the proposed project on Harbour Square is capable of obtaining planning permission. If it is established that planning permission for the project could be obtained, then significant work will have to be undertaken on the design to enable the project to be accurately costed and a funding package put in place. Given the amount of work involved, it is unlikely that the Factory Girls project can be completed as part of the UK City of Culture 2013 celebrations.

Atos Healthcare

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Social Development how many people have scored zero at their assessment by Atos Healthcare but have been scored fifteen at the review stage or following an appeal.

(AQW 21391/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Due to system limitations, it is not possible to detail how many claimants who were awarded zero points in their Work Capability Assessment medical examination subsequently scored fifteen points following a reconsideration of the original decision or an appeal.

Between June 2011, when Atos Healthcare commenced carrying out Work Capability Assessments, and March 2013, 113,341 claimants participated in the Work Capability Assessment process used to determine entitlement to Employment and Support

Allowance. During this period, 33,060 claimants were awarded zero points following an examination for Employment and Support Allowance conducted by Atos Healthcare.

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Maisonettes in Moyle Walk, Belvoir

Ms Lo asked the Minister for Social Development when the proposals made in 2008 to improve the Economy 7 heating and double glazing in the maisonettes in Moyle Walk, Belvoir will be carried out.

(AQW 21426/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The properties have been nominated for a proposed stock transfer programme. The Housing Executive is currently working with my Department and the Strategic Investment Board to finalise the stock transfer process to ensure this process is fit for purpose and achieves value for money in the use of public funds.

My officials advise that this work should be complete in the coming weeks, after which the Housing Executive will be in a position to initiate the process for schemes to progress later this year.

Winter Fuel Payments

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Social Development what assessment has been made of the cost of means testing Winter Fuel Payments; and whether this cost would be greater than the cost of the current scheme.

(AQW 21428/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Means testing universal pensioner benefits would add an additional layer of complexity, and additional administrative cost. We know from experience with Pension Credit and Rates Rebate that the take-up of means tested benefits among pensioners is well below 100%. A universal approach means that help reaches all, including the most vulnerable and those most reluctant or least able to make a means tested claim.

The Winter Fuel Payment provides assurance to older people that they can turn up their heating during the cold winter months because they know they will receive significant help with their bills. The payment is made on a near universal basis, it went to approximately 316,000 people in Northern Ireland in 2011/2012, and most payments are sent out automatically with no need to claim. This is the most simple and efficient way of administering the payment and ensuring that vulnerable pensioners do not miss out.

No assessment has been made of the likely administrative costs of means-testing the Winter Fuel Payments Scheme. This information would, therefore, only be available at disproportionate cost.

Employment and Support Allowance: Phone Number

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister for Social Development whether there have been any problems with the Employment and Support Allowance phone number over the last six months.

(AQW 21443/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Employment and Support Allowance Centre operates two telephone lines for claimants and their representatives; a 0800 number for making a claim and a 0845 number that handles calls about an existing claim when someone wants to report a change of circumstances or has a general enquiry about a claim.

Between October 2012 and March 2013, the two telephone lines received a total of 157,530 calls, of which 143,260 were answered, a response rate of 91%. During the same period, average call waiting times did not exceed 2 minutes 30 seconds on either telephone line.

Although response rates and call waiting times remain within acceptable levels, when there are large volumes of customers contacting the Centre, delays can occasionally occur. As a result, staffing levels are kept under constant review and when demand to answer telephone calls increase, assistance is provided by trained staff from other areas across the Centre.

St Lucia Barracks Site, Omagh

Mr Byrne asked the Minister for Social Development what plans his Department has to develop the St Lucia Barracks site in Omagh.

(AQW 21444/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Department commissioned a Masterplan to inform the future development of St Lucia former military barracks which contained proposals for the different areas of the site. These proposals have not been developed as there is a leasehold covenant on the Listed Buildings within the complex which limits their use to military purposes only. The listed buildings and parade ground at St Lucia remain the property of the Ministry of Defence. That part of the site has not been transferred to the Executive; however this issue is currently being examined. Further development of the plans for St Lucia will depend on the release of the Lease as well as the future development of Lisanelly.

Urban Renewal Scheme: Castlederg

Mr Byrne asked the Minister for Social Development what proposals his Department has for an urban renewal scheme in Castlederg.

(AQW 21445/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Department for Social Development's physical regeneration programmes are focused on urban towns and city centres. Castlederg is defined as a rural Intermediate Settlement with a population of 2,739 and as such it cannot benefit from any of the Department's current regeneration programmes. DSD officials are working with DARD officials to explore the potential to better co-ordinate urban and rural regeneration needs to maximise, and where possible integrate, funding opportunities available for regeneration of both

urban and rural communities, as set out in the Rural Development White Paper Action Plan.

Environmental Improvement Scheme for Fintona

Mr Byrne asked the Minister for Social Development what proposals his Department has in conjunction with the Department of the Environment and Omagh District Council for an environmental improvement scheme for Fintona.

(AQW 21447/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Fintona has a population of approximately 1359 and is therefore defined as rural by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. Responsibility for the regeneration of rural areas lies with the Department for Agriculture and Rural Development.

Fintona did however benefit previously from DSD funding through the Areas at Risk pilot programme. The scheme provides funding for up to two years in an effort to increase community cohesion and capacity, strengthen community infrastructure and achieve a more sustainable approach to community participation and development. A small amount of the £127,543 funding received during the period from July 2009 to March 2012 was spent on minor environmental improvements.

Rejuvenation and Environmental Enhancement of Border Villages

Mr Byrne asked the Minister for Social Development what proposals his Department has for the rejuvenation and environmental enhancement of border villages such as Clady, County Tyrone.

(AQW 21448/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The remit of the Department for Social Development is limited to urban regeneration. Therefore, the Department's physical regeneration programmes are focused on urban towns and city centres. Villages such as Clady, with populations of around 500 people, are defined as rural Small Villages or Hamlets and as such the Department is unable to provide them with funding from any of its regeneration programmes. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development is responsible for rural regeneration.

Strategic Investment Board: DSD Assets

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 17631/11-15, to detail the nature of the £50.01m in assets that his Department has identified to the Asset Management Unit of the Strategic Investment Board, broken down by year.

(AQW 21457/11-15)

Mr McCausland: No physical assets were identified to the Asset Management Unit of the Strategic Investment Board. Savings were made by the Department through a reduction in Housing Association grant rates of approximately 20% making Associations bring more private funding into the Social Housing Development Programme while still enabling PFG targets to be met. This created a saving of £16.67 million each year over the three years from 2012/13 to 2014/15 bringing the total to £50.1 million.

Benefits: Quota System

Mr McMullan asked the Minister for Social Development what assurances he can give that a quota system will not be introduced for people's access to benefits and that each claim will be judged on its own merits.

(AQW 21466/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Social Security benefits are awarded subject to the satisfaction of specific conditions and eligibility criteria which are different for each benefit. Each claim is judged on its own merits.

I can offer assurance to the member that there are no plans to introduce a quota system for people's access to benefits.

Housing Associations Funding

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development for a breakdown of the funding provided to Housing Associations over the last three financial years.

(AQW 21492/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The table below shows the funding the Department has allocated to Housing Associations including the Northern Ireland Co-Ownership Housing Association (NICHA) in each of the last three years.

	Social Housing Development Programme	NICHA	Get Britain Building	Total
	£m	£m	£m	£m
2010/11	166.8	18.0		184.8
2011/12	143.1	28.3		171.4
2012/13	85.1	38.0	11.9	135.0

Welfare Reform Bill

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development what flexibilities he has secured in the Welfare Reform Bill.
(AQW 21514/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I announced on 22 October 2012 that I had secured payment flexibilities for Northern Ireland following detailed discussions with Lord Freud. Officials are currently developing and consulting public representatives and voluntary sector representatives on a set of guidelines for determining the circumstances when the Universal Credit payment should be paid on a twice-monthly basis or split between partners in a household. They are also considering the operational details of paying the housing element of Universal Credit direct to landlords.

This work is currently underway and an Oversight Board has been established, chaired by the Department's Permanent Secretary, with input from a cross section of representatives from the community sector and academia. Two open forum events have taken place with members of the public and voluntary and community sector organisations to explore their views.

The Oversight Board is considering feedback from discussion events in addition to other research which will provide input to the Permanent Secretary. I expect to receive this report shortly.

Gambling Licensing Legislation

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Social Development whether there are any plans to review the gambling licensing legislation to permit customers of banks to enter into free prize draws.
(AQW 21536/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Following a review of local gambling laws, I recently announced my intention to amend the law so as to permit such promotional prize draws within Northern Ireland. I hope to bring this legislation to the Assembly before the end of the current mandate.

Abuse Victims

Ms Brown asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the provision of emergency accommodation that his Department makes available for (i) victims who do not wish to return home to their abuser in the immediate aftermath of an attack; and (ii) their children.
(AQW 21551/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive operates in line with the provisions of the Housing (NI) Order 1988 homelessness legislation. In circumstances where a victim of domestic abuse, with or without children, approaches the Housing Executive seeking accommodation, the Housing Executive will seek to secure the most suitable temporary accommodation to meet the needs of the particular household. Such temporary accommodation may be a refuge for victims of domestic violence, for example Women's Aid, voluntary sector hostels, Housing Executive hostels, or private sector accommodation. A homelessness assessment will be undertaken where the victim of domestic abuse does not wish to return home.

Atos Healthcare

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Social Development how many audits have been carried out on the performance of Atos Healthcare, particularly in relation to the number of cases in which claimants were awarded zero points after an assessment but were awarded fifteen points on appeal; and what were the outcomes of these audits.
(AQW 21555/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In August 2011 the Department appointed an independent Health Assessment Adviser to monitor the quality of the medical outcomes from Atos Healthcare. The Health Assessment Adviser has undertaken a total of 1,134 audits during the period December 2011 until February 2013 and has found the quality of the medical assessments to be of a high standard.

There have been no audits undertaken on cases which have gone through the appeals process who were awarded zero points following medical assessment but had this increased to 15 points on appeal as currently the detailed reason for the

Appeals Service overturning a decision is not shared with the Department. The Department is currently working with the Appeals Service to secure this additional information.

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Housing Executive Rent Arrears

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what (i) number; and (ii) percentage of Housing Executive tenants in North Down are in rent arrears.

(AQW 21571/11-15)

Mr McCausland: At the end of March, there were 982 (approximately 38%) Housing Executive tenants in rent arrears in the Bangor District Office area.

Queen's Parade, Bangor

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what progress has been made on the proposals for the development of Queen's Parade in Bangor.

(AQW 21572/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department has agreed to purchase the landholdings at Queen's Parade assembled by the developer, Karl Greenfarm Properties Limited. The content of sale was signed on 25 March 2013. My Department will commence work on assembling the remaining land needed for the development scheme and attaining planning approval. This will take in the region of 2 years to complete. In the intervening period my Department is supporting a project to provide temporary space for local artists and performance space to revitalise the Queen's Parade area.

DSD: Website

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development why his Department's website featured an article promoting a GAA match, in breach of paragraph 2.6 of the Dignity at Work policy; and why, having been removed, the article was reinstated.

(AQW 21576/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The article was published on the Departmental Intranet site to acknowledge a charitable sporting event marking the 20th anniversary celebrations of the Social Security Agency (SSA). The pictures accompanying the article were removed from the Intranet site, as they were not considered to be in compliance with the NICS Dignity at Work (DAW) policy. A decision was taken later to reinstate the photographs on the Intranet site as they were being published in the context of the efforts of staff in fundraising for the Children's Hospice.

As this decision has subsequently raised concerns in the Department about the interpretation of the DAW policy, I have asked my officials to ensure that the policy guidance on publishing articles on the Intranet is clear in its interpretation and that staff are made clear on the Department's policy position.

Taskforce on Protestant Working Class Communities

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development (i) to detail the initiatives introduced by his Department in response to the 2004 Report from the Taskforce on Protestant Working Class Communities; (ii) which initiatives currently focus on the issues raised in the 2004 report; and (iii) the results of any evaluations into initiatives designed to address the issues raised in this report.

(AQW 21599/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Government published "Renewing Communities" in response to the Report from the Taskforce on Protestant Working Class Communities in April 2006 detailing actions and initiatives required of a number of Departments. Details of the initiatives introduced by my Department as a result of the Report together with an outline of the work which my Department is currently progressing as a result of the evaluations of those initiatives are presented at Annex A.

Annex A

Vocational training through flagship developments (Renewing Communities 1.21)

This commitment was met and the Victoria Square scheme opened in March 2008. Building on the success of the Victoria Square scheme DSD will implement a Community and Business Opportunity Plan for the proposed Royal Exchange scheme that will include initiatives to provide employment and training for unemployed people in the scheme.

Expansion of NR (Renewing Communities 2.1)

In June 2003, "People and Place – A Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal" was launched targeting the communities living in the most deprived 10% of wards across Northern Ireland using the Noble Multiple Deprivation Measure (MDM). Following

the review of the MDM in 2005, four additional areas were targeted for support, bringing the total number of areas to 36. A consequence of the 2004 Report from the Taskforce on Protestant Working Class Communities was that the Neighbourhood Renewal budget was increased by an additional £2 million per year from April 2007.

A mid-term review of the Strategy was carried out which considered the overall impact of the Strategy for those who reside in the Neighbourhood Renewal Areas and can be accessed by the following link <http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/people-and-place-mid-term-review.pdf>.

It should be noted that the Department also provides support to those areas outside the MDM top 10% through its Area at Risk Programme, as well as supporting a number of isolated small pockets of deprivation with very small populations (less than 1000) through the Housing Executive's Small Pockets of Deprivation (SPOD) programme.

Re-launch of Local Community Fund (Renewing Communities 2.2)

The Local Community Fund (LCF) was re-launched for a further 2 years by Minister Hanson in April 2006 as part of the Government's Renewing Communities initiative targeting those areas within the 11% - 20% most deprived communities as defined by Noble 2005 complementing the support provided through the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy for the 10% most deprived communities. The Department now provides support to the top 20% most deprived areas through Neighbourhood Renewal and the Areas at Risk Programme.

Areas at Risk (Renewing Communities 2.3)

The Areas at Risk Programme was launched in June 2006 to provide support to communities outside the Noble 10% indicators of the most disadvantaged but at risk of economic, social or environmental decline. The programme has an annual budget of £1million up to year ending 31 March 2015, with each area receiving support for a maximum of 2 years. To date 37 areas throughout Northern Ireland have or are currently receiving support through the programme.

The pilot programme was evaluated on two separate occasions and found to be delivering its objectives against the policy intention.

Strategic Regeneration Framework for Belfast (Renewing Communities 2.4)

The concept of Strategic Regeneration Frameworks emerged from DSD's work with particular disadvantaged communities in 2006. The Department commissioned its regeneration partners, the Belfast Area Partnerships (BAPs) to develop Strategic Regeneration Frameworks (SRFs) in 2006 as part of the Renewing Communities initiative. SRFs were intended to act as high level, strategic reference documents to guide relevant stakeholders in the regeneration of the city of Belfast over a ten to fifteen year timeframe.

The development of each individual SRF was led by the relevant Belfast Area Partnership with the assistance of professional consultancy teams. The process, which involved local consultation, concluded in the latter part of 2008/early 2009 when final documents were presented to DSD. DSD and Belfast City Council (BCC) co-chaired a steering group to oversee the process, which also involved substantial local consultation.

Since 2009 BRO, in conjunction with BCC and the BAPs, undertook a process of engagement across government departments to communicate the aims of the SRFs and agree shared priorities. BCC has now incorporated the SRFs into their draft Masterplan Review for the city.

Targeted regeneration of worst urban dereliction (Renewing Communities 2.5)

To target the worst dereliction, through a strategic approach, the Department commissioned 5 Physical Regeneration Concept Masterplans for the Lower Shankill, Inner East Belfast, Shore Road/York Road, Crumlin Road (including Lower Olpark) and Lower Falls. Although all the plans went out to public consultation in 2010 they still remain in draft form.

Improving Arterial Routes (Renewing Communities 2.6)

Between 2006 and 2008, the Department undertook a comprehensive programme of improvements to secondary arterial routes, complementing the work already completed on arterial routes, at a cost of around £5.9m.

Incentivising private sector housing, support for private residents of urban renewal areas, affordability general – co-ownership scheme and better use of public land to deliver social and affordable housing (Renewing Communities 2.7 – 2.10)

Taken forward as two year pilot actions, these initiatives have been overtaken by Sir John Semple's Review into Affordable Housing which was published in the Spring of 2007 and "Facing the future" a Housing Strategy for Northern Ireland published for consultation in October 2012.

Capacity**(Renewing Communities 3.2)**

Capacity building in disadvantaged communities was initially taken forward through the creation of local Community Empowerment Partnerships (CEPs), geared to engage local communities and help build the capacity, expertise and skills of local people. More recently, and in recognition of the need to complement the wider regeneration agenda, this capacity building work was integrated into delivery of the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy particularly through the creation of Neighbourhood Partnerships which drew on the skills of local people involved with the CEPs.

Engaging faith based organisations in community development**(Renewing Communities 3.7)**

DSD provides regional support for faith-based community development through a contract with the Churches Community Work Alliance (CCWA) to the end of March 2015. An evaluation is due in 2014/15 and this will be used to determine future arrangements.

In May 2010 DSD established a pilot Community Faiths' Forum to generate proactive discussion and engagement with representatives from Christian and non Christian faith groups across Northern Ireland. The pilot was evaluated in March 2012 and it was recommended that it should be extended to March 2015.

4.6 Work with NI funders Forum**(Renewing Communities 4.6)**

The NI Funder's Forum was established in February 2003 to bring together the main statutory and private funders of the voluntary and community sector to agree a programme of work, to share information and to explore the possibility of achieving a degree of complementarities between funding programmes. The Forum has not met for a number of years but the work begun by it continues within Government as Departments seek to join up funding interventions where appropriate, reduce bureaucracy in grant funding to the sector and ensure that all interventions are evidenced based and outcome focused.

DSD recently hosted a half day Funder's Seminar on Friday 7 December 2012 to help develop more awareness and greater co-operation between funding organisations both government and non government.

Strategy for VCS Support Services**(Renewing Communities 4.7)**

In the past year DSD has completed a review of regional support arrangements, successfully introducing new arrangements designed to eliminate duplication, promote collaborative working and ensure quality of service with a greater focus on the outcomes to be achieved. In putting the new arrangements in place, DSD has worked collaboratively with other Departments where it was appropriate. Moving forward the new support arrangements are being closely monitored to ensure that they are working well. Evaluations are due in 2014/15 and these will be used to determine future arrangements.

Modernisation and Youth facilities**(Renewing Communities 4.8)**

The £15m Modernisation Fund Capital Programme which began in 2008 has supported 61 projects in total. Forty of these projects had a direct link to improving services for youth and were allocated £7 million pounds from the overall programme funding. Over a third of the projects funded were specifically targeted for improvements to facilities for youth in disadvantaged areas. Grant funding of over £3 million pounds was allocated to achieve this objective.

Evaluations to date have revealed that over 8000 young people are using equipment / facilities provided by the funding programme. Over 4000 of the young people involved in these projects have gained new skills and have increased their confidence. 800 young people have also gained further qualifications as a result of our funding.

Atos Healthcare

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Social Development, in relation to the assessments carried out by Atos Healthcare in which zero points were scored, but 15 points awarded on appeal, how long a claimant must wait before being called for another assessment; and whether this length of time is statutory or flexible.

(AQW 21634/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There is flexibility regarding the length of time an Employment and Support Allowance claimant will wait before being called for a re-referral following a successful appeal. In the vast majority of cases, a claimant will not be re-referred for at least 6 months following a successful appeal, irrespective of how many points they were originally awarded. However, if the claimant's condition is considered serious enough, the period before the re-referral process commences can be extended for up to two years.

Private Rented Properties

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development for an estimate in the change in the number of privately owned properties in the rented sector between 2007 and 2012.

(AQW 21676/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department publishes statistics on Housing at the following link: - http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/housing_stats

Table 1.3 shows that the number of "Private Rented and Other dwellings" increased from 64,200 in 2006/07 to 113,300 in 2010/11. Figures for 2011-12 will be available in mid to late May 2013.

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Welfare Reform Bill: Rural Proofing

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development whether his Department has rural proofed the draft Welfare Reform Bill. (AQW 21687/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In line with its Section 75 statutory duties my Department carried out an Equality Impact Assessment of the measures contained in the draft Bill and consulted between September and November 2011. The completed document was published in May 2012 and in recognition of concerns raised by respondents in relation to the suitability of the data used in the original assessment my Department gave a commitment that an update would be provided in relation to Section 75 impacts when new data became available.

In partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions my Department has developed a "Policy Simulation Model" (PSM) which is a micro-simulation model used for poverty and scenario analysis and can be used to demonstrate the financial impacts on different demographic groups as a result of policy changes to the tax and benefits system. The PSM is based on the Family Resources Survey (FRS) and therefore covers the same Section 75 groupings as the main survey.

Individual Regulations falling out of the Bill will also be subject to screening including, where appropriate, rural proofing.

Employment and Support Allowance

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development why community care grants are not available to people who are in receipt of contribution-related employment and support allowance. (AQW 21712/11-15)

Mr McCausland: A person may qualify for contributory Employment and Support Allowance, even though they may have access to substantial savings or other income, whilst those on income-related benefits are subject to a means test and are less likely to have access to other funds. This places them in a more vulnerable position and in greater need of help.

The Social Fund is intended to provide help to the most vulnerable people in society who may need additional help to meet specific needs. However, it is subject to financial constraints, as available resources are finite. For this reason entitlement to Community Care Grants is purposely restricted to those in receipt of the four main means-tested benefits, Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, income-related Employment and Support Allowance and, for those of pension age, to those in receipt of Pension Credit. My Department firmly believes that this qualifying criterion remains the fairest assessment which enables funds to be targeted at those who are least able to meet essential expenses.

Subject to the necessary Welfare Reform Bill receiving Royal Assent a new Discretionary Support Scheme will be introduced. This will capture the discretionary elements of the Social Fund, Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans. The new scheme will be income based so that those in employment on low incomes can also benefit.

Housing Estates in Bangor: Double Glazing

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what housing estates in Bangor are still to have double glazing installed; and when the work will begin. (AQW 21758/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that they have a double glazing scheme in the 2013/14 programme in the Bangor area for a total of 239 dwellings in Rathgill/ Willowbrook, Crawfordsburn/ Groomsport, and Kilcooley, which is due on site in October 2013.

Housing Estates in Holywood: Double Glazing

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what housing estates in Holywood are still to have double glazing installed; and when the work will begin. (AQW 21761/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that they have a double glazing scheme in the 2013/14 programme in the Holywood area for a total of 140 dwellings in Loughview, Redburn, Kinnegar, and Woodlands, Holywood, which is due on site in February 2014.

Public Realm Works in Villages

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development whether his Department has any plans for funding to be made available for public realm works in villages.

(AQW 21762/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department conducts its urban regeneration functions in settlements with a population of 4,500 or over. Villages have populations of less than 2,250 and do not fall within my Department's regeneration remit.

In recognition of the needs of smaller settlements my Department made a commitment in the Rural Development White Paper Action Plan to work with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to explore the potential to better co-ordinate urban and rural regeneration needs to maximise, and where possible integrate, funding opportunities available for the regeneration of urban and rural communities. Officials are currently taking this work forward.

Housing Executive: Rathmullan Drive, Newtownards

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Social Development when he will proceed with the proposed stock transfer at Rathmullan Drive, Newtownards.

(AQW 21764/11-15)

Mr McCausland: As I advised the Member in my reply to AQW 18630/11-15, the properties have been nominated for a proposed stock transfer programme. The Housing Executive is currently working with my Department and the Strategic Investment Board to finalise the stock transfer process to ensure this process is fit for purpose and achieves value for money in the use of public funds.

My officials advise work should be complete in the coming weeks, after which the Housing Executive will be in a position to initiate the process for schemes to progress later this year.

Welfare Reform Bill: Single Room Supplement

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development, were the single room supplement element of the Welfare Reform Bill not to proceed, for an estimate of the resources that would be needed to fill the gap created by such a decision.

(AQW 21821/11-15)

Mr McCausland: If Housing Benefit size criteria provisions were to be removed from the Welfare Reform Bill, my Department has estimated that, taking into account the number of existing social tenants (32,650) the cost would be in the region of £17 million.

Employment and Support Allowance: Medical Assessments

Ms Lo asked the Minister for Social Development how claimants who have undergone a medical assessment as part of the migration process to Employment Support Allowance are informed of the outcome of their assessment; and whether this communication can be improved to ensure that claimants are notified in a clear and explicit manner.

(AQW 21838/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The preferred method of contact with customers, both at initial stage of migration from Incapacity Benefit Reassessment to Employment and Support Allowance and at the outcome stage, is by telephone.

If no telephone number is held in respect of a claimant who fails to migrate to Employment and Support Allowance a letter is issued asking them to contact the Incapacity Reassessment office in order to be advised of the outcome of their assessment.

Customers who are ultimately found not to have a limited capability for work will have their Incapacity Benefit claim disallowed and will be contacted by the Customer Advice and Support Team to discuss potential entitlement to alternative benefits. The team will also inform the customer of their appeal rights and provide them with ongoing advice and support.

The clerically issued form advising the claimant that they have been disallowed Employment and Support Allowance has been produced to ensure it meets the recognised 'Plain English' standards. This ensures the wording is clear, straightforward and easily understood by the claimant.

From 3 September 2012, as a result of a review of the Work Capability Assessment, Decision Makers Justifications, which provides the claimant with a clearer explanation of the decision and all the evidence considered by the Decision Maker, have been issued to claimants in cases which have been disallowed.

Whilst improvements have been made to the notification letter it is kept under constant review.

Welfare Reform: Benefit Cap

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development (i) what benefits are to be included in the proposed benefit cap; (ii) what exemptions exist for claimants; and (iii) whether his Department intends to extend the cap to cover other benefits over the next two years.

(AQW 21997/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The benefits to be included in the benefit cap will be set out in regulations following the passage of the Bill. The Bill allows all benefits to be included in the cap apart from state pension credit and state retirement pensions.

The cap will apply to the combined income from:

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------|
| ■ Bereavement Allowance | ■ Income Support |
| ■ Carer's Allowance | ■ Jobseeker's Allowance |
| ■ Child Benefit | ■ Maternity Allowance |
| ■ Child Tax Credit | ■ Severe Disablement Allowance |
| ■ Employment and Support Allowance (except where it is paid with the support component) | ■ Widowed Parent's Allowance |
| ■ Guardian's Allowance | ■ Widowed Mothers Allowance |
| ■ Housing Benefit | ■ Widows Pension |
| ■ Incapacity Benefit | ■ Widows Pension Age-Related |

In recognition of the additional financial pressures they face, households will be excluded from the cap where someone in the household is entitled to:

- Disability Living Allowance or its replacement Personal Independence Payment,
- Attendance Allowance,
- Industrial Injuries Benefit and equivalent payments under the War Disablement Pensions or Armed Forces Compensation Scheme,
- the support component of Employment Support Allowance, or
- Constant Attendance Allowance.

War widows and widowers will also be exempt.

To increase incentives to work, households which include a member entitled to Working Tax Credits (including those with a nil award) will also be excluded from the cap. There will also be a grace period where those who have been continuously in work for the previous 12 months will be exempt from the benefit cap for 39 weeks.

Initially this cap will be delivered through Housing Benefit payments, so households who are not getting housing benefit will not have the cap applied. Ultimately it will be administered as part of the new Universal Credit system.

There are no plans to extend the cap to cover other benefits over the next two years. The cap is based on average earnings in Great Britain which is more advantageous to Northern Ireland claimants, as average earnings are higher in Great Britain than in Northern Ireland. The reason for introducing the cap is to set limits on the overall levels of benefit that it is reasonable for the state to provide. We need to be fair to the taxpayer and it is not reasonable or fair that households on out of work benefits should receive a greater income from benefits than the average weekly wage for working households.

Welfare Reform Concessions

Mr B McCreagh asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 17660/11-15, when he expects stable cost estimates to be available.

(AQW 22044/11-15)

Mr McCausland: As set out in my previous answer to AQW 17660/11 – 15, I expect that stable cost estimates will be available once detailed design work has taken place and suppliers have provided costed solution proposals. I anticipate that this will happen by Autumn 2013 subject to the outcomes of the current Cabinet Office review of the Universal Credit programme in the Department for Work and Pensions.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 3 May 2013

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Strategic Investment Board: Education and Skills Authority

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the role of the Strategic Investment Board (SIB) in the implementation of the Education and Skills Authority; and the work done by the SIB to date.

(AQW 21708/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): The Strategic Investment Board (SIB) supports the public sector in meeting targets set by the Programme for Government (PfG). SIB currently supports the Department of Education actions on its PfG target for the implementation of the Education and Skills Authority through the provision of expertise in change management, estates planning, operational services and recruitment.

Delivering Social Change: Signature Projects

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many (i) recently graduated teachers; and (ii) health workers, have been engaged by the six signature Delivering Social Change projects that were announced in October 2012.

(AQW 21741/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Under the 'Improving Literacy and Numeracy' Signature Programme, which is being led by the Department of Education, two hundred and thirty recently graduated teachers will be appointed prior to the beginning of the 2013/14 academic year. It is envisaged that the recruitment exercise will run during May and June 2013.

A Strategic Oversight Group has been established and has undertaken work to develop a proposed recruitment scheme and ensure it is practical and compatible with legal requirements.

The programme will ensure extra support for children in primary schools to achieve the expected levels in reading and maths at Key Stage 2. It will also provide tuition to pupils in post-primary schools who are not predicted to get at least a 'C' grade in GCSE English and/or maths.

The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has lead responsibility for two of the Delivering Social Change signature projects, the provision of 10 additional Family Support Hubs and Support for Parents.

The Family Support Hubs are being delivered by the Health and Social Care Board and Support for Parents projects by the Public Health Agency. The two signature projects will enable the commissioning of additional early intervention support for families and parents experiencing difficulties.

Family Support Hubs are intended to be coalitions of community and voluntary organisations and agencies which provide early intervention services for children and young people locally in order to enhance awareness, accessibility, co-ordination and provision of family support resources in local areas.

Family support needs may vary across localities and on that basis the work undertaken by the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership and its Locality Planning Groups, is vital.

Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry

Mr McDevitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when they will announce the result of the tender for services for victims and survivors as part of the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry; and when these services will be operational.

(AQW 21763/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We refer the Member to our answer to AQW 17178/11-15 issued 27 March 2013.

Work is ongoing on the recent tender for a broader service for victims and survivors. The results will be made public once a decision has been reached.

Strategic Investment Board: Spend on Consultants

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how much the Strategic Investment Board spent on consultants in each year since 2007; and what arrangements are in place for Ministerial approval of recourse to consultants.

(AQW 21765/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Strategic Investment Board expenditure on Consultancy since 2007 is as follows:

Year	
2007/2008	£2,323k
2008/2009	£1,200k
2009/2010	£1,437k
2010/2011	£1,500k
2011/2012	£1,059k
2012/2013	£1,155k (unaudited figures)

SIB receives an annual Ministerial derogation to approve its own consultancy business cases, subject to it maintaining a high standard of business case and financial propriety as assessed by OFMDFM, DFP and internal and external auditors. The annual renewal is subject to our approval on receipt of information on SIB's consultancy performance in the past year and the projected strategy for the coming year.

Unanswered Question: AQO 3406/11-15

Mr Lunn asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to explain the delay in answering AQO 3406/11-15.

(AQW 21788/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: A response to AQO 3406/11-15 was issued on 26 April 2013.

'Investing in Children: Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage'

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what actions they are taking to implement the recommendation made by the European Commission on 20 February 2013, 'Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage'.

(AQW 21790/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Commission's recommendation calls for an integrated approach to child friendly social investment. Investing in children and young people is seen as being especially effective in breaking inter-generational cycles of poverty and social exclusion and improving people's opportunities later in life.

Many of the recommendations within the Report are being taken forward in part through the Executive's Delivering Social Change Framework. This aims to deliver a sustained reduction in poverty and associated issues across all ages as well as improving the health and wellbeing and life opportunities of our children and young people.

The Commission's recommendation has been forwarded to all relevant departments to inform their work and their consideration of a range of possible future programmes and initiatives.

Social Investment Fund: Area Steering Groups

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the adequacy of the three month period granted to social investment fund area steering groups to analyse and prioritise the needs of their social investment zone and engage and consult with the local community.

(AQW 21946/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Nearly five months was provided for area planning, not three. Steering Groups were appointed in early October 2012 and following a two-day workshop on 17 and 18 October were commissioned to engage with communities and develop area plans. In December 2012, in response to feedback received from Steering Groups, we decided that the first phase of the Fund would be extended to March 2016 and as a consequence the area planning phase was also extended to 28 February 2013.

We consider Steering Groups were given sufficient time to consult and engage across their communities as evidenced by the detailed area plans which are currently now being appraised.

Social Investment Zone Steering Groups

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how social Investment zone steering groups will be involved in the monitoring and reporting of the implementation of social investment fund area plans.

(AQW 21947/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Social Investment Zone Steering Groups will oversee delivery of the area plans. Lead partners will be contracted by OFMDFM to manage delivery of the individual projects and they will be expected to report progress to the Steering Groups on a regular basis.

Social Investment Fund

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how they are communicating the progress of the social investment fund delivery process to the public.

(AQW 21948/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Delivery of the Social Investment Fund (SIF) is primarily through the development of strategic area plans, co-ordinated by steering groups.

Steering groups delivered short-term engagement plans during the area planning process and have developed longer-term plans to maintain communication during this first phase of delivery.

Information on SIF has also been available on the NI Direct website for some months now. The intention is to enhance this citizen facing portal once final plans and projects have been appraised to include detailed Area Plans and project information.

Social Investment Fund

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how delivery of the social investment fund will promote good relations.

(AQW 22023/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Social Investment Fund (SIF) has four strategic objectives -

- Build pathways to employment
- Tackle the systemic issues linked to deprivation
- Increase community services
- Address dereliction

While not an explicit aim of SIF, it is reasonable to expect that a reduction in poverty, unemployment and physical deterioration would have a generally positive impact on good relations, particularly in those areas which currently experience high levels of deprivation.

Strategic Investment Fund

Mr Milne asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the roll out of the strategic investment fund.

(AQO 3827/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Since October 2012, our officials have been working alongside steering groups to ensure communities across all nine social investment zones are engaged in the process to identify objective needs and potential projects to tackle those needs. Steering groups have drafted and submitted final area plans, encompassing prioritised projects aimed at addressing the key objectives of the Fund.

The final plans for all nine zones were received on 28 February and are now being subject to a quality assurance review, including the completion of the economic appraisal process for each proposed project.

Following the appraisal process, we will take final decisions on the final plans to be funded and the most appropriate delivery mechanism, with a view to projects commencing in communities soon afterwards.

Delivering Social Change: Signature Projects

Mr Beggs asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the six signature projects announced in October 2012.

(AQO 3828/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Work on the implementation of the six initial Delivering Social Change Signature Programmes is ongoing and close discussions between our officials and lead departments continue in order to ensure effective delivery at the earliest opportunity.

The Department of Education (DE) has been given lead responsibility for the 'Improving Literacy and Numeracy' Signature Programme. The programme will ensure extra support for children in primary schools to achieve the expected levels in reading and maths at Key Stage 2. It will also provide tuition to pupils in post-primary schools who are not predicted to get at least a 'C' grade in GCSE English and/or maths.

Two hundred and thirty recently graduated teachers will be appointed prior to the beginning of the 2013/14 academic year. It is envisaged that the recruitment exercise will run during May and June 2013. A Strategic Oversight Group has been appointed to oversee the implementation of the programme. The Western Education and Library Board will lead the practical delivery of the programme.

The Department for Employment and Learning is leading on the 'Pathways to Employment for Young People' Signature Programme. A 26-week pilot of the Community Family Support programme commenced in January 2013 which is designed to focus on the needs of 44 disadvantaged families in the targeted areas of Belfast (both West and East), Strabane, Cookstown and Newtownabbey. All 5 Family Liaison Officers have been recruited to support the families and they are currently working with mainstream provision to deliver the pilot. This pilot will be scaled up and rolled out as a Signature Programme to areas of greatest need where the levels of young people who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETs) are highest. The intention is to replicate the model and help support over 500 families.

The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has lead responsibility for the 'Direct Family Support' and 'Support for Parents' Signature Programmes. Significant progress has been made by the Health and Social Care Board and the Public Health Agency on both programmes since the launch.

As part of the Family Support Hub programme, the development infrastructure has been put in place. In the Northern Trust area an additional Hub is coming "on-line" and one hub is currently in planning for the Belfast Trust area. In line with the Outcomes Group's priorities to enhance the existing early intervention services, the planning for additional family support services has been completed and is ready to move to procurement. An evaluation system for Hubs has been introduced across all existing Hubs and data capture will start across all Hubs for monitoring and evaluation purposes.

Under the Support for Parents programme, a suite of parenting support programmes to be delivered has been developed from the Public Health Agency's ongoing engagement with stakeholders through the Child Development Programme Board and the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership. The programmes focus on parenting programmes for the vulnerable groups.

The Department for Social Development and the Department of Education are working collaboratively to deliver 20 new Nurture Units under the 'Early Intervention for Vulnerable Children' Signature Programme. Twenty schools were invited to participate in an awareness session on 10 April 2013. Plans have been developed with the aim of having all Nurture Units in place by the start of the 2013/2014 academic year.

Finally, the Department for Social Development is also working in partnership with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to bring forward proposals to establish 10 Social Enterprise Incubation Hubs under the 'Accelerating Social Enterprise' Signature Programme. The hubs will be established in currently vacant commercial premises and will offer a range of business advice and practical support to social enterprise entrepreneurs including facilities from which their businesses can operate on a 'test-trading' basis.

Budget Review Group

Mr McAleer asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the work of the Budget Review Group. (AQO 3832/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Budget Review Group met on 10 April. It discussed alternative options for accessing finance and asset management and commissioned work on NI Water structural issues. It also received updates on its priority work programme including the transfer of social housing stock, release of value from Belfast Harbour Commissioners and drawdown of European funding. It continues to meet on a quarterly basis.

Childcare Strategy

Mr Kinahan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the proposed Childcare Strategy; including the projected resources which will be available for its implementation. (AQW 22155/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Public consultation on the Childcare Strategy ended on 5 March 2013. All responses and views received are currently being reviewed. These, together with the findings from OFMDFM commissioned research, will inform the detail of the Strategy, including the actions it will support and the resources needed for implementation. We expect to be able to make an announcement on the Strategy shortly.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Extreme Weather Conditions: Assistance Requests

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in relation to the recent heavy snow, to detail (i) how many requests for assistance for farms were received by her Department; (ii) how many of these requests resulted in RAF helicopter assistance; and (iii) how many requests remained outstanding when the helicopters were stood down. (AQW 21565/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): At the 14 April the Helpline had received 902 calls. 525 related to fallen stock issues and 377 related to other adverse weather issues such as requests for fodder; access issues; and reports of structural damage.

A total of 46 air drops were made to assist farmers, 41 by the RAF and 5 by Irish Air Corp. These fodder air drops were targeted to the worst affected and isolated areas based on information received from the DARD Helpline, CAFRE Advisers contacting farmers, and air reconnaissance carried out in the Glens of Antrim area on 26 March and in the Slieve Croob area on 27 March.

Following the helicopter flights on 28 March our technical and logistical assessment indicated that there were no outstanding requests for help that required aerial support. Intelligence from both farmers and DARD staff on the ground indicated that access to remote areas was improving and that priority fodder needs had been addressed. While helicopter support was stood down it was kept under review, and all of the farmers who had requested assistance to move fodder successfully received support via our ground support programme involving Forest Service soft track machines.

Staff continue to work with farmers to address any ongoing adverse weather related issues.

Extreme Weather Conditions: Fence Damage

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she is aware of the damage caused to farm fences by the recent severe weather conditions and what direct assistance she can provide to farmers to keep the resultant disruption to livestock to a minimum.

(AQW 21726/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am very aware of and fully sympathise with the very difficult situation that farmers face at this time arising from the recent snow storm and I am aware that damage has been caused to farm fences.

I have obtained Executive agreement to hardship funding measures to assist farmers worst affected by livestock losses arising from the recent snow storm. The first element of this is that my Department will pay for the costs of collection and disposal of fallen stock from the farmers most severely affected. This relieves those farmers of a potential cost to their business and protects both the environment and animal health by encouraging the proper disposal of fallen stock.

I also intend to bring to the Executive proposals for a hardship scheme, which will be the second element of the hardship measures. The hardship scheme will help to mitigate the costs of the livestock losses that have been sustained by farmers arising from the snow storm. This will be under the EU de minimis rules and capped at a maximum of 7,500 euro per farmer, including the collection and disposal costs of the fallen animals. Farmers, who have fallen stock disposed of during the period 2 April – 19 April 2013 by approved renderers, will be eligible for the hardship funding. The scheme will be framed in light of the information gathered on the extent and nature of losses, which we will build as farmers have stock removed and disposed of by the approved renderers.

The hardship payment will be specifically for livestock losses arising from the recent snow storm. I hope to release details of the scheme and how to apply as soon as possible.

You may wish to raise the issue of damage caused to farm fences when clearing roads with the Minister for Regional Development.

Extreme Weather Conditions: Rescue Package for Farmers

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the qualifying criteria for the £5m rescue package for farmers affected by the recent severe weather.

(AQW 21859/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I have obtained Executive agreement to hardship funding measures to assist farmers worst affected by livestock losses arising from the recent snow storm.

The first element of these measures is that DARD is paying for the costs of collection and disposal of fallen stock that have died as a direct result of the snow storm. The second element will be a hardship scheme, which will help to mitigate the costs of the livestock losses that have been sustained by farmers arising from the snow storm. This will be under the EU de minimis rules and capped at a maximum of 7,500 euro per farmer, including the collection and disposal costs of the fallen animals. Farmers, who had livestock losses as a result of the snow storm and had fallen stock disposed of during the period 2 April – 19 April 2013 by approved renderers, will be eligible for the hardship funding.

The scheme will be framed in light of the information gathered on the extent and nature of losses, which we will build as farmers have stock removed and disposed of by the approved renderers. I hope to release details of the scheme and how to apply as soon as possible.

Extreme Weather Conditions: RAF Helicopter Assistance

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development when a request for RAF helicopter assistance was submitted.

(AQW 21860/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I made contact with the British Secretary of State Theresa Villiers MP on Monday 25 March to request the provision of helicopter support to assist the delivery of feed to farmers affected by the severe weather conditions.

Satellite Broadband

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what financial assistance is available to help rural property developers purchase equipment to gain access to satellite broadband and related services.

(AQW 21872/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Under Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme the only opportunity for a developer to purchase equipment to gain access to satellite broadband and related services would be where the developer was setting up a service that they would maintain and run as a business for a minimum of 5 years from the date of any grant payment. They would have to apply to a competitive open call for applications in the Local Action Group area covering their location, a list of these can be found at

<http://www.dardni.gov.uk/index/rural-development/rdp-campaign/rdp-campaign-development-funding-schemes-and-programmes/rdp-campaign-development-rural-life/rdp-development-local-action-group-contacts.htm>

Extreme Weather Conditions: Impact on Farming Community

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what discussions she has had with Executive colleagues regarding the impact of the snow crisis on the farming community, including on mental health.

(AQW 21904/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department and I are committed to supporting the farming community through the impact of the severe weather in March including the mental health of those affected. I made a statement to the Assembly on the 9th April 2013 and an update to the Executive on the 11th April 2013.

Extreme Weather Conditions: Assistance Provided by DARD

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many staff from her Department and its agencies were deployed on the ground to assist in the crisis during the recent severe weather, broken down by agency and responsibilities.

(AQW 21907/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: 201 staff assisted in the recent severe weather crisis as outlined in the table below.

Number of Staff	Division	Responsibility
143	Rivers Agency	Snow clearance; Flood response; and Dealing with potential thaw - grille clearance etc.
20	Forest Service	Supervisory management and industrial staff who were involved in various issues. The majority of help provided was delivering animal feed using Soft Track Vehicles.
18	Veterinary Service	Staff present at the point when carcasses are removed from the farm to record numbers and mark recorded animals; Visits to farms outside postcode areas to verify losses; and Staff present at rendering plants to reconcile the paperwork to be submitted to DARD.
18	College for Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise	Assisting in air support activities including reconnaissance and co-ordination of food drops; Providing advisory support to farmers; and Transportation of feed to pick up points.
1	Countryside Management Unit	Participation in reconnaissance helicopter flights to identify site coordinates where animal fodder needed to be dropped.
1	Loughs Agency	Assisting PSNI access to mountain region.

These figures relate to staff engaged in external field activities and do not include office based administrative staff who also provided assistance during that the severe weather incident.

Emergency Planning Strategy

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in light of the recent severe winter weather and the resulting problems faced by farmers, what consideration she has given to including Sky Watch Civil Air Patrol NI in the emergency planning strategy.

(AQW 22004/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: As part of our response to the problems faced by farmers in light of the recent severe weather, officials considered an offer of assistance from Sky Watch Civil Air Patrol. We did not avail of this offer as we already had sufficient air reconnaissance capacity in place, coupled with ground intelligence. However, we would consider the use of Sky Watch aircraft in future emergency planning strategy with its application being dependent on the nature of emergency.

Bovine Viral Diarrhoea Eradication Programme

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the uptake by farmers of the voluntary phase of the Bovine Viral Diarrhoea eradication programme; and to outline her plans in relation to the voluntary nature of the scheme.

(AQW 22108/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am pleased that industry, through Animal Health and Welfare NI (AHWNI), has commenced a voluntary bovine viral diarrhoea (BVD) eradication programme. While the programme is still in its infancy, initial figures with respect to uptake by farmers, the number of cattle tested and the low level of BVD positive cases identified to date are encouraging given the nature of seasonal calving which is focused both in spring and autumn here in the north.

I am aware it is AHWNI intention to make a case to my Department to move to mandatory BVD testing and therefore industry will need to demonstrate sufficient uptake by farmers during the voluntary BVD testing phase. In addition AHWNI will have to prove that it has sufficient industry funding to secure its on-going financial viability. Any future proposals to introduce mandatory BVD controls will be subject to consultation with both stakeholders and the ARD Committee, and will require the agreement of the EU Commission.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Lough Erne: Fishing Competitions

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail for each species of fish the (i) total; and (ii) average catch rates in quantity and mass from competitions held on Lough Erne, in each of the last six years.

(AQW 18495/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): The Department does not retain specific information for fishing competitions but obtains information from the event organisers when required. In the case of coarse fishing competitions, the organisers usually hold the total catch weight for each competitor, but do not retain the numbers of fish caught or details of the catch of different species.

In future, the Department will make it a condition of the consent issued to organisers of angling events booked on Public Angling Estate waters that numbers participating and catch data are provided to the Department.

DCAL Grants: East Antrim

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for a breakdown of loans and grants that her Department and its agencies have awarded to organisations in East Antrim, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 18755/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have assumed that as well as the Department and its agencies, you are also interested in the loans and grants awarded by my Arms Length Bodies.

It should be noted that the Department, its Agencies and its Arms Length Bodies do not provide loans to other organisations.

The total amount of grants awarded to organisations in the East Antrim constituency in the last five years is summarised in the tables below, divided between resource and capital:

	2007/08 £000	2008/09 £000	2009/10 £000	2010/11 £000	2011/12 £000
Resource	132	214	340	212	246
Capital	540	0	151	247	245
Total	672	214	491	459	491

Detailed breakdowns by project are provided in Annex A

I should point out that if there was any doubt as to whether the East Antrim constituency benefited from the grant, then that grant was excluded from the answer. For example, if an organisation situated in the East Antrim constituency spent the funding further afield, it was excluded from the answer.

Annex A**Resource - East Antrim Constituency**

ALB/Branch	Organisation	2007/08 £000	2008/09 £000	2009/10 £000	2010/11 £000	2011/12 £000
NIMC	Larne Museum			22		1
NIMC	Railway Preservation Society of Ireland		1	5	2	8
NIMC	Flame - Gasworks Museums	3				
Languages	MAGUS - Carrickfergus Council - Andrew Jackson Cottage	0	0	0	0	17
Community Festivals	Newtownabbey, Larne, Carrickfergus Councils	9	22	22	20	22
ACNI	Various Organisations	28	66	91	17	5
Ulster Scots Agency	Ballycarry Community Association		6	6	7	12
Ulster Scots Agency	Cairncastle LOL 692 Community & Cultural Group		14	23	21	28
Ulster Scots Agency	Bannside Community Safety Group		3			
Ulster Scots Agency	Larne District LOL No 1 Education & Cultural Group		1	9		
Ulster Scots Agency	Naggyburn US & Schomberg Orange Culture Soc			2	2	5
Ulster Scots Agency	East Antrim (killyglen) Accordion Band			1		
Ulster Scots Agency	Sir Henry Inglesbys Fife & Drum Corps			2	1	2
Ulster Scots Agency	Ballyboley Pipe Band				2	2
Ulster Scots Agency	Cairnalbana True Blues Flute Band				2	
Ulster Scots Agency	Cairncastle Flute Band				2	2
Ulster Scots Agency	Glenfield Community Association					2
Ulster Scots Agency	Carnlough Flute Band					1
Foras na Gaeilge	Glór Dhál Riada			1	1	
Sport NI	Belfast Lough Sailability			1		
Sport NI	British Gymnastics					94
Sport NI	Carrickfergus Sailing Club		14			
Sport NI	Greenisland FC			1		
Sport NI	Gymnastics Northern Ireland	58	56	109	89	17
Sport NI	Junior Ulster Elks					5
Sport NI	Larne Borough Council					1
Sport NI	Larne RFC					6
Sport NI	Larne Swimming Club					5
Sport NI	NI Volleyball Association	34	31	45	46	11
		132	214	340	212	246

Capital - East Antrim Constituency

ALB/Branch	Organisation	2007/08 £000	2008/09 £000	2009/10 £000	2010/11 £000	2011/12 £000
Inland Waterways	Larne BC	20				
Sport NI	Belfast Lough Sailability			9	29	

ALB/Branch	Organisation	2007/08 £000	2008/09 £000	2009/10 £000	2010/11 £000	2011/12 £000
Sport NI	Cairndhu Rowing Club				29	
Sport NI	Carnlough Rowing Club				19	
Sport NI	Carrick Rangers FC				53	245
Sport NI	Carrickfergus RFC			1		
Sport NI	Carrickfergus Sailing Club				15	
Sport NI	East Antrim Boat Club			9		
Sport NI	Greenisland FC			3		
Sport NI	Gymnastics Northern Ireland				30	
Sport NI	Larne Borough Council			100		
Sport NI	Larne Bowling and Lawn Tennis Club	520				
Sport NI	Larne FC				53	
Sport NI	Monkstown Amateur Boxing Club				14	
Sport NI	Monkstown Community Sports Facility			10		
Sport NI	NI Volleyball Association			7		
Sport NI	Shane O'Neill's GAC			5		
Sport NI	The Cliff			2		
Sport NI	The Shetland & Riding Pony Club			5		
Sport NI	University of Ulster Archery Club (Jordanstown)				5	
		540	0	151	247	245

DCAL: Special Adviser

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) whether her Special Adviser has made any declarations of interest, pursuant to the obligation on civil servants; (ii) how such declarations are recorded; and (iii) whether they are open to public inspection.

(AQW 19247/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín:

- (i) No declarations of interest have been made by my Special Adviser.
- (ii) Declarations of interest are recorded in departmental registers
- (iii) The registers are accessible under the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Soccer, Rugby and Gaelic Games

Mr Irwin asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for a breakdown of the funding allocated by her Department to soccer, rugby and gaelic games, over the last five years.

(AQW 19383/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The table below outlines the exchequer and Lottery funding awarded by Sport NI to soccer, rugby and gaelic games (GAA) over last five financial years.

Year	Soccer		Rugby		GAA	
	Exchequer	Lottery	Exchequer	Lottery	Exchequer	Lottery
2007/08	2,412,038	3,569,719	650,710		4,788,199	981,342
2008/09	1,932,514	3,633,828	2,124,129		4,778,270	2,298,250
2009/10	5,813,927	350,000	372,080		7,563,766	10,000
2010/11	2,712,446	688,837	394,980	109,788	3,458,732	182,751

Year	Soccer		Rugby		GAA	
	Exchequer	Lottery	Exchequer	Lottery	Exchequer	Lottery
2011/12	2,289,308	138,709	502,817	139,277	982,176	273,593
Totals	15,160,233	8,381,093	4,044,716	249,065	21,571,143	3,745,936

Gymnastics

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what plans her Department has to increase participation in gymnastics.

(AQW 20108/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Responsibility for increasing participation in gymnastics rests, in the first instance, with the governing body for the sport, British Gymnastics (NI). Having said that, my Department's strategy for sport, Sport Matters, identifies a number of high level targets aimed at increasing participation rates in sport generally, including gymnastics. To help achieve these targets Sport NI has, during the last three financial years up to March 2012, invested £329,952 of exchequer funding in gymnastics to assist with the development of the sport and increase participation rates. In addition, Sport NI provided £28,756 towards the establishment of a Pre-Games Gymnastics Training Camp in the north prior to the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. This was intended to provide an opportunity for the sport to build relationships with the wider community.

Boxing

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what plans her Department has to increase participation in boxing.

(AQW 20111/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Responsibility for increasing participation in boxing rests, in the first instance, with the governing body for the sport, the Irish Amateur Boxing Association. Having said that, my Department's strategy for sport, Sport Matters, identifies a number of high level targets aimed at increasing participation rates in sport generally, including boxing. To help achieve these targets, Sport NI has invested a total of £1,796,941 in exchequer and lottery funding over the last three financial years, up to March 2012 to assist with the development of the sport and increase participation rates.

In addition, the £3.27 million Boxing Investment Programme, initiated by me, includes targets to increase member participation by 10% in the sport by 2015; and increase female participation in that time by 20%, through the development and improvement of boxing club facilities across the north of Ireland.

Rivers: Worming

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether worming is permitted at all times on the (i) Bush; (ii) Margy; (iii) Carey; and (iv) Glenshesk Rivers.

(AQW 20472/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Worming is permitted on the following rivers during the periods specified:

- (i) River Bush - (a) Dundarave Stretch worming permitted 1st March – 20th October
 - (b) New Stretch worming permitted 1st March – 20th October
 - (c) Town Stretch worming permitted 1st March – 20th October
 - (d) Leap Stretch worming permitted 1st March – 20th October
 River Bush wild fishery – worming permitted – 1st March - 30th June
- (ii) Margy River – worming permitted 1st June – 31st October except from Bonamargy Bridge to the confluence of the Carey River.
- (iii) Carey River – worming permitted 1st June - 31st October from its confluence with the Glenshesk River upstream to Ballyvoy Bridge.
- (iv) Glenshesk Rivers – worming permitted from 1st July – 31st October from that portion of the Glenshesk River from its confluence with the Carey River upstream to Glenshesk Bridge.

Overtime Payments: DCAL

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the total overtime payments made to staff in her Department, in each of the last three financial years.

(AQW 20521/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The total overtime payments made to staff in DCAL in each of the last three financial years were:

2009/2010	£126,457.18
2010/2011	£133,573.26
2011/2012	£137,656.59

Track Cycling Facilities

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what funding is available to address the lack of adequate track cycling facilities despite the level of success on the international stage, including the recent world championship success of Martyn Irvine from Newtownards.

(AQW 21320/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am aware of the recent success of Martyn Irvine in winning gold and silver medals at the World Track Championships in Belarus. On the back of this, I have received a number of calls to look into the provision of track cycling facilities and I have asked my officials to meet with Cycling Ulster to discuss the needs of the sport. I have also recently written to my counterpart in the south of Ireland, Leo Varadkar TD, about the possibility of a meeting to consider how both Governments can work more closely to address major sports facility deficits on the island. I expect that the needs of cycling will feature prominently in those discussions.

Glenavon Football Club

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, given the reported financial difficulties at Glenavon Football Club, to detail (i) how her Department is liaising with the club; and (ii) what direct help her Department can provide to assist the club.

(AQW 21401/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am aware of reported financial difficulties at Glenavon Football Club. These are not matters for me but wholly for the club and the Irish Football Association (IFA). However, sports organisations, including Glenavon FC, that are experiencing financial difficulties can seek advice from Sport NI on options to help address these. It would, though, be a matter for the organisation to decide if it wished to discuss such issues with Sport NI. I understand from Sport NI that, to date, it has received no approaches from Glenavon FC or the IFA on this matter.

Salmon Fishing

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 number of licences that have been issued.

(AQW 22085/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín:

- (i) An application for a tidal draft net licence must be received by the Department on or before 1 March in the calendar year to which the licence relates. No other salmon net licences have closing dates for applications.
- (ii) 1 tidal draft net licence application;
1 drift net licence application;
11 Lough Neagh draft net applications.
- (iii) All applications outlined in (ii) have been granted and licences issued.

Department of Education

Education and Library Boards: Expenditure

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 20240/11-15, to outline the reasons for the difference in expenditure in each education and library board area.

(AQW 21503/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Expenditure is separated between capital for minor works and resource funding for maintenance.

The Education and Library Boards have responsibility for maintenance in the controlled and maintained sectors. In previous years the Boards were provided with a block grant at the beginning of each financial year to support the delivery of a range of services, including landlord maintenance. The Boards had discretion to determine the amount of the block grant they wished to attribute to their landlord maintenance budget, taking into consideration the level of backlog maintenance and health and safety risks in their Board area, along with other budgetary pressures.

Currently, initial allocations are made to the Education and Library Boards based on the backlog of maintenance and floor areas in each Board area. The amount of resource funding allocated for maintenance will therefore vary between Board areas.

Additional funding may be secured via in year bids, and I have continued to support these bids going to Department of Finance and Personnel in order to reduce the maintenance backlog. If the bids are successful, allocations are based on need and capacity to spend within the financial year.

Capital budget allocations for minor works are made equally between the controlled sector and the non controlled sector, which includes voluntary and maintained schools.

In the controlled sector, the initial budget allocation is usually divided equally between the five Boards. In the voluntary and maintained sectors, capital allocations are distributed on the basis of the agreed priorities and are not distributed by school management type or by geographical area.

The agreed priorities are as follows:

- 1 Minor works schemes that meet the inescapable statutory requirements such as Health and Safety, fire protection and our statutory obligations under DDA;
- 2 Essential minor works to ensure the integrity and suitability of the schools estate;
- 3 Curriculum based minor works that would meet currently unmet needs in schools;
- 4 Minor works schemes where application has been made for additional accommodation.

In addition, Boards can make in year bids for additional funding.

The Department then collates these bids with funding requirements from the voluntary maintained sector which are then considered in line with the total capital budget. There may be capacity to fund these bids from within the existing capital budget. If the capital budget is fully committed, the Department can make a bid to DFP for additional funding in the monitoring rounds and, if successful, can then distribute funding according to bids made and the capacity to spend within a financial year.

Primary Schools: Nurturing Projects

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education what funding he is putting in place for primary schools which have expertise in nurture projects but were not on the recent list for funding.

(AQW 21544/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The funding which was recently made available for a small number of schools with existing nurture provision had to be found from within the Department's current budget. The Department is not in a position to provide any further funding for nurture provision at this time.

The Department is commissioning an evaluation of nurture provision. The findings will inform a policy position on this type of intervention, including the targeting of any future support.

Catholic Certificate in Religious Education

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education, for his assessment of how St Mary's University College and Stranmillis University College will be affected by the ruling that the maintained primary sector will accept teachers who have been made redundant without a Certificate in Religious Education, to take posts in the maintained sector with support to complete the Certificate in Religious Education over three years.

(AQW 21845/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I consider that there will be no impact on either St Mary's or Stranmillis University College arising from the requirement for redeployed teachers who take up posts in the maintained sector to complete the Certificate in Religious Education within three years of appointment.

The Colleges are responsible for providing initial teacher education rather than in-service training for serving teachers, who can obtain the Certificate via distance learning.

Sperrinview Special School, Dungannon

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education what is the current cost per pupil allocated to Sperrinview Special School, Dungannon.

(AQW 21962/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The cost per pupil at Sperrinview Special School for the 2011/12 financial year was £16,563. This includes the school's delegated portion as well as staffing and all other associated costs.

St Ita's Primary School, Belfast

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Education (i) how many children applied for admission to St Ita's Primary School as their first choice; (ii) how many were successful in securing a place; (iii) for a breakdown of the criteria on which successful

applicants were awarded their place; and (iv) what provision is in place for those children who were unsuccessful but whose parents want their child to enjoy a faith based, Catholic education.

(AQW 21992/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have been advised by the South Eastern Education and Library Board that applications for admission to St Ita's Primary School in September 2013 were as follows:

- (i) The school received 105 1st preference applications.
- (ii) 87 of the 1st preference applicants have been admitted.
- (iii) The school is responsible for drawing up the admissions criteria which decides which children are admitted to the school. Successful applicants were admitted under the following published admissions criteria:
 - Criterion 1 39 (siblings lower end of parish)
 - Criterion 2 3 (siblings upper end of parish)
 - Criterion 3 5 (siblings from outside the parish)
 - Criterion 4(a)(g) 40 (other lower parish children who applied to St Ita's Nursery: then by random selection on initial letter of surname).
- (iv) The applications of those children who did not secure a place at St Ita's have all been processed in accordance with the further preferences listed by the parents. Two remaining unplaced children have been given a list of schools that still have places including Holy Rosary Primary School, Sunnyside Crescent, a maintained school in the BELB area.

Project Bank Accounts

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 18944/11-15, what plans his Department has to introduce Project Bank Accounts for all building contracts to help protect sub-contractors.

(AQW 22019/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) of the Department of Finance and Personnel introduced (in January 2013) a requirement to include Project Bank Accounts (PBAs) in all contracts awarded by the CPD on behalf of government departments. This is applicable to contracts with a value of over £1m that have a significant subcontracting element.

The CPD is currently trialling two projects that utilise project bank accounts. The trials will test the suitability of this application and, following completion, adjustments will be made from lessons learned to suit the North of Ireland construction sector. Departments have been asked to consider the wider application of PBAs across the public sector in the North of Ireland.

Following the completion of the trial projects the Department will take advice from CPD and will consider whether the process should be introduced across education sector construction projects.

Rasch Mathematical Model

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education, in light of the question presented in writing to his officials on 5 March 2013 by Dr H. Morrison of Queen's University Belfast on the conceptual mathematical error contained in the Rasch mathematical model, which is fundamental to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Programme for International Student Assessment, why, in mathematical terms, the Rasch model is still viable.

(AQW 22049/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am aware of the ongoing academic discussion on the mathematical model that Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) uses. I understand that recent criticism of PISA methodology has been strongly refuted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The methodological debate is of an academic nature and does not affect my views on the value of a benchmark that is used and valued by 65 participating countries.

Mobile Classrooms

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many mobile classrooms are in use in each constituency.

(AQW 22057/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The number of mobile classrooms in each constituency is as follows;

Constituency	No of Mobile Classrooms
Belfast East	50
Belfast North	55
Belfast South	65
Belfast West	106
East Antrim	112
East Derry	98

Constituency	No of Mobile Classrooms
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	155
Foyle	72
Lagan Valley	105
Mid Ulster	210
Newry & Armagh	228
North Antrim	194
North Down	43
South Antrim	102
South Down	201
Strangford	96
Upper Bann	140
West Tyrone	124

Primary School Places: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many pupils in North Down have yet to receive a Primary 1 school place.
(AQW 22058/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have been advised by the South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) that, as at 23 April 2013, there were 18 children in the North Down area who remain unplaced in the primary schools admissions process.

The SEELB are responsible for administering the admissions process and Transfer Officers from the Boards will continue to work with parents to ensure all children are placed for September 2013.

Donacloney Primary School

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Education, given the increase in the birth rate in the area and the fact that 10 children, some of whom live within a 1 to 2 mile radius, have not received a Primary 1 place in their local primary school, whether he will reconsider his decision not to grant Donacloney Primary School an additional class for September 2013.

(AQW 22068/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I turned down Development Proposal (DP) No 279 which sought to increase the capacity at Donacloney Primary School having been satisfied that there are sufficient places in other controlled primary schools in the local area to meet the current demand.

The Development Proposal process is a legal process and there is no recourse for an appeal or review of my decision.

The Southern Education and Library Board (SELB) has recently published its draft primary school area plan for public consultation and is exploring local solutions for many schools experiencing difficulties in this area. Any proposed expansion of Donacloney Primary School needs to be considered in this strategic context and brought forward as part of a managed change in line with the overall pupil population planning figure.

There are currently seven other schools in the locality with a total of 81 Year 1 places available. To allow Donacloney Primary School to increase beyond its current approved enrolment number, at this time, would have the potential to impact adversely on those other schools and increase the level of unfilled places.

I understand that of the 10 children that did not obtain a place in Year 1 at Donacloney PS, seven have been placed in line with parental preference in alternative schools and three are currently unplaced.

The SELB will work to secure places at alternative schools with places available for these three children.

Primary Schools: Admissions

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Education to list the primary schools in each constituency that have been permitted to exceed their admissions limit in each of the last two academic years; and the reasons that the limit was allowed to be exceeded.

(AQW 22075/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The primary schools in each constituency that have been permitted to exceed their admissions limit in each of the last two academic years are detailed in the tables below.

The Department considered each request for an additional place on its own merits though, typically, approval was given for the following reasons:

- The request represented the only way a child could access a place in the appropriate category (at first preference) of primary school within a reasonable travelling distance of their home address. Appropriate categories are controlled, maintained, Irish medium and integrated.
- A sibling was in attendance at the school.
- Compassionate or exceptional circumstances existed.

2011/12 School Year

Constituency	School Name
Belfast North	Ligoniel PS
	Holy Family PS
	Gaelscoil Eanna
Belfast South	Forge Integrated PS
	St Ita's PS
Foyle	Ballougry PS
	Greenhaw PS
	Chapel Road PS
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	St Patrick's PS, Mullanaska
	Carntall PS
	Fivemiletown PS
	Roan St Patrick's PS
	St Mary's PS, Aughnacloy
East Derry	Damhead PS
West Tyrone	Strabane Controlled PS
	Drumlish PS
	St Lawrence's PS
	St Columbkille's PS
	St Dymphna's PS, Dromore
	Gaelscoil na gCrann
South Antrim	Parkgate PS
	Creggan PS
	Mount St Michael's PS
	St Macnissi's PS, Newtownabbey
North Antrim	The Diamond PS
	Clough PS
	Broughshane PS
	Carniny PS
East Antrim	St Macnissi's PS, Larne

Constituency	School Name
Mid Ulster	New Row PS
	St Trea's PS
	St Columba's PS, Draperstown
	St Brigid's PS, Magherafelt
	Edendork PS
	St Mary's PS, Dungannon
	Gaelscoil Ui Neill
Lagan Valley	Maghaberry PS
	Rowandale Integrated PS
North Down	Rathmore PS
Strangford	Londonderry PS
	Drumlins Integrated PS
South Down	Cumran PS
	St Malachy's PS, Kilclief
	St Patrick's PS, Saul
	St Francis PS, Castlewellan
	St Mary's PS, Ardglass
	Our Lady & St Patrick PS, Downpatrick
	Bunscoil Bheanna Boirche
	All Children's Integrated PS
	Dromore Road PS
	Bronte PS
	Holy Cross PS, Kilkeel
Newry & Armagh	Mullavilly PS
	St Brigid's PS, Crossmaglen
	St Brigid's PS (Drumilly), Belleek
	St Mary's PS, Tassagh
	St Mary's PS, Jerrettspass
	St Mary's PS, Mullaghbawn
	St Patrick's PS, Cullyhanna
	St Jarlath's PS, Blackwatertown
Upper Bann	St Francis PS, Aghderg
	Seagoe PS

2012/13 School Year

Constituency	School Name
Belfast North	Our Lady of Lourdes PS
	St Therese of Lisieux PS
	Holy Family PS
	St Bernard's PS
	Gaelscoil Eanna

Constituency	School Name
Belfast West	Forth River PS
Belfast South	Forge Integrated PS
	St Ita's PS
Foyle	Broadbridge PS
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	Kesh PS
	Enniskillen Model PS
	Lisbellaw PS
	St Patrick's PS, Mullanaskea
	St Mary's PS, Mullymesker
	Enniskillen Integrated PS
	Roan St Patrick's PS
	St John's PS, Moy
	St Mary's PS, Dungannon
	St Mary's PS, Aughnacloy
	St Patrick's PS, Dungannon
	Gaelscoil Aodha Rua
	Windmill Integrated PS
East Derry	Killowen PS
	St Patrick's & St Joseph's PS, Garvagh
	St Columba's PS, Kilrea
West Tyrone	Strabane Controlled PS
	St Patrick's PS, Castlederg
	St Conor's PS, Omagh
	St Dymphna's PS, Dromore
	Omagh Integrated PS
	Holy Family PS, Omagh
South Antrim	Carnmoney PS
	McKinney PS
North Antrim	Garryduff PS
	Lislagan PS
	Landhead PS
	Clough PS
	Leaney PS
	St Mary's PS, Portglenone
	Glenravel PS
	St Colmcille's PS, Ballymena
	St Brigid's PS, Ballymena
	Ballycastle Integrated PS
East Antrim	Whiteabbey PS

Constituency	School Name
Mid Ulster	New Row PS
	St Trea's PS
	St John's PS, Swatragh
	St Brigid's PS, Magherafelt
	Gaelscoil an tSeanchai
	St Mary's PS, Pomeroy
	Phoenix Integrated PS
Lagan Valley	Pond Park PS
	St Colman's PS, Lisburn
	Rowandale Integrated PS
	Fair Hill PS
North Down	St Comgall's PS
Strangford	Londonderry PS, Newtownards
	Kircubbin Integrated PS
	Drumlins Integrated PS
South Down	Glasswater PS
	St Patrick's PS, Saul
	St Francis PS, Castlewellan
	St Mary's PS, Ardglass
	St Brigid's PS, Downpatrick
	Bunscoil Bheanna Boirche
	Drumadonnell PS
	Ballyholland PS
	Holy Cross PS, Kilkeel
	St Patrick's PS, Mayobridge
	St Patrick's PS, Hilltown
	St Patrick's PS, Rathfriland
Newry & Armagh	Orchard County PS
	Dromintee PS
	St Patrick's PS, Crossmaglen
	St Brigid's PS, Crossmaglen
	St Mary's PS, Tassagh
	St Peter's PS, Bessbrook
	St Mary's PS, Jerrettspass
	St Mary's PS, Mullaghbawn
	St Jarlath's PS, Blackwatertown
	Our Lady & St Mochua's PS

Constituency	School Name
Upper Bann	Lurgan Model PS
	King's Park PS
	Birches PS
	Edenderry PS
	St Patrick's PS, Magheralin
	St Francis PS, Aghderg
	St Francis PS, Lurgan
	Seagoe PS

St Francis Primary School, Loughbrickland

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Education how many children applied (i) successfully; and (ii) unsuccessfully for a Primary 1 place in St Francis Primary School, Loughbrickland; and to detail the reasons why each child was successful or unsuccessful.

(AQW 22076/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have been advised by the Southern Education and Library Board (SELB) that by the closing date for receipt of applications for admission to Year 1 in 2013/14, St Francis' Primary School, Loughbrickland had received 34 applications for an approved admissions number of 21.

Each school is responsible for determining its own admissions criteria for admission to the school. When a school is oversubscribed with applications it must apply its published admissions criteria in order to select between applicants to the last available place. In this instance 13 children were unsuccessful in gaining admission as they did not meet the school's admissions criteria as well as other applicants.

If a school wishes to accept more applicants than it has places available, it can seek additional places from the Department, known as a temporary variation (TV). In considering any TV request the Department, in order to maintain a viable schools estate, must be mindful of the availability of empty places in schools in the same sector (in this instance maintained) in the area. If the Department approves an additional place it must be offered to the child next-in-line following application of the school's published admissions criteria.

St Francis' Primary School sought a TV for 12 of the 13 unsuccessful children. In line with policy the Department was able to approve one additional place for the child ranked 22nd by the school. The TV request in respect of the remaining 11 was refused as the applicants live within travelling distance of other maintained primary schools with places available.

The SELB has advised that 9 of the 11 children not admitted to St Francis' Primary School have now been placed in alternative schools in line with parental preference. The Transfer Officer in the SELB will work with the parents of the two children currently unplaced in order to ensure that they are placed in a primary school by September 2013.

Children with Speech and Language Difficulties

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Education what advice his Department provides to schools on supporting children with speech and language difficulties.

(AQW 22087/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Provision of speech and language therapy as an allied health service, is the responsibility of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and is routinely delivered across both educational and health settings.

The type, level and frequency of therapy is recommended by the relevant Education and Library Board (ELB), usually in consultation with the relevant Health Trust, based upon the individual learning needs of the child.

The Chief Executives of the ELBs have advised that an extensive range of advice and support is available to schools to assist them in meeting the needs of children with speech and language difficulties including:

- advice regarding the educational implications of pupils' speech and language difficulties and use of appropriate teaching strategies and resources to address these issues;
- advice regarding Individual Education Plans and setting clear targets to meet the needs of the individual child;
- contributing to the delivery of intervention for pupils who require more specific support;
- ongoing monitoring, assessment and review of pupil progress and the appropriateness of support being delivered.

Additional training is available for school staff to promote their capacity to support pupils with speech and language difficulties and advice is offered to parents regarding effective strategies and resources which can be utilised to support the child in the home setting to reinforce work being carried out in school.

My Department has also been supporting a project in all ELBs to train teachers and classroom assistants to identify children with speech and language difficulties at an early stage and is being implemented by collaboration between the ELBs and the relevant Health Trusts. Approximately £11.6m has been allocated to the ELBs since the project's inception in 2001.

Evaluation to date has shown marked improvement not only in the skills of the teachers, but also in the understanding of the needs of these teachers by speech and language therapists.

In 2011 my Department issued a Resource File to all schools in the north of Ireland to support children with special educational needs. Included within this file is a chapter on speech and language and communication difficulties.

Preschool Places: Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many pre-school places are available in Bangor; and to list the location of each playgroup in Bangor.

(AQW 22091/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: For the 2013/14 school year there are a total of 746 funded pre-school places available in Bangor, of which 416 are in the statutory nursery sector and 330 are in the voluntary/private sector. The names and addresses of voluntary and private settings in Bangor are listed below:-

- | | |
|---|---|
| ■ Ballycrochan Playgroup
Ballycrochan Presbyterian Church
36a Silverbirch Road
Bangor BT19 6EU | ■ Crawfordsburn Playgroup
Ballygilbert Presbyterian Church
376 Belfast Road
Bangor BT19 1UH |
| ■ Ballyholme Presbyterian Church Playgroup
Ballyholme Presbyterian Church
Ashley Drive
Bangor BT20 5RD | ■ Early Days Playgroup
Ballymagee Primary School
77 Ashbury Avenue
Bangor BT19 6ZG |
| ■ Bangor Abbey Pre-School Centre
Rooms 18/19 Clandeboye Primary School
111 Clandeboye Road
Bangor BT20 3JW | ■ Little Acorns Pre-School Playgroup
Clandeboye Primary School
111 Clandeboye Road
Bangor BT20 3JW |
| ■ Bangor West Nursery Playgroup
West Church Halls
91 Crawfordsburn Road
Bangor BT19 1BG | ■ Little Bear's Day Nursery
Unit 2a Ashbury Shopping Centre
Ashbury Avenue
Bangor BT19 6TH |
| ■ Big Red Balloon Day Nursery
64 Broadway
Bangor BT20 4RG | ■ St Comgall's Pre-School Education Centre
St Comgall's Parish Centre
Brunswick Road
Bangor BT20 3DS |
| ■ Bo-Peep Corner Pre-School Playgroup
171 Crawfordsburn Road
Bangor BT19 1 BT | ■ Stepping Stones Day Nursery
1A Church Avenue
Bangor
BT20 3EQ |
| ■ Bright Sparks Pre-School
C/o Crawfordsburn Primary School
4 Cootehall Road
Bangor BT19 1JA | ■ Tiddli-winks Playgroup
St Columbanus Parish Hall
68 Groomsport Road
Bangor BT20 5 NE |

Preschool Places

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Education to list the pre-schools that are oversubscribed for the 2013/14 academic year; and by how many places each pre-school is oversubscribed.

(AQW 22094/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I will arrange for a list of those pre-school settings which had filled all of their allocation of funded pre-school places by the end of Stage 1 of the 2013/14 pre-school admissions process, to be placed in the Assembly library.

It is not possible to determine a specific number of places by which each setting was oversubscribed as the pre-school admissions process is a preference based system with parents stating, in some cases, 6 or more preferences on their application form. If a setting receives fewer applications than it has places available all those who apply will be facilitated. Where a setting receives more applications than it has places, these will be considered against the setting's published admissions criteria with those applications which cannot be facilitated being passed onto the next setting listed as a preference. A child may therefore be considered by a number of settings before being placed or may remain unplaced at the end of their list of preferences.

By the end of Stage 1 of the 2013/14 pre-school admissions process over 95% of children had been offered a place in a setting listed as a preference on their application form.

Education and Library Boards: Maintenance Backlog

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education what was the cost of the maintenance backlog in each Education and Library Board, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 22095/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information in the table below has been taken from the Manhattan Estate Management system and includes schools from all education sectors. Manhattan is a live system and hence does not hold historic information. Collation of maintenance backlog figures has only been carried out since June 2010.

Board	June 2010 £k	March 2011 £k	March 2012 £k	March 2013* £k
BELB	88,274	97,628	87,942	86,251
NEELB	55,505	59,655	64,553	65,939
SEELB	36,642	37,557	36,830	26,889
SELB	60,072	61,729	72,639	75,249
WELB	46,411	42,749	48,749	50,495
Total	286,904	299,318	310,713	304,823

* The March 2013 figure excludes the backlog as a result of schools that are closed. The backlog for closed schools amounts to some £4million across all Education and Library Board areas

Education and Skills Authority Implementation Team

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 21556/11-15, what role the Education and Skills Authority Implementation Team played in the approval process.

(AQW 22096/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Skills Authority Implementation Team (ESAIT) do not have a role in the approval process for redundancy proposals made by the Education and Library Boards for school based staff.

Voluntary Severance: DE

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of cases submitted for voluntary severance which have been (i) approved and (ii) not approved by his Department, in each of the last four years, broken down by arm's-length body.

(AQW 22097/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department has made funding available for voluntary severance for non-school based staff in ALBs from 1 April 2010. Figures for the numbers of cases, therefore, as presented in the table below relate to the three years since.

The Department had an approval role in respect of ALB access to funding. The approval role per case was within the ALB concerned

	2010-2011		2011-12		2012-2013	
	Volunteers submitted, approved and released	Volunteers submitted, and not approved	Volunteers submitted, approved and released	Volunteers submitted, and not approved	Volunteers submitted, approved and released	Volunteers submitted, and not approved
BELB	31	1	10	1	6	0
NEELB	29	1	29	0	11	0
SEELB	26	2	25	7	1	0
SELB	40	1	36	0	10	0
WELB	51	5	47	0	8	0
SCELB	1	0	0	0	1	0
CCEA	15	0	12	0	0	0
YCNI	1	0	0	0	0	0
CCMS	10	0	7	0	0	0
Total	204	10	166	8	37	0

Education and Library Boards: Redundancy Proposals

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 21556/11-15, how he ensured that the quality and effectiveness of the service provided was not diminished in the event of a voluntary severance proposal being approved.

(AQW 22098/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Board of Governors are responsible for their budget and staffing management. In meeting this responsibility, a Board of Governors should take into account the requirement to maintain the effectiveness and efficiency of the service through the retention of suitably qualified and skilled staff. In bringing forward proposals for redundancies, a Board of Governors must take into account the curricular needs of the school, including the statutory requirement of curriculum delivery.

The quality and effectiveness of teaching is monitored on an ongoing basis by the principal of an individual school. The more formal arrangements are implemented by the governors, in conjunction with the principal, through the individual school's arrangements for Professional Review and Staff Development (PRSD). Employing and Managing Authorities are required by the Department of Education to provide both support and challenge to the schools for which they have responsibility. The Education and Training Inspectorate, on behalf of the Department of Education monitors and evaluates the quality and effectiveness of provision in individual schools at the point of inspection and the Chief Inspector publishes the collated outcomes, at system level, in her biennial report

Colleges and Higher Education Institutions

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 21501/11-15, on what date he expects to notify the Higher Education Institutions.

(AQW 22099/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As I explained in my answer to AQW 21501/11-15, I am giving careful consideration to the intake numbers for initial education courses for the 2013/14 year. You will appreciate that in order to reach the right decision I need to take account of a number of options and wider considerations.

I am conscious that the Higher Education Institutions need to know their allocations in order to offer places to students for next year and will ensure they are notified as soon as practicable but this will not be until I have given full consideration to all the relevant issues.

'Advancing Shared Education' Report

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education for a breakdown of the cost of the 'Advancing Shared Education' report, including the amounts paid to each panel member.

(AQW 22114/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In order to produce their advice, funding of £35,000 was available to the Ministerial Advisory Group on Advancing Shared Education. The bulk of the funding was for research work (£15k); interviews and focus groups, including obtaining the views of parents and young people (£9k); and the balance to cover the offices expenses, hire of venues for meetings, travel, translation costs, etc. A staff officer from within the Department of Education was also made available to the Ministerial Advisory Group to provide secretariat functions.

I understand the actual costs of the Ministerial Advisory Group are likely to be less than the funding that was available to them. They have yet to submit their final claim.

The Panel members of the Ministerial Advisory Group carried out their duties on a voluntary basis and only received out-of-pocket expenses (such as travel expenses and the cost of telephone calls).

Nursery Assistants: Back Pay

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Education when the issue of back pay for nursery assistants will be resolved.

(AQW 22152/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There has been a considerable delay experienced in obtaining agreement with the trade unions on the composition of the job description for the post of Nursery Assistant.

Management Side first issued a draft generic job description to Trade Union Side (TUS) on 6 February 2008. In November 2009, TUS responded setting out comments on outstanding areas of disagreement. Management responded in March 2010 and ongoing discussions continued. A formal response from TUS was not received until May 2012 which requested further discussion on a number of issues.

On 22 April 2013, Management wrote to TUS outlining their substantive response to issues of concern. A further meeting has been requested and every effort is being made to reach an agreement.

Until the evaluation of the Nursery Assistant post is completed it is not possible to say if the issue of back pay will arise.

Primary School Places: North Down

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Education what action he is taking to assist parents who are unable to find a primary school of their choice for their children in North Down.

(AQW 22156/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have been advised by the South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) that, as at 23 April 2013, there were 18 children in the North Down area who remain unplaced in the primary schools admissions process.

The SEELB are responsible for administering the admissions process and Transfer Officers from the Boards will continue to work with parents to ensure all children are placed for September 2013.

Catholic Certificate in Religious Education

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Education what is the status of substitute teachers who wish to access employment opportunities in maintained primary schools but do not hold the Certificate of Religious Education.

(AQW 22168/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Schools may only engage substitute teachers from those who have completed the registration process for the NI Substitutes Teachers Register.

When registering on the Substitute Teachers Register teachers may, as part of the registration process, include details on whether they hold a Teachers' Certificate in Religious Education. It is not, however, a mandatory requirement that teachers hold this certificate in order to take up the offer of substitute employment in a Catholic Maintained school. In practice schools engage a wide range of teachers many of whom will not have obtained the certificate.

Schools: Languages Other Than English

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many children are taught in schools where English is not the first language.

(AQW 22183/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Figures reported in the 2012/13 census record that 3,261 children were enrolled in grant-aided Irish-medium schools, where the first language of instruction is Irish. In all other grant-aided schools, the primary language of instruction is English.

In addition to these pupils, there were 898 pupils enrolled in Irish-medium units attached to grant-aided English-medium primary and post-primary schools. A further 6 pupils were recorded as attending an Irish-medium independent school.

Southern Education and Library Board: Long-term Absence

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what was average time taken within the South Eastern Education and Library Board to (i) phase return to work; or (ii) dismiss teaching staff with long-term absence, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 22185/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The SEELB has informed the Department that the Board does not have the resources to determine the average time taken regarding (i) start phased return to work and (ii) dismiss teaching staff with long term absence, within a reasonable timescale.

However, in accordance with the Board's Managing Attendance in Schools Procedure, the SEELB has advised that:

- in circumstances where a recommendation is made by the Occupational Health Physician that a phased return to work would assist an employee, this should, where possible, be facilitated by the Principal, in line with the needs of the school. The time span of the phased return to work should normally be based on advice from an independent Accredited Specialist in Occupational Medicine. In accordance with agreed guidelines such arrangements should normally last for not more than four weeks.
- if all the available medical evidence indicates that the employee is no longer fit to carry out the duties of the post or is unlikely to be fit to return to work within a reasonable period, the Board of Governors, following consultation with the Employing Authority, may determine that an employee's contract should be terminated on grounds of capability due to ill health and/or on the grounds that they are unable to provide regular, reliable and sustained service. There is no set timeframe for any termination on the grounds of ill health/capability and each case is assessed and managed on its own merits, in accordance with agreed guidelines.

Education and Library Boards: Teaching Staff

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what is the average age of teaching staff in each Education and Library Board area.

(AQW 22187/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information is contained in the table below.

Average age of teachers by Education and Library Board Area, 2011/12

Education and Library Board Area	Average age
Belfast Education and Library Board Area	41
Western Education and Library Board Area	42
North Eastern Education and Library Board Area	41
South Eastern Education and Library Board Area	41
Southern Education and Library Board Area	41

Source: Teachers' Payroll and Pensions Administration System

Ministerial Advisory Group on the Advancement of Shared Education

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education whether he was aware, prior to the appointment of Professor Paul Connolly of Queen's University to his ministerial advisory group on the advancement of shared education, that Professor Connolly's research practice had been the subject of criticism in an 1998 Ofsted survey of published educational research by J Tooley and D Darby.

(AQW 22190/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I was unaware of this criticism from 15 years ago which I understand was challenged at the time by other academics who were supportive of Professor Connolly's research practice.

Professor Connolly was appointed on the basis of his expertise in the field of education and his acknowledged work in relation to community relations.

Paul Connolly BSocSc (Hons), MA, MSc, PhD is Professor of Education and Head of the School of Education at Queen's University Belfast. He also holds the position of Donald Dewar Visiting Chair in Social Justice and Public Policy at the University of Glasgow.

Professor Connolly is Founding Editor of the international, peer-reviewed journal Effective Education and Founding Director of the Centre for Effective Education at Queen's. In addition he is Co-Chair of the Campbell Collaboration Education Coordinating Group, which is an international network of scholars, policy makers, practitioners, funders, students, and others, who are interested in evidence-based practice and systematic reviews.

Professor Connolly is due our appreciation for taking-on the additional workload of Chairing the Ministerial Advisory Group on Advancing Shared Education and receiving no financial gain for doing so.

Primary School Places: North Down

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Education how many Primary 1 places exist in schools in the North Down constituency; and how many remain available for September 2013.

(AQW 22225/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The number of P1 places available is defined by a primary school's admissions number. Across the North Down constituency there were 1,119 places available at the start of the 2013/14 primary admissions process. Details of individual school admissions numbers are available in booklets published by Education and Library Boards on their websites. For schools in North Down these can be viewed at:

http://www.seelb.org.uk/schools/Procedures_12_13/PDFs/Primary/2012/ArdsN.Down.pdf

The South-Eastern Education and Library Board have advised that as at 26 April 2013, there are 115 places still available at the following schools:

Clandeboyne PS	29 places
Millisle PS	4 places
Kilcooley PS	57 places
St Patrick's PS, Holywood	19 places
St Anne's PS, Donaghadee	6 places

Schools: Capital Build Priorities

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Education what weighting is applied to social deprivation when determining new school capital build priorities.

(AQW 22262/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Education's strategy for capital investment in new school builds is shaped by the outworking of the Area Planning process with the focus on supporting the development and delivery of a network of viable and sustainable schools in the years ahead.

In delivering its capital investment programme the Department's priorities are weighted on effecting rationalisation; addressing serious accommodation inadequacies and schools operating on split sites; and undue reliance on temporary accommodation.

Social deprivation is addressed within the Economic Appraisal for a new school build project as part of the needs analysis in making the case for funding. Deprivation statistics are drawn from NISRA's Neighbourhood Information database

Northern Education and Library Board: Drugs Education

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Education what provision exists in the Northern Education and Library Board area for pupils who are preparing for post-primary transfer to receive professional guidance on the dangers of experimenting with legal highs and illegal substances.

(AQW 22270/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There are no programmes or specific training being provided by the North Eastern Education and Library board in relation to drugs education. However, information and advice regarding Drugs Policies for schools is provided on the Board's website at: <http://www.neelb.org.uk/teachers/cass/pcpd/drugs/>.

Drugs education is included in the revised curriculum and schools have access to a wide range of resources appropriate for pupils at each key stage. Opportunities to cover drugs education would mainly fall under the Personal Health element of the Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU) area of learning at primary school.

The revised curriculum provides the flexibility for teachers to choose the resources they require to deliver the curriculum and which they feel best meet the needs of their pupils. It is very much a matter for schools to decide whether they wish to use the services of external bodies and professionals to assist with curriculum delivery.

The Department does not hold information on the external services brought into schools.

Integrated Schools

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of (i) integrated primary schools; and (ii) integrated post-primary schools, broken down by council area.[R]

(AQW 22283/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table below.

Integrated primary and post-primary schools by council area – 2012/13

District Council	Primary	Post-primary	Total
Antrim	4	2	6
Ards	2	1	3
Armagh	1	0	1
Ballymena	1	1	2
Ballymoney	1	0	1
Banbridge	1	1	2
Belfast	4	2	6
Carrickfergus	1	1	2
Castlereagh	2	1	3
Coleraine	2	1	3
Cookstown	1	0	1
Craigavon	1	1	2
Derry	2	1	3
Down	4	2	6
Dungannon	1	1	2
Fermanagh	1	1	2
Larne	2	0	2

District Council	Primary	Post-primary	Total
Limavady	1	0	1
Lisburn	3	1	4
Magherafelt	1	1	2
Moyle	1	0	1
Newry And Mourne	1	0	1
Newtownabbey	1	0	1
North Down	2	1	3
Omagh	1	1	2
Strabane	0	0	0
Total	42	20	62

Source: School census

Note:

1 Figures include Controlled Integrated and Grant Maintained Integrated (GMI) schools.

St Joseph's Primary School, Galbally

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Education who granted permission for St Joseph's Primary School, Galbally to exceed its stated admissions limit.

(AQW 22321/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Only the Department has the power to permit a school to exceed its approved admissions number. For the 2013/14 school year the Department approved eight additional places at St Joseph's Primary School, Galbally.

Towerview Primary School

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Education why the South Eastern Education and Library Board did not approve an increase in the enrolment numbers in Towerview Primary School.

(AQW 22325/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: It is the responsibility of the Department of Education to determine the maximum enrolment and admissions numbers for each school. In determining the enrolment number for a school, the Department is required to have regard to the teaching accommodation available for use by pupils.

I have been advised by the South Eastern Education and Library Board that it has no plans to progress a Development Proposal to increase the capacity of Towerview Primary School or to re-designate the classroom provided at the school to accommodate a Key Stage 1 Medium Learning Difficulties Unit, for teaching purposes.

The school did submit a request for a temporary variation to allow it to admit three additional pupils above its admissions number for the 2013/14 year. However, in line with existing temporary variation policy, this was refused as there are sufficient places available in the controlled sector in the Bangor area within reasonable travelling distance.

Pupils with Type 1 Diabetes

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what training is available for teachers or school staff in supporting pupils with Type 1 Diabetes.

(AQW 22327/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have been advised by the Education and Library Boards that Boards undertake a needs analysis, on an annual basis, of the training required by schools for the forthcoming academic year.

School principals are responsible for determining the training needs of their teachers and school staff and they can avail of the wide range of courses on all aspects of special educational needs, including diabetes, offered by Boards.

Training with regard to health conditions, including diabetes, would be provided by the relevant Health and Social Care Trust and will be in line with the pupil's individual healthcare plan and be subject to on-going review.

Buddy Bear Trust in Dungannon

Ms McGahan asked the Minister of Education how many referrals the Education and Library Boards have made to the Buddy Bear Trust in Dungannon.

(AQW 22330/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Chief Executives of the Education and Library Boards have advised that the number of children who were referred to the Buddy Bear Trust, in the calendar years 2008 – 2012, is as follows:-

BELB	0
NEELB	1
SEELB	0
SELB	0
WELB	0

Curriculum: Relationship and Sexuality Education

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 21936/11-15, given that the Human Rights Commission report referenced the absence of sexual orientation from the whole curriculum as well as relationship and sexuality education (RSE), whether he will consider bringing RSE within the statutory curriculum; or establishing a mandatory minimum content for schools to follow.

(AQW 22336/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Revised Curriculum, including the areas of learning (AOL), is set out at a high level in the Education (NI) Order 2006. The detailed requirements of what schools must teach under each AOL at each key stage are contained in the Education (Curriculum Content) Order (NI) 2007 and this constitutes the minimum content of the curriculum for schools to follow. There is no statutory requirement at any Key Stage for schools to teach about sexual orientation.

Whilst the term Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) does not appear in the 2007 Order, the terms relationships and sexuality do appear separately.

However, schools do have Guidance from the Department specifically requiring them to have in place a written policy on Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE), which has been subject to consultation with parents and endorsed by the Board of Governors. The Guidance states that RSE must be delivered in schools within a moral framework and taught in a sensitive manner that is in keeping with the ethos of the school and which is appropriate to the needs and maturity of their pupils. The Department's Guidance for Post-primary Schools on Relationships and Sexuality Education states that the issue of sexual orientation should be handled by schools in a sensitive, non-confrontational and reassuring way.

In developing or reviewing their RSE policy, schools have been advised to take account of guidance produced by the Equality Commission on eliminating sexual orientation discrimination. This guidance relates to the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (NI) 2006, which gives all pupils the right to learn in a safe environment, to be treated with respect and dignity and not be treated any less favourably on the grounds of their actual or perceived sexual orientation.

A key strength of the Revised Curriculum is the flexibility it provides to teachers to introduce topics in ways that best meet the needs and interests of their pupils.

I have no plans at this time to introduce any further statutory requirements within the curriculum.

Shared Education: Limavady

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Education whether any individuals or groups have expressed views regarding the shared education system in place in the Limavady area, over the last two years.

(AQW 22345/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have not had any specific views expressed about the shared education system in place in the Limavady area. This work is jointly funded through the International Fund for Ireland and the Atlantic Philanthropies

Last year, I had the pleasure of visiting St Mary's High School, Limavady, which acts as the lead school for the Sharing Education programme in the Roe Valley area and saw the work at first hand.

Teachers: Efficient Discharge Scheme

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education whether his Department will have the mechanism for the efficient discharge of teachers in place by 2015.

(AQW 22368/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: It is important to note that the Efficient Discharge Scheme and its application have not been free from criticism in the past. My Department is currently engaged in discussions with teacher unions and employers about the reintroduction of an Efficient Discharge Scheme which would allow the early release of a limited number of teachers in the interests of the

efficient discharge of the employer's function. It is important that any scheme is capable of demonstrating value for money and quantifiable outcomes; there are also a range of formal approval processes involved in taking forward schemes of this nature. Work is being taken forward on a without prejudice basis to ensure practical steps are taken to make the criteria for evaluating ED cases more robust and processes are put in place to ensure the criteria are applied fairly and equitably to all applications.

Given the importance being placed on this issue by unions, employers and others I have instructed officials to intensify efforts to advance this piece of work. However, until the necessary approvals are in place it is difficult to determine whether or when a scheme might come into effect.

St Francis Primary School, Loughbrickland

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Education whether he will ask the Southern Education and Library Board to bring forward its development proposal for St Francis Primary School, Loughbrickland.
(AQW 22373/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: A Development Proposal (DP) seeking an increase in the capacity of St Francis Primary School, Loughbrickland was submitted by the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools to the Southern Education and Library Board (SELB) on 10 April 2013.

Prior to the publication of any DP the Board is required to undertake pre-consultation with those schools it considers may be affected by the proposal. The SELB has confirmed that the DP for St Francis PS was issued to the relevant schools for consultation on 15 April 2013.

Responses to this are due to be returned to the Board by 7 May 2013 and it is anticipated that the DP will be published in the relevant local papers during week commencing 13 May 2013 and in the national papers on Thursday 16 May 2013.

Online Safety Education

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Education what level of education is provided to primary school aged children on online safety; and at what age this begins.
(AQW 22400/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Information and Communication Technology (ICT) plays a central role in the revised curriculum and it is essential that pupils are protected and made aware of potential dangers. Using ICT is a cross-curricular skill, compulsory at all key stages of the curriculum and applies to pupils from compulsory school age onwards. As part of Using ICT, pupils learn how to keep safe and display acceptable online behaviour.

Schools are required to have in place policies on the safe and effective use of the Internet and other digital technology tools. The Department of Education has provided guidance to schools to help them in drawing up their policies.

C2k's Education Network service, the fully managed digital technology service provided to all grant-aided schools, has built in physical controls to protect users and operates a rigorous Internet filtering policy. E-Safety is actively promoted as part of the Education Network service.

Schools have access to a range of educational resources about keeping safe, including online safety, suitable for pupils at each key stage, including young children. The revised curriculum provides teachers with the flexibility to tailor their teaching and to use the resources and programmes they feel best meet the needs and level of understanding of their pupils. It would be a matter for individual schools how they deliver online safety education and the Department would not hold information on the approaches used by schools.

Schools: East Londonderry

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Education which schools in the East Londonderry constituency were in formal intervention in (i) 2011; and (ii) 2012.
(AQW 22443/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There were no schools in the East Derry constituency in formal intervention in 2011 or 2012.

To date, no schools in the East Derry constituency have entered formal intervention since the process was introduced at 30 April 2009.

Sperrinview Special School: Hydrotherapy Pool

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education why an application to the Southern Education and Library Board from Sperrinview Special School, for a hydrotherapy pool, was turned down.
(AQW 22456/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Southern Education and Library Board has advised that an Economic Appraisal, undertaken by the Southern Education and Library Board, determined that the proposal for a hydrotherapy pool at Sperrinview Special School was not feasible due to the recurrent costs involved.

The outcome of the Economic Appraisal, and the reasoning behind it, were conveyed to Sperrinview Special School in September 2012.

Department for Employment and Learning

Praxis: Moving Up Project

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 20545/11-15, to provide a breakdown of how this funding has been expended.

(AQW 21779/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): The table overleaf is a breakdown of the funding allocated to the ESF Moving Up Project delivered by Praxis Care. Funding is provided by the European Social Fund (40%) and the Department for Employment and Learning (25%). Praxis Care provides 35% match funding.

	Staff Costs	Participant Costs	Running Costs	Total
2011/12				
ESF	£227,885	£32,582	£28,076	£288,543
DEL	£142,428	£20,364	£17,548	£180,340
2012/13				
ESF	£228,655	£32,726	£25,391	£286,772
DEL	£142,909	£20,454	£15,870	£179,233
2013/14				
ESF	£233,569	£33,429	£26,394	£293,392
DEL	£145,980	£20,893	£16,496	£183,369
2014/15				
ESF	£233,569	£31,905	£27,918	£293,392
DEL	£145,980	£19,941	£17,449	£183,370
Total Costs	£1,500,975	£212,294	£175,142	£1,888,411

Higher Education: Profoundly Deaf Students

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 20973/11-15 and AQW 20974/11-15, if assistance for profoundly deaf people is adequate and not in decline and why the number of enrolled deaf students in Higher Education has fallen in the last five years.

(AQW 21804/11-15)

Dr Farry: When students with hearing disabilities apply for higher education courses they are encouraged to apply for Disabled Students Allowances to cover the extra costs of any support they may require throughout their course as a direct result of their condition. The assistance which my Department provides for students with disabilities has increased in the last five years from £2.1m in 2007/08 to £3m in 2012/13. For students who are profoundly deaf, support has also increased over this period.

The rates of Disabled Students' Allowances payable to full-time students who are deaf have increased as follows in the period 2007/08 to 2012/13:

- A specialist equipment allowance up from £4,905 to £5,266 for the whole course.
- A non-medical helper's allowance up from a maximum of £12,420 to a maximum of £20,938 each year.
- A general disabled students' allowance up from £1,640 to £1,759 each year.

When making comparisons of student enrolments from year to year it is important to bear in mind that information on disability is collected on the basis of a student's self-assessment. Students are not obliged to report a disability and Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) therefore advises that the figures can vary.

It is also important to note that HESA's own disability coding framework changed in 2010/11. This involved a change to the wording of the disability categories and to the number of categories being recorded. The universities' data collection methodologies also changed significantly in 2008/09, with the introduction of online admission systems and the switch from a paper disability questionnaire to an online questionnaire. There were also small differences between the Northern Ireland HE Institutions in the way that the HESA disability coding frame was presented to students in these new admission systems. As a result the figures for the various disability categories are not directly comparable on a year by year basis.

West Belfast and Greater Shankill Task Force: Health Employment Project

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the West Belfast and Greater Shankill Task Force health employment project.

(AQW 21919/11-15)

Dr Farry: The West Belfast & Greater Shankill (WB&GS) Health Employment Project (HEP) was originally funded by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) (under Tackling Health & Social Inequalities) and developed to help more people gain employment in the health and social care sector and create job progression opportunities for staff working within the Belfast Health and Social Services Trust. The 3 year project ended in March 2010.

After this, the DHSSPS was not in a position to fund HEP alone and the project would have needed cross-departmental financial support to continue. Due to financial constraints, this funding could not be secured from other government sources or the My Department did however give a firm commitment that, through the funding of the Local Employment Intermediary Service (LEMIS, known as the Job Assist Centres in West Belfast and Greater Shankill), it would continue to partner at a local level with any Department, or any initiative such as the HEP that aimed to deliver positive employment outcomes for people struggling in areas of deprivation.

LEMIS funding will continue at least for the next 2 years, and my Department remains committed to partnership working. Any further continuation or extension of the HEP is, however, a matter solely for the DHSSPS.

Employment Law

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the proposed timescale for the review of employment law.

(AQW 21924/11-15)

Dr Farry: In my statement to the Assembly on 5 November 2012, I identified a significant number of employment law policy issues that merit further consideration, many of which will require legislation and Executive/Assembly approval.

Having carried out a more detailed appraisal of the main policy issues and taken the views of key stakeholders, it is now my intention to present a paper to the Executive in May 2013 seeking approval to a public consultation

Subject to Executive approval, I intend to launch a public consultation on a range of policy proposals in June 2013. Following the consultation process, the necessary primary and subordinate legislation will then be taken forward over the remainder of the current mandate. This mirrors the timescales for the UK Government's employment law reform programme.

Higher-level Apprenticeship Programme Pilot

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the performance of the Higher Level Apprenticeship programme pilot.

(AQW 21927/11-15)

Dr Farry: In its response to the areas for action identified in the Skills Strategy 'Transforming Futures', under the theme of 'Up-skilling the existing workforce', my Department made a commitment to introduce higher level apprenticeship pilots. The intention is to build upon the success of the ApprenticeshipsNI programme and establish clear work based progression routes, facilitating a better educated and more highly skilled workforce that meets the needs of the economy.

A higher level apprenticeship pilot in ICT was launched last November, with 11 apprentices currently undertaking training with the South West Regional College. The College continues to actively market the apprenticeship opportunity to employers and is confident that apprentice numbers will increase towards the target level of 25.

It is anticipated that a Professional Services higher level apprenticeship pilot will commence in May 2013. My officials are currently finalising contract details with the training supplier.

SEMTA, the Engineering Sector Skills Council, is completing a proposal for the delivery of a higher level apprenticeship pilot in engineering. It is anticipated the programme will be in place by autumn 2013.

The review of my Department's policy on apprenticeships will consider how to grow and accommodate higher skilled apprenticeships beyond level 4 and how apprenticeships can be expanded into the professions.

Foundation Degrees

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many people are studying for a foundation degree.

(AQW 21928/11-15)

Dr Farry: In the 2011/12 academic year, the latest full-year for which data is available, there were 2,270 student enrolments on foundation degree courses in Northern Ireland.

Sources: Further Education Statistical Record and Higher Education Statistics Agency

World Host Training

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the uptake of world host training in each of the district councils.

(AQW 21955/11-15)

Dr Farry: Data on the number of participants in the World Host training programme by District Council area is not collected by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. It does however record participants by the tourist destination areas from which they come. These may embrace different district council areas. Please see below.

Armagh	64
Antrim	875
Belfast	1495
Fermanagh	98
Derry/Londonderry	2458
Causeway Coast	68
Newry and Mourne	782
Sperrins & Tyrone	210
Other	19
Total	6069

(Figures supplied by World Host/NITB)

Regional Colleges: Business and ICT Lecturers

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many (i) part-time; and (ii) full-time (a) business; and (b) ICT lecturers were employed in each Regional College in each of the last five years.

(AQW 21986/11-15)

Dr Farry: Each Further Education college, in its capacity as an employing authority, is responsible for all employment-related matters. Consequently, my Department does not hold the information requested by the Member.

I have referred the questions to the directors of the six Further Education colleges, who will respond directly to the Member.

Ministerial Co-ordination Group on Suicide Prevention

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the work that his Department has undertaken as part of the ministerial co-ordination group on suicide prevention.

(AQW 22150/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department participates fully in the work of this Group and in the implementation of the "Protect Life" Strategy and Action Plan.

As employment can be a protective factor in reducing the risk of suicide, my Department's activities can make a positive indirect contribution to the Strategy's key aims, primarily by supporting people to develop their skills and assisting them into or towards work, which in turn helps to raise self esteem and contributes towards general well-being.

My Department's contributes to 17 actions in the Strategy's current Action Plan, which can be summarised as follows:

- support for awareness raising among young people;
- appropriate training for relevant frontline staff, e.g. Employment Service Advisers; and
- suitable pastoral care arrangements amongst DEL providers, such as the colleges and universities.

In addition, my Department is taking forward two new initiatives which aim to help some of the more vulnerable groups in our society. These are the:

- delivery of the Executive Strategy, "Pathways to Success" which aims to reduce the number of young people not in employment, education or training; and
- the development of a joint DEL/DETI Reducing Economic Inactivity Strategy in order to increase economic participation by assisting individuals with family commitments, health conditions or disabilities to move into work.

Youth Unemployment: South Tyrone

Ms McGahan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to list the organisations that are funded to (i) tackle youth unemployment in South Tyrone; and (ii) deliver the Social Change Framework.

(AQW 22246/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department works in partnership with a number of organisations to deliver programmes to help tackle youth unemployment across Northern Ireland including the South Tyrone area.

Steps to Work is the Department's main return to work provision and is a flexible programme which tailors provision to the individual's need with the aim of assisting participants to find and sustain employment. In the South Tyrone area South West College is the Lead Contractor and is funded to deliver this programme on behalf of the Department. The Lead Contractor will involve other organisations in the delivery of the programme.

The Department's Pathways to Work programme assists people, including young people, with health conditions and disabilities move into employment and advisers based in the local Jobs and Benefits office work in partnership with organisations that can offer specialist help and support. Through this provision my Department funds the following organisations: Southern Health Trust (Condition Management Programme), USEL and Disability Action (Workable Programme), Parkanuar Training Centre (Specialist Training) and Supported Employment Solutions (Work Connect programme and Workable Programme). Staff also work in partnership with other organisations in the South Tyrone area such as The Women's Centre, Rowan Tree Centre Pomeroy, Breakthru (Alcohol and Drugs Advice), Lilac Centre Coalisland etc.

Youth unemployment continues to be a major area of concern for me and my Executive colleagues and together we agreed a range of interventions to help address this. The Youth Employment Scheme which I introduced in July 2012 offers a series of measures to help young people gain experience, acquire new skills and find employment. My Department does not fund organisations to deliver this scheme on our behalf as it is currently administered entirely by Employment Service staff based in Jobs and Benefits offices and JobCentres.

In relation to the social change programme my Department has recently introduced the Collaboration and Innovation Fund which is a new initiative funded under the Executive's 'Pathways to Success' strategy for young people who are not in education, employment or training. Eighteen organisations from the community, voluntary, health and educational sectors are contracted from February 2013 to March 2015 to assist more than 5,500 unemployed 16 to 24 year olds across Northern Ireland, improve their employability prospects through the acquisition of work related skills.

The South West College has been allocated Collaboration and Innovation funding to address youth unemployment in South Tyrone. In addition, Youth Action, Include Youth and the Training for Women Network will receive funding to focus on youth unemployment across Northern Ireland including in the South Tyrone area.

Network Personnel (branded as SOURCE) is contracted to deliver the Local Employment Intermediary Service (LEMIS) in the Cookstown District Council area and on an outreach basis to individuals living in South Tyrone. The initiative assists individuals with an employability barrier, for example those who are homeless, ex-offenders and ex-prisoners, or with a history of drug or alcohol misuse as well as looked after children or care leavers.

LEMIS has recently been refocused to assist with the delivery of the 'Pathways to Success' strategy. The new arrangements are designed to increase the number of 16 to 24 year olds using the service and build on the success that community providers have had in reaching and supporting those clients furthest from the labour market.

In addition, the Community Family Support programme is a 'Pathways to Success' initiative designed to focus on the needs of the most disadvantaged families in targeted areas of Northern Ireland including Strabane and Cookstown. The pilot programme is being delivered in the Cookstown District Council area by Network Personnel and by Jobs First in the Strabane District Council area in partnership with mainstream provision.

Additional resources have been secured to enable the pilot to be scaled up and rolled out to the areas of greatest need across Northern Ireland, including the South Tyrone area.

Students on Work Placement: Insurance Issues

Mr Girvan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the insurance issue for students on work placement in schools.

(AQW 22285/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department has contacted the universities and university colleges, regarding this issue, as it does not hold information on the insurance arrangements for students on work placement in schools. The responses received from Queen's University Belfast, University of Ulster, Stranmillis College and St Mary's University College indicate that none of these institutions have encountered any difficulties in placing students on work placements in schools due to issues with insurance cover.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Tourism: Motorhomes

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline any actions taken by her Department to publicise motorhome tourism within other tourism sectors, over the last three years.

(AQW 21639/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): I would refer the member to the reply I gave to AQW 21638/11-15.

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) currently provides visitor information on the location of all Motorhome service points and Aires de Service points in Northern Ireland on its consumer website discovernorthernireland.com.

Power Supply Security

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment why the Programme for Government does not address the issue of future security of power supply.

(AQW 21650/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Security of energy supply is an operational issue which my Department reviews on an ongoing basis with the electrical system operator SONI, the Utility Regulator, and the power generators.

Definition of Sustainable Energy

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what is the definition of sustainable energy that she received from the Department of Energy and Climate Change that she cited during the Assembly debate on 18 February 2013. (AQW 21695/11-15)

Mrs Foster: In the Assembly debate on 18 February 2013 I referred to nuclear, gas and renewables being the three elements that make up sustainable energy. The intention in making this statement was that nuclear, gas and renewables are the three low carbon generation elements that 'underpin' sustainable energy.

Job Creation: East Londonderry

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what measures she has taken to initiate a programme of job creation in my constituency given the number of job losses occurring at Seagate and other industries. (AQW 21747/11-15)

Mrs Foster: As with other parts of Northern Ireland, East Londonderry has been impacted by the adverse effects of the economic downturn, however, please be assured that my Department and Invest NI continue to work with companies across the local business base to help them grow and develop. Between 2009 and 2012, Invest NI made over 400 offers of assistance worth £15.5 million to companies in East Londonderry generating total investment in the constituency of £28.5 million. In addition, during the same time period over 550 new business starts were supported.

In November 2011, I launched the Boosting Business campaign which provides a range of support both financial and advisory, to help businesses cope with the impact of the downturn. A key element of the campaign is the Jobs Fund which aims to help boost employment creation in the shorter-term. In the East Londonderry constituency there are currently 11 Jobs Fund business investment projects at various stages of development which should lead to the creation of a total of 71 new jobs, 23 of which have already been created.

Garvagh-based Annie's Traditional Food Ltd recently announced it will create 10 new jobs over the next two years as part of a £280,000 expansion. The Jobs Fund has also provided support to 10 young people (aged 16-24) not in education, employment or training (NEET) to set up their own business through the NEET Business Start grant, and to 4 individuals resident in Neighbourhood Renewal Areas (NRA) to set up their own business through the NRA Business Start Grant.

You can be assured that Invest NI is working hard to identify new projects that will lead to further job creation in the constituency. The Jobs Fund remains ongoing and Invest NI is continuing to build a pipeline of projects that will lead to further new job creation and business growth in East Londonderry and across Northern Ireland.

Electricity Costs for Large Businesses

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, following the research by the Utility Regulator confirming that electricity costs for large businesses in Northern Ireland are among the highest in the EU, whether this is a consequence of competition not working in the Single Electricity Market, lack of investment in new efficient power stations and a lack of linkage between the Great Britain and Northern Ireland markets. (AQW 21803/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The paper produced by the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation (NIAUR) is intended to provide transparency on electricity prices for interested parties and to begin a process of constructive debate amongst stakeholders on energy policy and regulation. At this stage it does not provide specific reasons for price patterns and further analysis will be required to better understand the matters introduced in the paper. I believe that further analysis must be prioritised and have written to the Chief Executive of NIAUR to make this point. I would encourage all parties with an interest in this Paper to provide their feedback to the Regulator on the matters raised.

Invest NI

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the financial assistance provided by Invest NI to companies during the 2012/13 financial year, broken down by constituency; and the amount each represents as a percentage of the total financial assistance provided by Invest NI during this period.

(AQW 21910/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The information requested is not yet available due to an ongoing data verification exercise by Invest NI following its financial year end. I will make this information available to the member once this process has been completed, which should not be later than the end of May.

Invest NI

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of new jobs created through inward investment projects supported by Invest NI during the 2012/13 financial year, broken down by constituency; and what each figure represents as a percentage of the total number of new jobs created by inward investment projects during that period.

(AQW 21911/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The information requested is not yet available due to an ongoing data verification exercise by Invest NI following its financial year end. I will make this information available to the member once this process has been completed, which should not be later than the end of May.

Invest NI

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of new jobs created through first time international investors that were supported by InvestNI during the 2012/13 financial year, broken down by constituency; and what each figure represents as a percentage of the total number of new jobs created by first time international investors during that period.

(AQW 21912/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The information requested is not yet available due to an ongoing data verification exercise by Invest NI following its financial year end. I will make this information available to the member once this process has been completed, which should not be later than the end of May.

Invest NI

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many of the jobs created by Invest NI in each constituency during the 2012/13 financial year offer a salary which is (i) less than 25 percent above; and (ii) 25 percent or more than the average private sector wage, expressed as a number and a percentage of all the new jobs created by inward investment projects during this period.

(AQW 21913/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The information requested is not yet available due to an ongoing data verification exercise by Invest NI following its financial year end. I will make this information available to the member once this process has been completed, which should not be later than the end of May.

Minister of Enterprise Trade and Investment: Trips Outside Northern Ireland

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail each trip outside Northern Ireland she has made since coming to office, including the number of officials who accompanied her on each trip and the cost of each trip.

(AQW 21976/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The costs of trips outside Northern Ireland were provided in June 2011 as per AQW 222/11-15.

To disaggregate the information for each trip during these years would only be available at disproportionate cost.

The information relating to trips during 2011/12 and 2012/13 (up to 30 September 2012), is detailed in the table attached.

Date:	Location:	No. in Party:	Cost (£):
7/4/11	Brussels	2	3,026
27/5/11	London	2	850.59
7/6/11	London	3	1674.64
15/6/11	Brussels	3	4411.38
20/6/11	London	3	1302.74
7/9/11	London	3	1776.65
19/9/11	Toronto / New York	3	10,635.64

Date:	Location:	No. in Party:	Cost (£):
4/10/11	London/Dublin	3	2539.30
9/10/11	Cologne	3	7025.06
11/10/11	London	2	971.74
21/10/11	Kurdistan	4	14,095.28
22/11/11	Glasgow	3	826.31
9/12/11	London	3	1406.24
18/1/12	London	3	1659.01
16/2/12	London	2	980.4
20/2/12	UAE	3	17,924.14
7/3/12	London	3	1230.79
17/3/12	London	1	560.93
15/4/12	UAE/India	3	13,926.9
27/4/12	London	3	1594.53
19/5/12	London	2	1260.27
22/5/12	London	2	896.24
3/7/12	London	3	2384.96
8/7/12	London	3	2219.37
18/7/12	Kurdistan	3	7052.13
26/7/12	London	2	754.24
13/9/12	Istanbul	2	3,698.37
23/9/12	USA, various cities	3	10,449.76

G8 Summit: Telecoms Companies

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail how telecoms companies are being incentivised to improve their infrastructure in Co. Fermanagh in time for the G8 summit, including any financial incentives.

(AQW 21990/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I wrote to the Chief Executive Officers of the main telecoms companies to encourage them to review their future investment plans or a reprioritisation of services/upgrades in order to leave a more permanent legacy in Fermanagh. My officials have been following up this letter with ongoing discussions with the companies. A number of telecoms companies have already been investing significantly to improve infrastructure without the need for public financial incentives.

Ferry Route: Belfast to Birkenhead

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) what impact the fare increases on the Belfast to Birkenhead route will have on the competitiveness of local hauliers compared to those operating from the Republic of Ireland, particularly as these costs can often not be passed on to consumers; (ii) whether local hauliers are having to compete with some hauliers who are using illegal fuel to cut their costs; and (iii) whether the Essential Users Fuel Rebate in the Republic of Ireland will further disadvantage hauliers whose fuel prices are already 16 pence per litre more than in the Republic of Ireland.

(AQW 22072/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I have requested a meeting with Stena Line to discuss the fluctuations in price for freight traffic on the Belfast to Birkenhead route. However, the development and operation of ferry links, and the fares the operators charge, are entirely matters for commercial decision by individual sea carriers and the Northern Ireland and Great Britain ports.

I am aware that the Irish Government are taking steps to introduce an Essential Users Fuel Rebate, part of the rationale for this scheme being a desire to incentivise drivers away from fuel duty avoidance. It is my understanding that the rebate will be available to qualifying road transport operators across all EU Member States. I have written to the Minister of Finance and Personnel about whether it might be feasible or appropriate for a similar scheme to be introduced in Northern Ireland. The introduction of such a scheme would require the agreement of HM Treasury and would be likely to result in a reduction in the Northern Ireland block grant.

Hauliers: Fuel Rebate

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans she has to discuss the introduction of an essential users fuel rebate for hauliers with the UK Government; and how many departmental officials have been working on such a measure.

(AQW 22073/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I have written to the Minister of Finance and Personnel about the proposed introduction of an Essential Users Fuel Rebate in the Republic of Ireland, and if whether it might be feasible or appropriate for a similar scheme to be introduced in Northern Ireland. The introduction of such a scheme would require the agreement of HM Treasury and would be likely to result in a reduction in the Northern Ireland block grant.

G8 Summit: Telecoms Companies

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) how telecommunications companies are being incentivised to improve the telecommunications infrastructure in Fermanagh in time for the G8 summit; (ii) whether any financial incentives are being offered; and (iii) to detail any such incentives.

(AQW 22230/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I would refer the Member to the reply I gave to AQW 21990/11-15.

A5 Road Project

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an estimate of the impact on the economy of the north-west region, the construction industry and on job opportunities in the region resulting from the recent court decision on the A5 road construction.

(AQW 22260/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The recent legal ruling and resulting delay to the A5 project is clearly disappointing, as this will impact on a key trading route between the North West and other parts of Northern Ireland and the ROI. The Regional Development Minister has previously quoted construction industry estimates that this project would create employment for over 800 workers at the peak of the construction phase. However, my Department does not have access to the detailed economic analysis that will undoubtedly have taken place within DRD on a project of this scale.

In any event, until it is clear whether this project is simply delayed or does not happen at all, it is difficult for my Department to be conclusive on the overall economic impact.

Investment Conference, Autumn 2013

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline all discussions she has had with the Prime Minister, and the Secretary of State, on the investment conference planned for Autumn 2013.

(AQW 22468/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The First Minister, deputy First Minister and I have had a range of discussions with the Secretary of State in recent weeks about strengthening the Northern Ireland economy.

Department of the Environment

TV, Radio and Newspaper Advertising Campaigns: DOE Spend

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of the Environment to detail his Department's TV, radio and newspaper advertising campaigns, in each of the last three years; and the spend on each campaign.

(AQW 21033/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): The tables below outline the details and costs of DOE advertising campaigns for the years 2009/10 to 2011/12.

Year	Campaign	Costs £
2009/10	Road Safety	1,012,433
	NIEA – European Heritage Open Days	15,535
	NIEA – Events, Sites and Properties	71,942
Total		1,099,910

2010/11	Road Safety	1,006,892
	NIEA – European Heritage Open Days	18,401
	Re-Think Waste	98,273
Total		1,123,566
2011/12	Road Safety	1,149,100
	Re-Think Waste	127,253
Total		1,276,353
Overall Total		3,499,829

Councils: Co-option

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what progress has been made in the discussions with the Northern Ireland Office on co-options to existing councils extending into 2014.

(AQW 21851/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The current consultation on severance arrangements for councillors seeks views on asking the Secretary of State to amend the electoral law to allow a vacancy in any of the existing councils to be filled by co-option after 1 January 2014. Any future discussions with the Secretary of State will be informed by the responses to that consultation. I believe strongly in the ability to co-opt to existing councils in the rundown to the new councils in 2015.

Councils: Payment of Supplier Invoices

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the total number of supplier invoices paid by councils (i) within 30 days; and (ii) after 30 days between 1 April 2012 and 1 March 2013.

(AQW 21870/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The relevant information held by my Department relating to prompt payment relates to the full financial year from 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013 and the question is, therefore, answered on that basis. The total number of invoices paid and the total paid within (i) 30 calendar days of receipt of the supplier's invoice and (ii) after 30 calendar days, by each council, for the period 1 April to 31 March 2013, is detailed in the table below.

Council	(i) Total invoices paid within 30 days (1 Apr 2012- 31 Mar 2013)	%	(ii) Total invoices paid outside 30 days (1 Apr 2012- 31 Mar 2013)	%
Antrim	5,490	54	4,700	46
Ards	10,457	87	1,577	13
Armagh	9,859	95	548	5
Ballymena	10,385	89	1,315	11
Ballymoney	4,712	81	1,099	19
Banbridge	4,268	66	2,234	34
Belfast	42,416	80	10,926	20
Carrickfergus	3,350	64	1,861	36
Castlereagh	9,389	96	331	4
Coleraine	3,955	80	998	20
Cookstown	6,101	98	130	2
Craigavon	8,404	69	3,862	31
Derry	16,170	75	5,519	25
Down	10,525	80	2,569	20
Dungannon & S Tyrone	5,825	94	380	6

Council	(i) Total invoices paid within 30 days (1 Apr 2012- 31 Mar 2013)	%	(ii) Total invoices paid outside 30 days (1 Apr 2012- 31 Mar 2013)	%
Fermanagh	7,983	77	2,321	23
Larne	3,377	71	1,389	29
Limavady	7,375	92	652	8
Lisburn	11,681	87	1,690	13
Magherafelt	5,911	97	217	3
Moyle	2,554	75	847	25
Newry & Mourne	9,179	71	3,770	29
Newtownabbey	15,137	87	2,195	13
North Down	8,951	85	1,620	15
Omagh	4,408	82	949	18
Strabane	3,659	84	674	16
Total	231,521	81	54,373	19

These figures suggest an improving picture, significant in parts, with more work to do. I, for example, wrote to councils in March to ascertain limitations on new software packages to record this type of statistics and explore how to standardise processing.

Driver and Vehicle Agency: Category B+E Test

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment when staff training and test routes for the B+E car and trailer test will be completed; and when the facility will be introduced in Coleraine.

(AQW 21874/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Agency regularly reviews the delivery of all types of driving tests and is currently developing options to extend the Category B+E driving test to other suitable test centres. No firm date has been confirmed to extend Category B+E tests to Coleraine but we are aiming to have the requirements in place by the autumn of 2013. Any changes to services offered will be communicated to customers and the industry through the normal channels.

Driving Licences in Irish

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of the Environment how people can have their personal details on their driving licence displayed in Irish.

(AQW 21900/11-15)

Mr Attwood: First time applicants can have their personal details displayed in Irish on a driving licence upon receipt of a completed DL1 driving licence application form and accompanied by the required identity documents.

To change details on a current driving licence a customer can make an application to amend their name free of charge.

Where name details have been provided in Irish, the Agency must be satisfied that the details match those on any supporting identity document(s) submitted with the application, as in the case with English.

The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages – Guidance on Meeting UK Government Commitments in Respect of Irish and Ulster Scots, indicates that adopted street names may be used without reference to the English equivalent. Where a licence holder requests the display of an address in Irish, the request will be facilitated only where the Irish road or street name has been officially adopted.

To take advantage of very significant cost benefits, Northern Ireland driving licences are printed and issued by the Driver & Vehicle Licensing Agency in Swansea. DVLA do not have the capacity to print fadas on driving licences. Therefore while the Irish name may be displayed, associated fadas cannot be printed on Northern Ireland driving licences.

DVA are currently examining options for the provision of a new Driver Licensing IT system and printing options for licences may be considered as part of that project.

Prehistoric Monuments

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of the Environment what assistance his Department offers people who want to preserve and protect a prehistoric monument on their land.

(AQW 21971/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency: Built Heritage Directorate works to protect prehistoric and all other historic monuments on farmland. This is done either by scheduling under Article 3 of the Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects (NI) Order 1995 or by policy which is agreed between the NIEA and the Department of Agriculture. If a site is scheduled the owner will be contacted by a Field Monument Warden from time to time to discuss its condition. If the site requires remedial action, for instance, repair of an earthwork or fencing to restrict grazing, an owner may be offered a management agreement under Article 19 of the above Order. This is offered up to the value of any necessary expenditure or loss of landuse for a particular period. Fencing of a site to mitigate farm animal trampling or the hand- clearance of invasive scrub are typical situations for management agreements which can cost from several hundred to a couple of thousand pounds and are subject to competitive quotes. If a site is not scheduled an owner who has a concern about the condition of a monument could contact NIEA: Built Heritage directly for advice as there is no regular inspection of monuments which are not statutorily protected.

The NIEA also responds to consultations from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) about the protection of prehistoric and other sites on land which is subject to agreement under an agri-environment scheme. In such cases NIEA: Built Heritage inspects those sites and makes recommendations to DARD about their treatment which are passed to the landowner for action. As NIEA is concerned to protect all monuments from harm, an inspection to any site, whether scheduled or not, can be carried out on request and advice and direction is provided by the Inspectorate free of charge.

Planning: Strategic Development in Carrickfergus

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment what plans there are for strategic development in Carrickfergus under the 2015 plan, in particular the Marshallstown Road.

(AQW 21982/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I would refer you to the details for Carrickfergus contained within Volume 7 of the draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP) and the subsequent Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) Reports into objections to the draft Plan.

Amongst other objections received for Carrickfergus, an objection, reference BMAP/1356, seeking the inclusion of land bordered to the north by the Marshallstown Road, has been considered by the PAC and it has recommended no change to the Plan.

In the statement issued on 6 June 2012 to accompany the publication of the Planning Appeals Commissions Reports on BMAP I highlighted that in instances where the PAC state that they 'recommend no change to the draft plan as a result of the objections', it is more likely - although I cannot guarantee it - that these recommendations will be accepted by my Department.

The Department in the course of preparing BMAP for adoption has assessed all the PAC recommendations before reaching final decisions, and these decisions will be known when the Plan is adopted.

The public cannot make any assumptions as to the development status of sites until such times as the final report is issued and the Plan adopted.

Driver and Vehicle Agency Jobs

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment what progress has been made regarding the Driver and Vehicle Agency jobs in Coleraine since his discussions with the Secretary of State on 11 April 2013.

(AQW 21983/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Vehicle licensing is delivered in Northern Ireland by the Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA), under an agreement between the Department and the Department for Transport. DVLA, the Agency in Swansea responsible for vehicle licensing services across the UK, is nearing completion of a project to integrate the separate NI and GB computer systems, to produce an integrated system capable of meeting the vehicle licensing needs of customers across the UK. DVLA has proposed using the integrated computer system to transfer all the work not done online or in Post Offices to Swansea and to terminate the agreement with this Department.

At my meeting with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, I emphasised the need for meaningful consultation with customers and other stakeholders here before any decisions are made about the future delivery of vehicle licensing services. I also emphasised the disproportionate impact that the loss of 320 jobs would have on the Northern Ireland economy and particularly on Coleraine and that the issue must be assessed in the context of the wider economic and social context of the Executive's effort to stimulate and re-balance the economy here – and the London Government's proposals for a new package of measures to support the local economy

The Secretary of State agreed to consider the points I raised and to discuss the situation with the Transport Secretary. I am meeting Stephen Hammond, the Transport Minister responsible for vehicle licensing, on 7 May 2013 and at that meeting we will review the process for consultation and decision-making and consider the proposals for vehicle licensing in the light of my most recent representations.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Rates: Domestic

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the percentage increase in domestic rates in each of the last ten years, broken down by district council.

(AQW 21574/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): The information requested is provided in the attached Tables with increases in the Regional Rate shown in Table 1 and Table 2 detailing increases in the District Rate. Information on the District Rate has been provided by the Department of the Environment.

Unfortunately information in relation to increases in domestic district rates for the rate year 2007-08 is not readily available. A revaluation of domestic property for rating purposes came into effect on 1st April of that year and arising from the different basis of valuation it was not possible for the Department of the Environment to calculate a like-for-like comparison with the previous year's figures. The domestic regional rate set by central government was uplifted by an agreed 6% for the 2007-08 rate year.

Table 1: Percentage Increase in Regional Domestic Rate

Inc. in	Inc. in	Inc. in	Inc. in	Inc. in	Inc. in	Inc. in	Inc. in	Inc. in	Inc. in
2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
8.80%	9.00%	19.00%	6.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	2.49%	2.22%	2.70%

Table 2: Percentage Increase In Domestic District Rates

District Council	2003/2004 to 2004/2005	2004/2005 to 2005/2006	2005/2006 to 2006/2007	2006/2007 to 2007/2008	2007/2008 to 2008/2009	2008/2009 to 2009/2010	2009/2010 to 2010/2011	2010/2011 to 2011/2012	2011/2012 to 2012/2013	2012/2013 to 2013/2014
Antrim	7.82%	7.70%	3.83%	N/A	9.88%	7.76%	5.32%	1.45%	0.96%	0.49%
Ards	5.95%	4.99%	3.80%		3.49%	4.97%	2.98%	0.96%	0.92%	0.91%
Armagh	5.90%	4.50%	7.50%		6.90%	6.93%	6.89%	2.50%	1.94%	1.70%
Ballymena	8.57%	7.27%	9.99%		9.85%	5.96%	6.91%	2.74%	2.29%	1.65%
Ballymoney	9.63%	2.12%	4.23%		3.97%	7.61%	7.46%	2.79%	3.04%	0.00%
Banbridge	7.94%	6.94%	5.90%		3.93%	3.94%	4.96%	3.49%	2.89%	2.21%
Belfast	5.95%	7.30%	5.59%		4.83%	6.97%	7.80%	2.97%	2.59%	0.00%
Carrick-fergus	8.23%	3.98%	1.94%		7.00%	7.98%	5.65%	2.28%	2.20%	1.86%
Castlereagh	6.35%	3.48%	3.96%		1.66%	0.00%	3.47%	2.49%	5.90%	2.90%
Coleraine	6.52%	4.90%	7.00%		5.91%	5.95%	4.98%	3.59%	2.88%	1.91%
Cookstown	6.93%	5.90%	6.89%		4.91%	3.86%	2.52%	1.03%	1.41%	2.00%
Craigavon	7.46%	6.62%	6.86%		2.33%	2.94%	1.99%	3.40%	1.99%	1.59%
Derry	7.98%	5.95%	5.80%		4.99%	5.58%	4.99%	2.25%	2.20%	1.98%
Down	8.81%	4.99%	7.99%		6.68%	2.54%	6.78%	0.00%	2.00%	2.63%
Dungannon	6.75%	6.21%	6.98%		6.57%	4.44%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Fermanagh	4.32%	4.98%	6.21%		6.89%	8.52%	3.86%	1.19%	0.97%	1.68%
Larne	8.28%	5.52%	5.53%		2.53%	0.00%	3.92%	2.99%	4.03%	2.84%
Limavady	5.82%	4.75%	8.24%		6.60%	5.49%	7.57%	-0.72%	1.12%	1.83%
Lisburn	6.93%	0.89%	1.99%		1.71%	2.59%	1.98%	2.97%	3.97%	1.97%
Magherafelt	5.95%	4.84%	3.49%		2.89%	2.90%	8.40%	1.93%	1.97%	1.97%

District Council	2003/2004 to 2004/2005	2004/2005 to 2005/2006	2005/2006 to 2006/2007	2006/2007 to 2007/2008	2007/2008 to 2008/2009	2008/2009 to 2009/2010	2009/2010 to 2010/2011	2010/2011 to 2011/2012	2011/2012 to 2012/2013	2012/2013 to 2013/2014
Moyle	8.59%	7.51%	6.55%		9.40%	5.61%	0.00%	0.00%	2.21%	1.83%
Newry & Mourne	3.50%	4.90%	4.95%		4.90%	6.74%	6.85%	0.00%	2.00%	1.29%
Newtown-abbey	4.57%	3.32%	3.89%		5.90%	1.93%	4.91%	2.46%	2.83%	1.30%
North Down	3.49%	3.95%	5.32%		7.47%	8.16%	3.00%	2.99%	3.48%	0.98%
Omagh	6.09%	6.50%	4.93%		4.84%	4.50%	2.98%	1.37%	1.70%	0.98%
Strabane	6.50%	4.69%	5.24%		6.47%	7.48%	4.37%	-1.80%	3.92%	3.77%

As 2007/2008 domestic rates were determined on the basis of capital valuations, a like for like comparison with the previous year's figures is not possible.

Civil Servants: Hotel Accommodation

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the cost of hotel accommodation for civil servants, in each the last five years.

(AQW 21621/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The information requested is presented on the attached table and covers the period from 1 January 2008 to 31 December 2012.

Year	Cost
2012	£752,946
2011	£529,743
2010	£308,557
2009	£435,367
2008	£428,776

Blom UK and GSM Data

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the procurement process that led to the appointment of Blom UK and GSM data; and (ii) the value of the contracts.

(AQW 21715/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Blom Aerofilms Ltd and DSM Geodata, were appointed as the result of an open tender process carried out by the Department of Finance and Personnel's Central Procurement Division following NICS policies and regulations.

The value of each contract is as follows:

Blom Aerofilms Ltd	£1.30million
DSM Geodata	£1.30million

Rate Relief: Caring for Sick Relatives

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether there is a policy in place to allow people who are caring for sick relatives to apply for rate relief.

(AQW 21898/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Extra allowances are available, mainly through the rates element of Housing Benefit, but there are also small supplements provided under the low income rate relief scheme.

Entitlement to that support depends on individual circumstances and on the level of income and/or capital, which includes savings.

Anyone who believes they may be entitled to rates support should contact Land and Property Services if they own their house, or alternatively the Northern Ireland Housing Executive if they rent their property.

Fiscal Position

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the relationship between estimated revenue and the local fiscal position.

(AQW 21950/11-15)

Mr Wilson: As stated in the Northern Ireland Net Fiscal Balance Report 2009-10 and 2010-11, the net fiscal balance for NI is estimated as aggregate public sector revenue less aggregate public sector expenditure.

Net Fiscal Balance Report

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether the data available to apportion revenue is sufficient to provide calculations of reasonable accuracy which can be quantified within statistical confidence limits.

(AQW 21951/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The purpose of the Net Fiscal Balance Report 2009-10 and 2010-11 is to provide an overview of public sector finances in Northern Ireland. It is not intended to provide an exact figure of individual revenue items.

Net Fiscal Balance Report

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what mechanisms are being developed to address the absence of key revenue data sources within the net fiscal balance report.

(AQW 21953/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I refer the Member to my written response to AQO 3681/11-15.

Legal Services Commission

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) what action he is taking to ensure that staff of the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission (NILSC) are placed on pay scales which mirror the Northern Ireland Civil Service; and (ii) what barriers exist to placing staff of the NILSC on pay scales which mirror the Northern Ireland Civil Service; and (iii) when a decision on the NILSC pay scales will be made.

(AQW 22002/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission (NILSC) is an executive Non Departmental Body (NDPB) of the Department of Justice (DOJ), and as such is subject to the HM Treasury (HMT) Pay Remit Approval and Process guidance. The Executive has previously agreed that the HMT guidance be adopted by the Executive as the framework for the management of the public sector pay position in Northern Ireland

This guidance states that responsibility for value for money and regularity issues associated with pay remits sits with the relevant departmental Accounting Officer, in this case the DOJ. This is evidenced by all proposed remits (and supporting evidence) being approved by the Departmental (DOJ) Finance Directorate before being formally submitted to the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) Supply.

It is DFP's responsibility to provide advice on pay policy and information requirements as well as to challenge departments when there is a belief that the policy has not been implemented properly.

DFP will also provide a technical quality assurance on a submitted pay remit, and will consider whether the pay remit raises any associated issues in relation to the control of public expenditure, affordability, departmental delegations and the need for wider Supply approvals.

Once content, DFP Supply will seek the approval of the DFP Minister. If the case raises significant or contentious issues the DFP Minister may decide to refer the matter to the Executive for discussion.

As yet, DOJ has not formally submitted any pay proposal to put the NILSC staff on to pay scales that mirror those of the Northern Ireland Civil Services (NICS), however when such a pay remit is received it will be given due consideration in line with the process described above

Civil Service Buildings: Catering Services

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the closures over the past twelve months, or planned closures, of catering services in Civil Service buildings; (ii) the rationale for the closure of these services; and (iii) any subsidies currently provided to catering services.

(AQW 22005/11-15)

Mr Wilson: No catering services have been closed in the past twelve months.

Provision of catering services will cease after 30 June 2013 in the locations identified in the table overleaf.

The Contract for these services commenced in April 2012 on the basis that no subsidy would be provided. The Terms and Conditions of contract allow for partial termination of the NICS Cleaning, Catering and Support Services contract if it is not viable to provide catering without a subsidy in a specific building. The Contractor has given notice to cease the provision of catering services in the above locations from 30 June 2013. In taking this action the contractor has complied with its contractual obligations.

Subsidies are currently provided for catering services in James House, Lighthouse Building and Andersonstown Jobs and Benefits Office. Catering services at these buildings are delivered under contracts awarded in 2010 and 2011.

Location	Department
Craigantlet Buildings	DFP
Hydebank	DRD
Marlborough House	DRD
Omagh County Hall	DOE
Hollywood Road Jobs and Benefits Office	DSD
Newry Jobs and Benefits Office	DSD
Falls Road Jobs and Benefits Office	DSD
Foyle Jobs and Benefits Office	DSD
Enniskillen Jobs and Benefits Office	DSD
Coleraine Jobs and Benefits Office	DSD
Armagh Jobs and Benefits Office	DSD
Lisahally	DSD
Newforge	AFBI /DARD
Northern Ireland Tourist Board HQ	Northern Ireland Tourist Board

Public Service Contracts

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the (i) nature; (ii) value; and (iii) provider of each contract to provide a service to the public sector in each of the last four years.

(AQW 22079/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Details of services contracts valued at over £30k awarded by the Central Procurement Directorate over the past four years have been placed in the Assembly Library. In accordance with normal practice details of those providing services on security related contracts in general and to the Department of Justice in particular are not published.

Cancer Deaths

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the changes in the five most common cancer deaths per 10,000 of the population between 2002 and 2012.

(AQW 22082/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The tables overleaf detail the most common cancer deaths registered in Northern Ireland for males and females, with associated rates, where cancer1 has been recorded as the primary cause of death.

Figures are presented for 2001 to 2011. Provisional figures for 2012 will be available in May 2013.

1 International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision codes C00-C97

Table 1: Most Common Cancer1 Deaths in Males, Registered in Northern Ireland and Rates per 10,000 Male population2, 2001-2011

ICD10	Name of Cancer	Registration Year										
		2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
C33-C34	Trachea, bronchus & lung	6.1	5.9	5.8	6.1	6.0	6.1	6.0	6.5	5.9	6.1	6.3
C61	Prostate	2.6	2.3	2.6	2.9	2.6	2.5	2.7	2.6	2.4	2.8	2.6
C18	Colon	1.7	1.8	2.1	1.7	1.7	1.7	2.0	1.7	1.5	1.6	1.6

ICD10	Name of Cancer	Registration Year										
		2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
C15	Oesophagus	1.1	1.4	1.2	1.0	1.3	1.3	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.0	1.1
C80	Primary site unknown	1.2	1.4	1.2	1.3	1.0	1.3	1.1	1.2	1.1	1.2	1.1
C25	Pancreas	1.1	1.3	0.9	0.9	1.0	1.1	1.3	1.4	1.3	1.0	1.0

Table 2: Most Common Cancer¹ Deaths in Females Registered in Northern Ireland and Rates per 10,000 Female population², 2001-2011

ICD10	Name of Cancer	Registration Year										
		2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
C33-C34	Trachea, bronchus & lung	3.2	3.6	3.8	3.8	3.6	3.7	3.9	4.0	4.2	4.0	3.9
C50	Breast	3.6	3.2	3.3	3.7	3.5	3.4	3.5	3.5	3.4	2.9	3.7
C18	Colon	1.5	1.4	1.6	1.6	1.7	1.6	1.7	1.5	1.5	1.4	1.2
C80	Primary site unknown	1.2	1.5	1.5	1.3	1.5	1.3	1.5	1.1	1.3	1.5	1.3
C56	Ovary	1.3	1.3	1.5	1.4	1.5	1.4	1.3	1.4	1.3	1.4	1.2
C25	Pancreas	1.0	1.0	1.2	0.9	1.0	1.1	1.1	1.2	1.1	1.1	1.2

1 Cancer deaths were defined using the International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision (ICD-10).

2 Rates have been calculated using the Northern Ireland Mid Year Estimates

Suicide

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many people died by suicide in each of the last three years, broken down by (i) constituency; and (ii) age.

(AQW 22122/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The tables overleaf detail the number of deaths registered as a suicide¹ in Northern Ireland, for 2009 to 2011, broken down by (i) constituency; and (ii) age.

(i) Table 1: Number of Deaths Registered as Suicide¹ in Northern Ireland by Parliamentary Constituency Area², 2009-2011

Parliamentary Constituency Area Name	Registration Year		
	2009	2010	2011
Belfast East	17	23	14
Belfast North	26	25	31
Belfast South	13	20	21
Belfast West	27	20	29
East Antrim	9	9	12
East Londonderry	16	19	12
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	19	13	16
Foyle	17	25	15
Lagan Valley	6	23	15
Mid Ulster	14	9	14
Newry and Armagh	18	16	19
North Antrim	11	20	13
North Down	9	13	8

Parliamentary Constituency Area Name	Registration Year		
	2009	2010	2011
South Antrim	12	13	14
South Down	6	20	9
Strangford	6	16	10
Upper Bann	16	17	26
West Tyrone	17	12	11
Unknown	1	-	-
Northern Ireland	260	313	289

- 1 In the UK, in considering suicide events it is conventional to include cases where the cause of death is classified as either 'Suicide and self-inflicted injury' or 'Undetermined injury'. Since 2001, the ICD10 codes used for 'Suicide and self-inflicted injury' are X60-X84 and Y87.0 and the ICD10 codes used for 'Undetermined injury' are Y10-Y34 and Y87.
- 2 Based on the 2008 Parliamentary Constituencies Boundaries.

(ii) Table 2: Number of Deaths Registered as Suicide¹ in Northern Ireland by Age, 2009-2011

Age	Registration Year		
	2009	2010	2011
Under 15	1	1	3
15-19	14	20	22
20-24	27	50	31
25-29	33	29	37
30-34	26	28	39
35-39	29	26	25
40-44	34	39	28
45-49	32	41	21
50-54	20	26	20
55-59	16	13	22
60-64	8	14	15
65-69	10	7	12
70-74	3	7	4
75-79	4	6	3
80-84	3	2	4
85+	0	4	3
All Ages	260	313	289

- 1 In the UK, in considering suicide events it is conventional to include cases where the cause of death is classified as either 'Suicide and self-inflicted injury' or 'Undetermined injury'. Since 2001, the ICD10 codes used for 'Suicide and self-inflicted injury' are X60-X84 and Y87.0 and the ICD10 codes used for 'Undetermined injury' are Y10-Y34 and Y87.

Asthma Deaths

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many deaths as a result of asthma have been recorded in each of the last two years, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area.

(AQW 22197/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The table overleaf details the number of deaths registered in Northern Ireland, by Health and Social Care Trust, where asthma¹ has been recorded as the primary cause of death in 2010 and 2011.

Provisional figures for 2012 will be available in May 2013.

¹ International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision (ICD-10).

Table 1: Asthma1 Deaths Registered in Northern Ireland, 2010-2011

Health and Social Care Trust	2010	2011
Belfast	5	3
Northern	11	10
South Eastern	5	6
Southern	7	6
Western	6	8
Total	34	33

1 Asthma deaths were defined using the International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision (ICD-10), code J45.

Cavity Wall Insulation

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether there is a statutory obligation on developers of residential areas to install cavity wall insulation before residential buildings become inhabited.

(AQW 22211/11-15)

Mr Wilson: There is no statutory obligation to install cavity wall insulation in residential buildings.

Rates: Town Centre Businesses

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether his Department will consider the introduction of a scheme aimed at reducing the rates burden on town centre businesses.

(AQW 22261/11-15)

Mr Wilson: My Department has no current plans for special relief for town centres. Any such provision would present major difficulties in terms of choosing exactly where to designate relief and the impact it is likely to have, in terms of the unfair competitive disadvantage it may create for those outside the chosen areas and the likelihood of causing displacement. Furthermore, even if I wanted to intervene in this way, the risk of someone successfully challenging such a policy is unacceptably high. I would rather direct resources to the business community as a whole rather than waste them on defending well meaning schemes which are vulnerable to challenge through the courts.

I prefer a broader approach. There are already several rate relief schemes currently in place to help town centre businesses in these difficult times. These include small business rate relief, industrial derating, empty shops rates concession and empty property rate relief.

More than 50% of businesses now receive some form of relief through the rating system.

In addition to these schemes the regional rate has been frozen in real terms throughout the budget period. As part of the overall four year budget the Executive has agreed that rates should be held at the rate of inflation, through to the 2014/15 rating year, providing certainty and stability for ratepayers in terms of financial planning.

I believe that the range of measures described above are the right mix of policies that put business needs first, recognising that there are limits to the concessions we can make while still raising enough money to help pay for essential public services and investment in infrastructure.

My Department has no plans to provide any further relief to town centre businesses at this time.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Freedom of Information Request

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 21299/11-15, how this answer is compatible with the response to a Freedom of Information request that the revision in 2009 was "solely to reflect the name change of the organisation."

(AQW 21706/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): The third point within the answer to AQW 21299/11-15 stated that the purpose of the review in 2009 was to ensure that the standard conditions of contract did not contain anything that was contrary to the new health and social care arrangements following RPA. The change of name from Central Services Agency to Business Services Organisation, as part of RPA, required the standard conditions of contract to be revised.

Brooklands, Antrim

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many contracts the Conway Group has been awarded since November 2011 to provide intermediate care beds at Brooklands Antrim Health Centre; and what was the value of each contract.

(AQW 21716/11-15)

Mr Poots: I understand that since November 2011 the Northern Trust has had two contracts with the Conway Group for Brooklands, Antrim. The first was for 6 months with a phased number of intermediate beds, up to a maximum of 15, from 21 March 2012. The value of this contract was £203,000. The second contract is for the period October 2012 to September 2013 for 15 intermediate beds. The value of this current contract is estimated to be £429,000.

The contract is paid on a block contract basis at £550 per week (regional nursing tariff). This is a temporary arrangement pending a review and reform of intermediate care services across the Trust.

A competitive tendering process was undertaken in the procurement of the intermediate care beds that are in use at the Brooklands care facility.

Northern Health and Social Care Trust

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) why the Northern Health and Social Care Trust is using a private health care centres for intermediate inpatient beds; (ii) what capacity issues within the Trust were identified that led to these beds being commissioned; (iii) whether the Mid Ulster Hospital or Whiteabbey Hospital sites were considered in the business plan for these contracts; and (iv) to provide a copy of the Equality Impact Assessment on the provision of intermediate inpatient beds at Brooklands Health Centre Antrim.

(AQW 21718/11-15)

Mr Poots: I understand that the position is as follows:-

- (i) The Northern HSC Trust is currently developing a strategy on the future of intermediate care services. The NHSCT currently uses a variety of care settings for inpatient intermediate care which currently includes community hospitals, a number of independent sector nursing and residential care homes, and statutory residential homes;
- (ii) Sustained going pressures within acute service facilities meant there was a need to enhance patient flow out of acute facilities by the use of intermediate care beds;
- (iii) The Mid Ulster and Whiteabbey Hospital sites are currently utilised for Consultant Led Rehabilitation and so were not available for this purpose;
- (iv) An EQIA was not required. This is an interim arrangement to deal with the pressures on acute services and meet the needs of patients.

Cancelled Surgical Appointments

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of surgical appointments cancelled, through no fault of the patients, in each month of the last three years, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 21799/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information is not available on the number of surgical appointments cancelled, through no fault of the patients, in each month of the last three years. However, my Department's 'Integrated Elective Access Protocol', issued in 2008, provides guidance to Health and Social Care Trusts on effective and responsive booking processes. For example, clinicians are required to give 6 weeks notice of annual or study leave. This helps ensure a reduction in the likelihood of hospital cancellations as Trust's can be confident that clinics will be held.

Nursing Home Residents

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how nursing home residents can access counselling services for mental health issues, such as depression.

(AQW 21807/11-15)

Mr Poots: "Talking therapies" can be commissioned and delivered in a range of settings and vary in type and intensity. Access to a specific service is dependent on an assessment of the clinical need of the individual.

Within the statutory sector, such services can be accessed through primary care, mental health and/or older people's services.

The Health and Social Care Board has recently established a Mental Health Older Peoples Group which is reviewing care arrangements for older people with mental health needs. It is anticipated that this work will support improved access to psychological care services for older people.

Fire Stations in South Down and Strangford

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many times (i) fire stations in the (a) South Down; and (b) Strangford constituencies have been unable to respond to calls in the required time, in the last twelve months; and (ii) the (a) first; or (b) second appliance has been unable to respond because there has been no crew available.
(AQW 21808/11-15)

Mr Poots: The table below outlines the number of times during 2012/13

- (i) fire appliances did not respond in the required time,
- (ii) the first appliance was unable to respond due to no crew available; and,
- (iii) the second appliance was unable to attend due to no crew available.

Constituency	Failure to meet response target *	1st Appliance Failure to Respond	2nd Appliance Failure to respond
South Down	19	16	36
Strangford	29	9	5

* this column refers to the Emergency Response Standards (ERS) which apply to dwelling fires only.

Fire Stations in South Down and Strangford

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the occasions in the last twelve months when fire stations in the (i) South Down; and (ii) Strangford constituencies have required back-up from neighbouring stations.
(AQW 21809/11-15)

Mr Poots: The table below outlines the number of occasions in 2012/13 when fire stations in South Down and Strangford constituencies have required back up from neighbouring stations.

Constituency	Number of back-ups
South Down	55
Strangford	79

Fire Appliance Crew

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the standard crewing level for a fire appliance; and how many times, in the last twelve months, appliances have responded whilst below this level.
(AQW 21810/11-15)

Mr Poots: The standard crewing levels are five for the first appliance and four for the second appliance.

The following table outlines the number, during 2012/13, of measurable incidents under the Emergency Response Standards when NIFRS responded below the standard crewing levels.

Number of occasions 1st appliance responded with less than 5 riders	Number of occasions when 2nd appliance responded with less than 4 riders
206	78

Fire Service: Reserve Members

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what actions the Fire Service takes in relation to reserve members who do not respond to call-outs.
(AQW 21811/11-15)

Mr Poots: The NIFRS' Retained Crews have agreed performance criteria and if performance falls below expected levels individuals are interviewed by their line manager. If necessary, action is taken in line with the guidance set out in the policies relating to the Retained service.

Fire Service in South Down and Strangford

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the performance against targets of the Fire Service in the (i) South Down; and (ii) Strangford constituencies; and what action and support is being initiated to improve performance.
(AQW 21812/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) The table below details the performance of fire stations in the South Down and Strangford constituencies against the required performance.

Constituency	Number of Measurable Incidents under the Emergency Response Standard	Number of times 1st and 2nd appliance met the response standard
South Down	95	76
Strangford	76	47

- (ii) In order to improve performance NIFRS Area Commanders (ACs) are held to account at Monthly Operational Accountability Meetings for their performance against agreed standards. Issues that cannot be addressed at area level are escalated through internal performance management vehicles including the Board, as appropriate.

Stroke Lysis Treatment

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what clinical arrangements are in place in the (i) Causeway Hospital; and (ii) Antrim Area Hospital to ensure that patients requiring stroke lysis treatment receive the appropriate intervention.

(AQW 21823/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Northern Health and Social Care Trust is responsible for the provision of appropriate clinical interventions and care for patients requiring stroke lysis treatment in the Causeway and Antrim Area Hospitals.

The Trust's Management of Acute Stroke Protocol June 2012 is the policy which directs the medical, pharmacy and nursing response to adult patients presenting with stroke like symptoms in both a hospital and community setting. The aims of the protocol are to ensure that patients with a diagnosis of stroke are referred to stroke specialists as soon as possible and to ensure that patients with acute stroke are commenced on a stroke care pathway so that no omissions occur in any aspect of their assessment or treatment. The protocol recognises that in order to minimise the effects of stroke illness, it is imperative that patients presenting with an acute stroke receive a comprehensive assessment of their condition. Patients should then be given the optimum level of treatment to ensure they have as high a chance as possible of surviving their illness and making the maximum functional recovery.

Learning Disability: Shaping and Monitoring of Services

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his Department's plans to involve people with a learning disability and family carers in the development, shaping and monitoring of services.

(AQW 21843/11-15)

Mr Poots: Involving people with a learning disability and their families/carers in the development, shaping and monitoring of services is a key principle of Delivering the Bamford Vision (2009) and the Bamford Action Plan 2012-2015.

It falls to the Bamford Taskforce, which was established to co-ordinate and lead in the various areas of HSC work that are identified in the Bamford Vision and its accompanying Action Plans, to ensure that this principle is adhered to.

A representative of the Bamford Taskforce regularly attends the Bamford Monitoring Group, which captures the views and experiences of people with learning disabilities and their families and carers in relation to changes being made to services in Northern Ireland resulting from the Bamford Review. The Taskforce listen to the views of those people who regularly use learning disability services and these views may then be used to inform future service provision.

In addition, during 2013 the HSC Board and Public Health Agency, in partnership with the Guidelines and Audit Implementation Network, intend carrying out an audit of people with a learning disability and their experiences of service provision, in line with the Learning Disability Service Framework's requirement to establish a performance baseline for each of the Framework's 34 Standards.

Muckamore Abbey Hospital

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients are being treated in Muckamore Abbey; and how many have been there for more than one year.

(AQW 21858/11-15)

Mr Poots: It is assumed that this question refers to the number of patients in Muckamore Abbey. On 17th February 2012 (latest information available), 212 patients were in Muckamore Abbey, 185 (87.3%) of whom had been resident for more than one year.

Muckamore Abbey Hospital

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much money the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust has spent on maintenance of Muckamore Abbey in 2011/12; and for a breakdown of this spend.

(AQW 21862/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust spent £976k on maintenance for Muckamore Abbey Hospital in 2011/12. A breakdown is not available.

Antrim Area Hospital

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, since December 2012, what funding has been made available to the Northern Health and Social Care Trust to (i) improve performance and; (ii) increase inpatient capacity at Antrim Area Hospital.

(AQW 21866/11-15)

Mr Poots: The allocation of funding for hospital services is a matter for the Health and Social Care Board as service commissioner. I am advised by the Board that additional funding has been allocated to the Northern Health and Social Care Trust from 2011/12 onwards with the express aim of improving performance. Some additional inpatient capacity was also provided with a view to it contributing to an overall improvement in the unscheduled care pathway in Antrim Area Hospital.

The Board has advised that there are three investments where funding was made on or after December 2012:

- £22,000 non-recurrent funding for community in-reach coordinators, two Band 2 nurses to promote safe, effective and timely discharge of patients to community services;
- £800,000 non-recurrent for reablement;
- £400,000 non-recurrent for emergency care services, part of the £1.8 million investment mentioned below.

The Northern Trust has also received funding for a number of other projects which commenced before December 2012 but continues to be funded after December 2012:

- £973,000 recurrent for additional medical and nursing staff from October 2011 to deliver more hours of senior decision making cover in the emergency department, enhance the medical assessment unit, facilitate direct GP access and bolster nursing ratios;
- £1.8 million non-recurrent in 2012/13 to maintain 14 additional beds, provide emergency theatre capacity and continue to implement an Emergency Department Action Plan. £400,000 of this was allocated in December 2012;
- £408,000 non-recurrent winter pressures funding allocated in November 2012;
- £99,570 non-recurrent funding from September 2012 to January 2013 for a primary care stream in the emergency department;
- £40,000 non-recurrent from September 2011 to March 2013 for nursing home outreach clinics;
- £3.19 million recurrent funding in 2012/13 for older people's services, which aims to strengthen community services and support older people at home, which in turn can help reduce the need for hospital attendance and admission and reduce length of stay in hospital.

Antrim Area Hospital: Accident and Emergency

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the claim by the senior consultants in the Antrim Area Hospital that the Accident and Emergency department is ineffective and unsafe.

(AQW 21867/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am advised by the Northern Health and Social Care Trust that it is confident that it provides a safe service. I visited Antrim Area Hospital on Monday 22 April 2013 to hear at first hand the consultants' concerns. The Trust has advised that it is working with the consultants to mitigate the potential risks within the emergency department. The Trust has put in place a range of measures to ensure patient safety at the emergency department including: expanding the Medical Assessment Unit which allows GPs direct access to specialist assessment beds; increasing support for triage and reviewing and strengthening the escalation process; making further investment in nursing staff and increasing paediatric support. The Trust is also looking at improvements in other areas of the hospital to help improve patient flows in and through the emergency department.

Antrim Area Hospital: Accident and Emergency

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why funding has been made available to the Northern Health and Social Care Trust since the dismissal of its Chairman to make improvements to the Accident and Emergency department in Antrim Area Hospital; and how much funding has been provided.

(AQW 21868/11-15)

Mr Poots: The allocation of funding for hospital services is a matter for the Health and Social Care Board as service commissioner. I am advised by the Board that additional funding has been allocated to the Northern Health and Social Care

Trust from 2011/12 onwards with the express aim of improving performance. Some additional inpatient capacity was also provided with a view to it contributing to an overall improvement in the unscheduled care pathway in Antrim Area Hospital.

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The Northern Trust has also received funding for a number of other projects which commenced before December 2012 but continues to be funded after December 2012:

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- £40,000 non-recurrent from September 2011 to March 2013 for nursing home outreach clinics;
- £3.19 million recurrent funding in 2012/13 for older people's services, which aims to strengthen community services and support older people at home, which in turn can help reduce the need for hospital attendance and admission and reduce length of stay in hospital.

Antrim Area Hospital

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) what is the cost of the turn-around team in Antrim Area Hospital; (ii) for an update on any changes produced by the turn-around team and; (iii) for a summary of any interim reports made by the turn-around team.

(AQW 21869/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Turnaround and Support Team continues to work alongside the support already being provided by the Health and Social Care Board and the Public Health Agency through the emergency department Improvement Action Group and I expect the Team's report to be provided to me shortly.

The cost of the Turnaround and Support Team to the middle of May 2013 is estimated to be £40,000. For the period January to March 2013 the services of two of the team members were provided free of charge.

Antrim Area Hospital and Causeway Hospital: Accident and Emergency Services

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of Accident and Emergency Services at the (i) Antrim Area Hospital; and (ii) Causeway Hospital; and what action he will take following the negative report from hospital consultants at the Antrim-based Accident and Emergency Department.

(AQW 21875/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Emergency Departments at Antrim Area and Causeway Hospitals receive annually approximately 72,000 and 43,000 patients respectively. Both departments are experiencing difficulty in meeting the emergency care targets which I have set for Health and Social Care, with Antrim Area Hospital having particular difficulties.

On 10 December 2012 I announced the appointment of a Turn Around and Support Team to the Northern Health and Social Care Trust to carry out a strategic overview to establish what changes and support might be required to accelerate progress at the Trust. There will be a focus in particular on the challenges in relation to the Trust's ability to deliver on the services commissioned, including reducing waiting times in relation to unscheduled care. The Team has been working alongside the support already being provided to the Trust by the Health and Social Care Board and Public Health Agency. The team's report is expected shortly.

I visited Antrim Area Hospital on Monday 22 April 2013 to hear at first hand the consultants' concerns about the Emergency Department. I am advised by the Northern Trust that it is working with the consultants to mitigate the potential risks within the department. The Trust has put in place a range of measures to ensure patient safety which include: expanding the Medical Assessment Unit which allows GPs direct access to specialist assessment beds; increasing support for triage and reviewing and strengthening the escalation process; and, making further investment in nursing staff and increasing paediatric support. The Trust is also looking at improvements in other areas of the hospital to help improve patient flows in and through the Emergency Department.

West Belfast and Greater Shankill Task Force

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the West Belfast and Greater Shankill Task Force, health employment scheme.

(AQW 21886/11-15)

Mr Poots: The West Belfast and Greater Shankill (WBGs) Task Force, Health Employment scheme finished in March 2010. The project was focused upon two core areas of work; Pre-employment - targeted at the unemployed and economically inactive in the , West Belfast and Greater Shankill areas providing training and job support services to enable them to compete for advertised entry level jobs within Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.

Outcomes - records show that a total of 310 people received support under the Pre-employment strand of which 145 have secured a job, 143 of which have moved into employment with the Trust. This equates to a 47% job conversion rate which is an excellent achievement when benchmarked against other Programmes such as New Deal. Of the 145 who secured a job, 85 were JAC (Job Assist Centre) clients. The remaining 60 were people who made direct contact with the WBGs Health Employment Partnership through a community outreach event in the Millennium Outreach Centre.

Job progression – targeted at those staff in entry level jobs within Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, providing training to help staff to progress along a career path within the Trust.

Outcomes - project records show that a total of 316 Trust staff received training through the HEP project and 36 staff progressed up the Trust's employment scale as a direct result of the intervention of the HEP project.

Prisoner Heath Care

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 20630/11-15, to provide the figures for 2013 to date.

(AQW 21896/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information is set out in the table below.

	2013 to date
No of prisoners treated in prison health facilities for the effects of taking illegal drugs	5
No of prisoners who required treatment in an outside hospital for the effects of taking illegal drugs	1
No of prisoners who have suffered long term health damage as a result of taking illegal drugs	0
No of prisoners who did not recover from the effects of taking illegal drugs	0

Rates: Help for Carers

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether his Department has a policy in place to help people who care for sick relatives with the payment of their rates.

(AQW 21899/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department does not have a policy in place to help carers with the payment of their rates; such a policy would be outside the remit of my Department.

The Department of Finance and Personnel currently holds responsibility for policies around Rate Relief.

Antrim Area Hospital

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety on what date did the escalation of the Antrim Area Hospital begin; and what assurances he can give that fire safety in the hospital has not been compromised by the extra non-medical beds in inpatient wards.

(AQW 21906/11-15)

Mr Poots: My office has been informed that this question refers to the escalation invoked to deal with winter pressures.

The escalation process began on 28 December 2012 in response to overcrowding in the Emergency Department, to respond to the number of patients waiting to be admitted to wards and the expected level of inpatient admissions to the hospital in the following days.

A review of the ward areas was carried out by the Trust Fire Safety officer, Director of Acute Services and a Trust Estates Officer to determine where in each ward extra beds could be safely placed. A subsequent external inspection carried out by the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service concluded that they were satisfied with the arrangements. These risk reviews form part of the established escalation plan.

Antrim Area Hospital: Serious Adverse Incidents

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of Serious Adverse Incidents (SAIs) that have been recorded at Antrim Area Hospital in (a) 2009; (b) 2010; (c) 2011; (d) 2012; and (e) 2013 to date; (ii) the reasons the SAIs were initiated; and (iii) the number of these SAIs that related to service delivery at the Accident and Emergency department of Antrim Area Hospital.

(AQW 21908/11-15)

Mr Poots: Since 1 May 2010, Health and Social Care (HSC) organisations have been required to report to the HSC Board any Serious Adverse Incident relating to the services they provide. Prior to that date, incidents were reported to the Department.

The information on the number of Serious Adverse Incidents reported to the Department and the Health and Social Care Board by Antrim Area Hospital in (a) 2009; (b) 2010; (c) 2011; (d) 2012; and (e) 2013 to date; (ii) the reasons the SAIs were initiated; and (iii) the number of these SAIs that related to Service Delivery at the Accident and Emergency Department of Antrim Area Hospital is outlined in the tables below.

- (i) Number of Serious Adverse Incidents (SAIs) that have been recorded at Antrim Area Hospital in (a) 2009; (b) 2010; (c) 2011; (d) 2012; and (e) 2013 to date.

Year SAI notified to Department/HSCB	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013 (Jan - 30 Apr)	Total
No	8	8	5	10	3	34

- (ii) the reasons the SAIs were initiated;

SAI Criteria	No of SAI Notifications
Serious injury to or the unexpected/unexplained death (including suspected suicides or serious self harm) of a service user.	15
Unexpected serious risk to a service user and/or staff member and member of the public.	12
Unexpected or significant threat to provide service and/or maintain business continuity.	3
Serious assault (including homicide and sexual assaults) by a service user on other service users or on staff or on members of the public.	2
Serious incidents of public interest or concern involving theft, fraud, information breaches and data losses.	2
Total	34

- (iii) the number of these SAIs that related to service delivery at the Accident and Emergency department of Antrim Area Hospital

SAIs that related to service delivery at the A& E department of Antrim Hospital	6
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Supported Living Accommodation

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients have been discharged to supported living accommodation in accordance with the principles of the Bamford Review since 2007.

(AQW 21931/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information was requested from the chief executives of the five HSC Trusts, who indicated that the information was not readily available and could only be provided by manually trawling through patient records, which would incur disproportionate cost.

Neurophysiotherapist

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of neurophysiotherapists in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust area; (ii) the number of people diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis in the Northern Trust area; and (iii) the current waiting time from referral to appointment for accessing a neurophysiotherapist.

(AQW 21943/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) The numbers (headcount and whole-time equivalent [WTE]) of neurophysiotherapists employed by the Northern HSC Trust at April 2013 are shown in the table below.

Agenda for Change Band	Headcount	WTE
Band 8a	2	1.0
Band 7	6	5.0
Band 6	11	7.5
Band 5	1	1.0

Source: Northern HSC Trust

Note: These staff treat a wide range of neurological conditions, with 2.4 WTE dedicated to patients with progressive neurological conditions. In addition, patients with neurological conditions may also be treated by general rehabilitation physiotherapists.

- (ii) Information on the number of people currently diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis is not available. It is however well established that Northern Ireland has one of the highest incidences of MS in the world.
- There were 2,101 admissions to HSC hospitals in Northern Ireland during 2011/12 where a diagnosis of Multiple Sclerosis was recorded. In 344 of these admissions, Multiple Sclerosis was recorded as the main/primary diagnosis.
- (iii) The Northern HSC Trust has stated that the current average waiting time from referral to an appointment with a neurophysiologist is between 4 to 6 weeks. They have advised that patients are prioritized according to clinical need and will be seen sooner than this if necessary.

Neurophysiotherapist

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the review process for patients who have had appointments with a neurophysiotherapist.

(AQW 21944/11-15)

Mr Poots: Following initial assessment, a treatment plan will be developed and treatment sessions allocated. Neuro-physiotherapy patients are reviewed in line with their clinical need and the frequency of their reviews will vary according to an individual's requirements. On discharge, patients are given advice about accessing the service should their condition change. Furthermore, a patient may be re-referred to the service by a Consultant, MS Specialist Nurse, GP, or an Allied Health Professional.

Patient Complaints

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of patient complaints recieved by (i) each Health and Social Care Trust; (ii) each hospital; and (iii) his Department, in each of the last twelve months.

(AQW 21956/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- i Information on the number of patient complaints received by Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts is published annually by the Department, and is available to view or download from:
- http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/hospitalstats/patient_safety/complaints.htm
- Table 11 of this publication details the number of complaints received by HSC Trusts during each of the last three years up to 31 March 2012.
- ii. Information on the number of complaints received by each hospital is not currently collected. Complaints to specific hospitals are referred to the relevant HSC Trust, and are included within the HSC Trusts complaints figures detailed in the statistical report above.
- iii. Information on the number of patient complaints received by the Department is not currently collected. Patient complaints are re-referred to the relevant HSC Trust, and are included within the HSC Trusts complaints figures detailed in the statistical report above.

BSc Nursing (Adult), Queen's University

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of student places funded by his Department for the BSc Nursing (Adult) at Queen's University in each of the past three years; (ii) the number of students

who have failed to progress to the subsequent year of the course; and (iii) the cost to his Department of providing additional places in years 2 and 3 of the course for nursing students who may wish to transfer from other academic institutions.

(AQW 21972/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) The table below shows the BSc Nursing (Adult) commissioned numbers funded by the Department at Queens University for the three years 2011-12 to 2013-14.

Pre-Registration Nursing Student Commissions for Queens University

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
BSc Nursing (Adult)	284	266	266

The answer to parts (ii) and (iii) of this AQW have been provided by Queens University Belfast.

- (ii) The table below shows the cumulative % dropout by entry session.

Percentage not returning in 2nd, 3rd, 4th or 5th year following entry session

Year 2				Year 3			Year 4		Year 5
08-09	09-10	10-11	11-12	08-09	09-10	10-11	08-09	09-10	08-09
6.9%	5.1%	5.7%	7.0%	9.0%	8.2%	9.4%	11.0%	7.9%	9.5%

A student is allowed a maximum of 5 years from the date of first entry onto the course, to complete their nursing degree. A small number leave for one or more years and return to complete the qualification. The table above shows the attrition rate from a start date in 08/09, across this maximum 5 year window.

- (iii) There are no additional places offered for transferring students in years 2 or 3, and hence no additional cost to the Department. Should a student permanently withdraw from a funded pre-reg Nursing course during year 1 of their studies, the School will advertise that it is open to applications for UK transfers into year 2 to take up any commissioned places that have been vacated. There are no transfers taken into Year 3.

Fluoridation

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on proposals to fluoridate the water supply.

(AQW 21987/11-15)

Mr Poots: I indicated on 25 April 2012 that it was appropriate that I should give consideration to fluoridation of the water supplies in Northern Ireland. I continue to consult with my Executive colleagues on the matter before coming to a decision.

If a proposal to fluoridate the water supplies is made, the appropriate evidence from reputable scientific and medical sources will be considered, and we are required under, The Water and Sewerage Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 to consult, and ascertain, public opinion. Should such a consultation proceed, we would welcome the views of all interested parties, at that time.

Fluoridation Pilot in Holywood, County Down

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he has access to the data from the 1980s water fluoridation pilot in Holywood, County Down.

(AQW 21988/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department does not hold any data from the 1980s water fluoridation pilot in Holywood, County Down.

Following previous similar requests my officials have carried out an extensive search of Departmental records, including the archives of the Public Records Office to check for such records and none has been found.

Project Bank Accounts

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 18944/11-15, what plans his Department has to introduce Project Bank Accounts for all building contracts to help protect sub-contractors.

(AQW 22013/11-15)

Mr Poots: I confirm that my Department intends to introduce the use of Project Bank Accounts on construction works contracts in line with the protocol to be developed by Central Procurement Directorate.

Antrim Area Hospital: Permanent Medical Inpatient Beds

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the capacity at Antrim Area Hospital for permanent medical inpatient beds on 31 March in each of the last five years.

(AQW 22046/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Northern HSC Trust have advised that the capacity at Antrim Area Hospital for permanent medical inpatient beds on 31 March in each of the last five years is as follows;

Year	Beds Capacity
March 2009	218
March 2010	196
March 2011	213
March 2012	248
March 2013	232

Sports Clubs: Disability Access

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what assistance his Department offers sports clubs that wish to install aids in their premises, such as lifts for people with disabilities.

(AQW 22048/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department does not offer such assistance to sports clubs. Section 21 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 places a duty on the service provider to ensure that their services can be accessed by people with disabilities. I would refer the Honourable Member to Sport Northern Ireland, the leading public body for the development of sport in Northern Ireland. Sport Northern Ireland has produced guidelines entitled, "Access To Sports Facilities For People With Disabilities: Design and Management Guidelines" (2010 Edition)". The guidelines can be accessed on the Sport Northern Ireland website at www.sportni.net.

Mental Illnesses

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what services the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust provides in the West Belfast constituency for people diagnosed with a severe and enduring mental illness.

(AQW 22051/11-15)

Mr Poots: The West Belfast Recovery Team is an integrated/multidisciplinary Community Mental Health team comprising of social workers, Community Psychiatric Nurses, an Occupational Therapist, a Psychologist and a Psychiatrist. An employment specialist will be joining the team soon.

The team provides a range of services such as a comprehensive mental health assessment, support, Health and Wellbeing clinics along with a wide range of psychological and treatment interventions. The team also provides support, carer assessment and advice to carers and relatives.

In addition to the above, service users within West Belfast also have access to the full range of mental health services provided across the Belfast Trust area.

Whiterock and Ballyowen Health Centres

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what services are provided at (i) Whiterock; and (ii) Ballyowen health centres for people diagnosed with a severe and enduring mental illness; and what is the duration of this service provision.

(AQW 22052/11-15)

Mr Poots: The main service offered at Whiterock Health Centre for people diagnosed with a severe and enduring mental illness is Day Services.

Mental Health Day Services deliver a time limited Day Service at Whiterock Day Centre, two days per week. This provides therapeutic, practical and creative support to meet the needs of adults living with and managing severe and enduring mental illness. Duration of this service is determined by individual need.

Mental Health Day Services work in partnership with other community and voluntary organisations to offer opportunities that can help improve the service.

In addition, the following clinics are run at Whiterock Health Centre:

Primary Mental Health Team	1 clinic
CBT	2 clinics

Trauma	1 full day clinic
Addictions	1 clinic

There are no Mental Health Services based in Ballyowen Health Centre however appointments are offered to service users in both Ballyowen and Whiterock Health Centres as and when required.

Mental Health Recovery Team Services

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust plans to move mental health recovery team services from west Belfast to south Belfast.

(AQW 22053/11-15)

Mr Poots: Mental health services will continue to be offered in the West Belfast locality. There are no changes planned to the current service provision profile.

Tamiflu

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much of the Tamiflu that was not used during the swine flu outbreak can still be used.

(AQW 22055/11-15)

Mr Poots: During the 2009 H1N1 pandemic, antivirals were procured to cover 80% of the UK population. The current policy in line with the 2011 UK Influenza Pandemic Preparedness Strategy is to maintain antivirals for 50% population coverage. Antivirals are retained until they are no longer able to be used in a clinical setting.

Tamiflu

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much Tamiflu was procured during the most recent swine flu outbreak; and how much was unused.

(AQW 22056/11-15)

Mr Poots: During the 2009 H1N1 pandemic, antivirals were procured to cover 80% of the UK population. The current policy in line with the 2011 UK Influenza Pandemic Preparedness Strategy is to maintain antivirals for 50% population coverage. Antivirals are retained until they are no longer able to be used in a clinical setting.

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust: Early Retirement Scheme

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the (i) number; and (ii) nature of posts in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust that are held by nurses who availed of an early retirement scheme.

(AQW 22078/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am advised by the Belfast HSC Trust that there are two nurse-qualified staff who have availed of Voluntary Early Retirement between 1 April 2007 and 31 March 2013 that have subsequently registered with the Trust Nursing Bank to perform frontline nursing roles on an "as and when required basis". Both of these individuals were previously employed in nursing managerial roles and in registering with the Trust Nurse Bank have made themselves available to augment the frontline workforce in the event of any short-term need that may arise.

Autism

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what medical care is available for adults diagnosed with high-functioning autism.

(AQW 22081/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Health and Social Care Board commission a range of services to provide care for adults who are diagnosed with Autism and have been assessed as needing care.

A regional adult autism care pathway was agreed in 2012. Implementation of this pathway was highlighted as a key element of the draft Autism Strategy and Action Plan 2013-2015.

It is recognised that services for adults living with ASD are multi-agency in nature; however, the HSC intends to invest an additional £500k to further support adult autism-specific service provision. This will include additional practitioners from the second half of 2013/14.

Measles, Mumps and Rubella Vaccine

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the uptake of the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine in each of the last five years.

(AQW 22100/11-15)

Mr Poots: The measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine is given as two doses, with uptake measured by the number of children who have received the first dose by their second birthday and with both doses by their fifth birthday.

The table below shows the number of children who have received the first dose at age 2 for the past five years.

Year	Total Children	Children Vaccinated with 1st MMR dose	% Uptake
2008	23423	21112	90.1
2009	24324	22267	91.5
2010	25222	23259	92.2
2011	24771	23029	93.0
2012	25397	24158	95.1

The table below shows the number of children who have received both doses at age 5 for the past five years.

Year	Total Children	1st & 2nd MMR dose	% uptake
2008	22247	19745	88.8
2009	22847	20531	89.9
2010	22780	20727	91.0
2011	23698	21642	91.3
2012	24730	22459	90.8

Measles, Mumps and Rubella Vaccine

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps his Department has taken to increase the uptake of the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine since the outbreak in Swansea.

(AQW 22101/11-15)

Mr Poots: Increasing the uptake rate of MMR vaccine has been given priority for many years in Northern Ireland and by doing so we have consistently achieved uptake rates above the UK average. In 2012 NI became the first UK country to achieve 95% uptake by 2 years of age for the first dose.

Measures that have contributed to these high rates include:

- providing high quality information and training to those health professionals who are dealing directly with parents so that they can educate them and answer their concerns;
- providing information for parents, ranging from leaflets to detailed question-and-answer briefings so that parents can choose the level of information they require;
- issuing press statements to counter misinformation, reassure parents and provide information about the vaccine and about measles, mumps and rubella;
- giving GPs, health visitors and other nurses feedback on their uptake rates, in order to help those who encounter lower rates to find ways to raise them including visiting practices with comparatively low rates and discussing ways of improving; and
- running workshops for areas with comparatively low rates.

It is measures such as these consistently applied over a long period of time which have led to the present high uptake rates which should prevent large outbreaks.

The high uptake rate means that although there are some unimmunised or incompletely immunised children dotted throughout the community, the numbers are considered insufficient to allow outbreaks to spread. The Public Health Agency continues to closely monitor the number of cases of measles in Northern Ireland and will take all appropriate action where necessary.

Measles, Mumps and Rubella Vaccine

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what measures have been put in place to prevent an outbreak of measles similar to that experienced in South Wales.

(AQW 22102/11-15)

Mr Poots: Increasing the uptake rate of MMR vaccine has been given priority for many years in Northern Ireland and by doing so we have consistently achieved uptake rates above the UK average. In 2012 NI became the first UK country to achieve 95% uptake by 2 years of age for the first dose.

Measures that have contributed to these high rates include:

- providing high quality information and training to those health professionals who are dealing directly with parents so that they can educate them and answer their concerns;
- providing information for parents, ranging from leaflets to detailed question-and-answer briefings so that parents can choose the level of information they require;
- issuing press statements to counter misinformation, reassure parents and provide information about the vaccine and about measles, mumps and rubella;
- giving GPs, health visitors and other nurses feedback on their uptake rates, in order to help those who encounter lower rates to find ways to raise them including visiting practices with comparatively low rates and discussing ways of improving; and
- running workshops for areas with comparatively low rates.

It is measures such as these consistently applied over a long period of time which have led to the present high uptake rates which should prevent large outbreaks .

The high uptake rate means that although there are some unimmunised or incompletely immunised children dotted throughout the community, the numbers are considered insufficient to allow outbreaks to spread. The Public Health Agency continues to closely monitor the number of cases of measles in Northern Ireland and will take all appropriate action where necessary.

Bereavement Midwives

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety who commissions the hiring of bereavement midwives. (AQW 22105/11-15)

Mr Poots: The recruitment of bereavement midwives is a matter for each Health and Social Care Trust based on service needs and available resources. All midwives undergo bereavement training on how to support and care for grieving parents.

Dentistry: Prior-approval Cases

Mr Rogers asked Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, with the number of applications for prior approval dental cases set to increase, what plans are in place to combat the increased waiting times and paperwork.

(AQW 22123/11-15)

Mr Poots: In order to address the anticipated pressures on the General Dental Services budget, my Department has consulted on a number of proposed changes to General Dental Services which were chosen because they would help reduce the pressures on General Dental Services whilst minimising the impact on patient's oral health, and on the ability of practices to provide ongoing care and treatment in the Health Service.

These proposals included using internationally-recognised criteria to determine eligibility for Health Service-funded orthodontic care. If introduced, orthodontists would no longer have to submit a prior approval application for those patients who met the criteria for treatment. This would lead to a significant reduction on the overall number of prior approval applications which are currently processed. The proposed introduction of a core service of treatments would mean that more treatments could only be provided following an application for prior approval. The Department's assessment is that overall there should be little to no increase in the time taken to process prior approval applications. In tandem, the Health and Social Care Board and Business Services Organisation have been considering how the prior approval process could be streamlined to take account of the proposed changes and ensure that approvals are provided in a timely manner.

Dental practitioners will remain able to proceed with treatments that would normally require an application for prior approval in emergency situations, such as when it is necessary for the relief of pain.

Dental Fees

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given that costs continue to rise while dental fees increase at less than the rate of inflation, to outline the rationale for the proposed cuts in the dental contract that will lead to a reduction in the income of dental practice owners, associates and assistants.

(AQW 22124/11-15)

Mr Poots: Since 2007, the budget for the provision of General Dental Services has increased by around £30m and the investment is planned to continue to increase this year and next. In spite of this the expenditure on Health Service dentistry during 2012/13 was £11m greater than the initial allocated budget. The proposed changes to General Dental Services which were recently the subject of consultation do not include cuts in the dental contract but instead include a number of proposals to help mitigate the pressures on the budget and so help ensure the best use of the available resources across the Health and Social Care sector. I am aware that members of the dental profession have raised concerns over increases in their expenses and these will be considered as part of the consultation analysis.

Dental Services and Oral Health

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans are in place to address the impact that the proposed reduction in resources will have on dental services and oral health, particularly amongst the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in society.

(AQW 22126/11-15)

Mr Poots: The resources allocated to General Dental Services have increased over recent years and are planned to continue to increase this year. The proposed changes to General Dental Services were chosen because they would help reduce the pressures on the General Dental Services budget whilst minimising the impact on patient's oral health, and on the ability of practices to provide ongoing care and treatment in the Health Service. While some change is necessary, my Department is taking steps to ensure that all treatments will remain available, where clinically necessary.

Improving oral health is largely achieved through using evidence based fluoride schemes (currently fluoride toothpaste or fluoride varnishes), fissures sealants (protective coating on newly erupted adult molar teeth) and reducing the amount of sugar in patients' diets. My Department will continue to fund evidence-based schemes, developed and provided by appropriate healthcare professionals, to improve oral health. The most vulnerable and disadvantaged in our society are already entitled to free dental care through the "Help with Health Costs" scheme and this safeguard will remain.

Antrim Area Hospital: Accident and Emergency

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the current staffing levels in the Antrim Area Hospital Accident and Emergency department over a 24 hour period; and the projected staffing levels in the new Accident and Emergency department over a 24 hour period.

(AQW 22134/11-15)

Mr Poots:

i) Current and ii) Projected staffing levels in Antrim Area Hospital's Emergency Department are shown below.

(i)

Grade	Headcount	Shift Pattern
Admin & Clerical	5-7	8am – 10pm
Admin & Clerical	2-3	10pm – 8am
Nursing Trained	6-9	8am – 9pm
Emergency Nurse Practitioner	1-2	8.30am – 9pm
Nursing Support	2	8am – 9pm
Nursing Trained	6-10	9pm - 8am
Nursing Support	2	9pm – 8am
Consultant	1-2	8am – 10pm
Middle Grade Doctor	1-2	8am – 10pm
Junior Doctor	1-2	8am – 10pm
Consultant	On call	10pm – 8am
Middle Grade Doctor	1-2	10pm – 8am
Junior Doctor	1-2	10pm – 8am

(ii)

Grade	Headcount	Shift Pattern
Admin & Clerical	6-8	8am – 10pm
Admin & Clerical	2-3	10pm – 8am
Nursing Trained	7-11	8am – 9pm
Emergency Nurse Practitioner	1-2	8.30am – 9pm
Nursing Support	3	8am – 9pm
Nursing Trained	7-12	9pm – 8am
Nursing Support	2	9pm – 8am

Grade	Headcount	Shift Pattern
Consultant	1-2	8am – 10pm
Middle Grade Doctor	1-2	8am – 10pm
Junior Doctor	1-2	8am – 10pm
Consultant	On call	10pm – 8am
Middle Grade Doctor	1-2	10pm – 8am
Junior Doctor	1-2	10pm – 8am

This information has been obtained directly from the Northern Health & Social Care Trust, and has not been validated by the Department.

NI Chest, Heart and Stroke Nurses

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he will offer additional publicity to the visit to Parliament Buildings by NI Chest, Heart and Stroke nurses on Tuesday 7 May 2013 to further inform the wider public on health issues.

(AQW 22135/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am very supportive of the important work done by Northern Ireland Chest Heart and Stroke (NICHs) through their health promotion work and raising awareness of risk factors for cardiovascular and respiratory illness. I plan to attend for a cardiac risk factor assessment on 7 May when NICHs nurses visit Parliament Buildings.

Dalriada Urgent Care

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how much funding is used to supply motor vehicles to Dalriada Doctor Services; (ii) whether these cars are bought or leased; (iii) who carries out the maintenance; (iv) how the maintenance contract is awarded; and (v) what is the annual maintenance cost.

(AQW 22139/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am advised that the position is as follows:-

- (i) Dalriada Urgent Care spends £53,700 per annum on lease payments for 9 vehicles;
- (ii) The vehicles are leased on full maintenance operating leases which incorporates the cost of maintenance, tyre replacement and road tax;
- (iii) The cars are supplied by Agnew Corporate which organises the maintenance and servicing of the vehicles through nominated partners;
- (iv) There is no separate maintenance contract; and
- (v) The element of the above quoted cost at (i) which relates to maintenance is £5,500 per annum.

Antrim Area Hospital

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what impact the current consultation on the reconfiguration of emergency services in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust will have on Antrim Area Hospital; and whether any risk assessments have been carried out.

(AQW 22146/11-15)

Mr Poots: The preferred option identified in the consultation document is that there should be two emergency departments within Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, in the Royal Victoria and Mater Hospitals, supported by direct access, via GPs, to a range of specialist services at the Belfast City Hospital. This reflects the configuration of services which has been in place since the temporary closure of the Belfast City Hospital emergency department in November 2011. While a risk assessment has not been carried out on the consultation, the impact of the preferred option is discussed in the consultation document (pages 48-50). In addition, the impact of the temporary closure of the Belfast City Hospital emergency department has been monitored and it appears to have had no significant impact on Antrim Area Hospital.

No final decisions have been made on the future configuration of emergency department services in Belfast.

Fire and Rescue Service

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the cost to date of the process to recruit a Director of Performance Planning and Corporate Affairs to the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service; and whether the post has been filled.

(AQW 22170/11-15)

Mr Poots: The total cost, to date, of the process to recruit a Director of Planning, Performance and Corporate Affairs is £10,786.58. This figure does not include internal staff costs.

Following the recruitment exercise no appointment was made and the post remains vacant.

Dentistry: Preventive Treatment

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given the increased need for preventive dental treatment, what efforts are being made to provide more comprehensive preventive dental treatment on the Health Service. (AQW 22206/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department and the Health and Social Care Board are continuing to develop a new contract for General Dental Services. The proposed new contract is intended to reward dentists for providing preventative care and advice to patients and payments will acknowledge the greater oral health needs of patients from socially deprived areas.

My Department recognises the benefits of preventative treatments in improving and maintaining oral health and over recent years has introduced the following measures:

- Fluoride toothpaste schemes for young children in the most deprived areas.
- Preventive fissure sealant scheme delivered through the General Dental Services for young people.
- Enhanced capitation payments for dentists providing care to children from certain deprived areas.
- Enhanced continuing care payments to incentivise dental care for adults in deprived areas with the highest decay rates.
- Focussing the work of the Community Dental Service (CDS) across the whole of Northern Ireland, to improving the oral health of those with special care needs such as children from socially disadvantaged areas, the learning disabled, the housebound and residents in nursing and residential homes. In addition, the service delivers evidence-based oral health improvement programmes.
- Across Northern Ireland, the Public Health Agency run a number of healthy eating initiatives, smoking cessation and alcohol reduction programmes to improve both general and dental health.

Oakridge Social Education Centre, Dungannon

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 21354/11-15, whether this is high or low priority.

(AQW 22234/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Oakridge project is a high priority for the Trust. The Southern Trust plans to submit the business case for the project to the Department in May.

Paediatric Cardiac Surgery

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether a Safe and Sustainable assessment of children's cardiac surgery was carried out at Our Ladies Hospital Crumlin, Dublin, as was carried out in Royal Victoria Hospital for Sick Children in Belfast.

(AQW 22280/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Safe and Sustainable review, led by Sir Kennedy, was an NHS review of congenital heart services provided for children in England and Wales. An Independent Expert Group, also led by Sir Ian Kennedy, was invited to assess the paediatric congenital cardiac services at the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children.

Our Lady's Children's Hospital Crumlin (OLCHC) is in another jurisdiction and a Safe and Sustainable assessment has not therefore been undertaken. However, all centres undertaking cardiac surgery on children from Northern Ireland, including OLCHC, submit outcome data to the centrally held register, the Congenital Cardiac Audit Database (CCAD), which publishes information on mortality rates for surgical and cardiological interventional procedures. Among the information provided by CCAD are profiles of every congenital heart disease centre in the UK, including the number and range of procedures they carry out and survival rates for the most common types of treatment.

Paediatric Cardiac Surgery

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the recommendation within the Preferred Option Document by the Paediatric Congenital Cardiac Services Working Group of a Dublin-only service for the future commissioning of regional Paediatric Cardiac Surgery.

(AQW 22351/11-15)

Mr Poots: I recently received the Paediatric Congenital Cardiac Surgical (PCCS) services Working Group's recommendation, endorsed by the Health and Social Care Board, on the future commissioning of this service. The recommended option involves building on the existing service provided by the Dublin paediatric cardiac surgery centre for the Belfast Trust. I have said that before I make my decision I want to take the opportunity to hold further discussions with our counterparts in the Republic of Ireland and explore the scope for flexibility in the location for the future delivery of this service without compromising any aspect of patient safety.

My key priority in all of this is to ensure the delivery of a safe and sustainable service for these vulnerable children. In so doing, I want to ensure that we have fully explored every possibility for addressing the concerns which have been raised with me by parents and by cardiology consultants. I will now take time to consider the report and its recommendations in full and I will make my decision shortly.

Residential Care Homes

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of recent proposals from Health and Social Care Trusts to close all statutory residential care homes within five years.

(AQW 22352/11-15)

Mr Poots: I want to ensure that older people receive the best care possible, within available resources, and in an environment that meets their care needs. Planning for change is essential, if independent living is to be promoted and people are to be treated with the dignity and respect they deserve.

The majority of people want to be supported so that they can stay at home, for as long as possible. The HSC is working on developing flexible and responsive models of care in the community. As part of this, some Trusts have issued proposals for consultation which includes the closure of statutory residential care homes.

I would urge older people, and other members of society who have an interest in how the HSC delivers services, to get actively involved in their local consultation processes. It is important that there is an informed debate and that local people can express their views.

Child Abuse

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what assurances he can provide that child abuse, such as that which happened in Donagh, cannot happen again.

(AQO 3879/11-15)

Mr Poots: It is not possible to provide the Member with the assurance he is seeking. However, I can assure him that my Department is working alongside other departments and organisations to ensure we maximise the protection offered to children. The Member should not underestimate neither the challenge faced day and daily by front-line staff to keep children safe and free from abuse, nor their commitment to the task. Safeguarding children is a priority for me as Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety and for the Executive as a whole. It is a Programme for Government commitment. There are a number of very significant policy and practice developments in recent years, which have the collective aim of improving and strengthening safeguards for children and reducing the likelihood of a recurrence of the dreadful events in Donagh.

We have a new children's Safeguarding Board in Northern Ireland, which was set up in September last year. Work is ongoing to revise existing child safeguarding policy, which will be supported by revised operational policies and procedures. We are continuing to implement new disclosure and barring arrangements and providing improved supports to children and families in need. For example, we will have a Family Support Hub network in place across all of Northern Ireland within the next few years.

In relation to the Donagh case, I can assure the Member that all of the recommendations made by the Independent Review of the case, which are within the remit of my Department, have either been actioned or are in the process of being actioned.

Cystic Fibrosis

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking to assist people with cystic fibrosis.

(AQO 3888/11-15)

Mr Poots: Adult cystic fibrosis patients attend Belfast City Hospital's Cystic Fibrosis Centre and children attend the Unit at the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children. Both the adult and paediatric centres have a multi-disciplinary team of medical, nursing and allied health professionals to meet the needs of the patients.

I announced on 12 March 2013 that ivacaftor, otherwise known as Kalydeco, would be made available to suitable cystic fibrosis patients in Northern Ireland. Ivacaftor is the first in a new class of medicines that target the underlying cause of cystic fibrosis rather than simply treating the symptoms. Research into this type of treatment continues with the hope for further good news for cystic fibrosis patients.

I can also advise that newborn screening for cystic fibrosis is part of the newborn blood spot screening programme, which is offered to all babies at 5 days of age.

Health Inequalities: Committee Report

Ms Ruane asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the action taken on the recommendations made by the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety in its recent Review of Health Inequalities Report.

(AQO 3889/11-15)

Mr Poots: I welcomed the Health Committee's Report of its Review of Health Inequalities, forwarded to my department on 17 January, and debated in the Assembly on 18th February. It contains 9 recommendations some of which are beyond the sole remit of my Department and require consideration with other departments and Executive colleagues.

Informed by the outcome of last year's consultation exercise on the draft cross-cutting public health framework "Fit and Well – Changing Lives" and the recommendations of the Health Committee's Review of Health Inequalities, my officials have held two cross-sectoral workshops in February and March to engage with key stakeholders and to provide a steer for the general shape of changes to be made to the framework.

Representation at the workshops included from across government departments.

Feedback from this process has since been assimilated and further liaison is now taking place directly with other departments to finalise the themes and actions for the framework.

I have undertaken to provide the Committee with a detailed response in due course, and prior to finally publishing the framework.

Healthcare: Electronic Records

Mr Irwin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how electronic health records can assist in improving care.

(AQO 3890/11-15)

Mr Poots: Electronic Health Records allow our staff to provide patients with faster, safer, better care based on more complete information about the patient being available when and where it's needed.

The Northern Ireland Electronic Care Record Proof of Concept has been running successfully in the Belfast City and Ulster Hospital since 2010, and some local GP Practices, with around 800 clinicians using it. It is due to roll out across Northern Ireland from next month, bringing information together securely, so clinical staff have the key facts and can make the right decisions, more quickly. This improves the patient experience, and will increase the efficiency, productivity and quality of services.

Embracing technological advances such as the NIECR is critical to the delivery of the new healthcare model envisaged in Transforming Your Care.

Causeway Hospital

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the timescale for resolving the difficulties reported in the Local Commissioning Group's Population Plan in relation to the Causeway Hospital.

(AQO 3891/11-15)

Mr Poots: I made a Statement to the House on 9th October 2012 on the start of a public consultation on the response to the proposals set out in Transforming Your Care. The draft Population Plan for the Northern Health and Social Care Local Commissioning Group area was published at that time. The draft Plan highlighted difficulties in recruiting permanent skilled medical staff, and the risk to continued delivery of safe and sustainable services at the Causeway Hospital.

My Statement on the 19th March 2013 updated the House on the outcome of the public consultation on the proposals contained in the document Transforming Your Care: Vision to Action. I indicated that in light of the responses received I had asked officials to begin work to take forward a detailed options appraisal for the Causeway Hospital, as outlined in the consultation document. The appraisal will consider future management arrangements and will also include consideration of community services. The appraisal should be completed within six months. Decisions on the way forward will be informed by the conclusions of the appraisal. The aim is to ensure that we have effective delivery of safe, sustainable and resilient services for patients and clients in the area.

Dentists

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the contract for dentists.

(AQO 3892/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department and the Health and Social Care Board are continuing to develop the new contracts for General Dental Services, Oral Surgery and Orthodontics. The Health and Social Care Board has just launched the pilot of the new Oral Surgery contract across a number of primary care oral surgery practices in Northern Ireland. The experience from this exercise will inform the forthcoming pilots of the new Orthodontic and General Dental Services contracts.

These pilots will have a significant role in informing the successful roll out of the new contracts across Northern Ireland.

Healthcare: Vulnerable People

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to taking strategic health related decisions which affect vulnerable people, how does he explain the decisions to those affected and their next of kin.

(AQO 3893/11-15)

Mr Poots: Health and social care bodies are expected to communicate with patients and services users, to involve them in decisions which affect them and to keep them fully informed as appropriate.

Department of Justice

Welfare Reform Bill: Increase in Benefit Appeals

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, given the increase in benefit appeals due to welfare reform, many of which are now relying on points of law, whether he will make Legal Aid available to allow appellants to access legal opinion and appropriate representation in the interests of parity, access to justice and human rights legislation.

(AQW 21714/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): Legal Advice and Assistance is available to pay for the legal opinion of a solicitor on any point of Northern Ireland law, including welfare issues, providing the applicant meets the relevant financial eligibility criteria.

Legal aid is not currently available for representation before the Appeals Tribunal. The Access to Justice Review Report, published by my Department in September 2011, did not recommend making publicly funded legal representation available in social security appeal cases.

I currently have no plans to introduce any further access to legal aid for representations at benefit appeals.

Prison Service Staff

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 21219/11-15, how many Northern Ireland Prison Service staff were offered reinstatement, following dismissal, which was subsequently overturned by the Northern Ireland Civil Service Appeal Board, in each year since 2004.

(AQW 21720/11-15)

Mr Ford: Since 2004 the Northern Ireland Prison Service has not offered reinstatement, following dismissal, to any member of staff which was subsequently overturned by the Civil Service Appeal Board.

Prison Service Staff

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 20873/11-15, to detail (i) the number of (a) suspended; and (b) operational prison staff that have availed of the services of Carecall since 2008; (ii) whether staff can avail of counselling in addition to the six sessions provided; (iii) what other counselling services are available; and (iv) whether the Northern Ireland Prison Service employs a Clinical Psychologist.

(AQW 21766/11-15)

Mr Ford: Between 1 January 2008 and 31 March 2013, a total of 498 operational staff availed of the services of Carecall. During this period 53 staff were suspended with 18 of these staff using the services of Carecall. A limited number of additional counselling sessions may be approved in exceptional circumstances.

The Prison Service does not provide any other staff counselling services or employ a Clinical Psychologist but an out-of-hours Carecall helpline is available which gives staff the opportunity to speak to a counsellor on the telephone.

Prison Service Staff

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether a member of Northern Ireland Prison Service staff employed under the new intake was found to have a criminal record and subsequently dismissed, and to detail (i) the checks carried out on the person's application and references; (ii) how the criminal record was discovered; (iii) for how long the person was employed before the criminal record was discovered; and (iv) whether the person has been reported to the PSNI.

(AQW 21768/11-15)

Mr Ford: No member of the Northern Ireland Prison Service staff, employed under the new intake, has been found to have a criminal record and been subsequently dismissed.

Prison Service Professional Standards Unit

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, given that in October 2011 Dame Anne Owers recommended that a Northern Ireland Prison Service Professional Standards Unit should oversee all disciplinary matters, to detail (i) whether this is the case, as the answer to AQW 18758/11-15 confirmed that the Head of the Unit was appointed on 16 January 2012 and the answer to AQW 20578/11-15 confirmed that no other staff had been recruited; and (ii) whether he will provide an overview of how all disciplinary cases have been managed since January 2012.

(AQW 21771/11-15)

Mr Ford: I refer the member to the response I gave to AQW/20578/11-15. The new Professional Standards Unit is expected to be established by June 2013, following which it will oversee all disciplinary matters. Until then all disciplinary cases will be managed under the current disciplinary system.

Prison Service: General and Gross Misconduct

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in terms of Northern Ireland Prison Service operational staff charged with general and gross misconduct, to detail (i) the number charged since 2008; and (ii) the number of cases that met the timescale as laid down in the Code of Conduct and Discipline.

(AQW 21780/11-15)

Mr Ford: Since 2008 there have been 199 operational staff charged with general and gross misconduct.

Information regarding the number of cases meeting the timescales as laid down in the Code of Conduct and Discipline is not held and the attainment of this information could only be provided at disproportionate cost. I would, however, refer the Member to my response to AQW/21392/11-15 and confirm that individual disciplinary cases are dealt with as expeditiously as possible, taking into account any relevant mitigating issues.

Part-time Reserve Gratuity Fund

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) how much money was left from the Part-Time Reserve Gratuity Fund provided by HM Treasury; and (ii) how has it been allocated.

(AQW 21832/11-15)

Mr Ford: There is approximately £392,000 remaining of the £20m funding provided by Treasury for the Part-Time Reserve Gratuity Scheme. This residue is held within the Department awaiting a final decision. My officials have drafted an options appraisal for consideration and a decision is expected within weeks.

Prison Service Staff

Lord Morrow asked Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 18261/11-15, to detail (i) why the Northern Ireland Prison Service is not seeking to recruit retired senior police officers for the Professional Standards Unit; (ii) whether his Department will recruit staff from all Departments within the Northern Ireland Civil Service for the Unit; (iii) how he will ensure that the unit will be operated independently of undue influence from the Northern Ireland Prison Service; (iv) whether all prison staff under disciplinary investigation will be dealt with on a strictly confidential basis at all times and; (v) if the Northern Ireland Prison Service intends to continue to use Governors as investigating officers.

(AQW 21834/11-15)

Mr Ford:

- (i) External recruitment is not on this occasion considered to be necessary.
- (ii) I refer the member to the answer I gave to AQW 20578/11-15. The investigators in the Professional Standards Unit will be a mixture of operational and general service grade staff.
- (iii) The new disciplinary system will be fair and transparent and there is no reason to suggest otherwise.
- (iv) I can confirm that all disciplinary cases will be dealt with confidentially.

NI Legal Services Commission

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the current position of the NI Legal Services Commission since it received £10m additional funding and requested further funding for the 2012/13 financial year; (ii) whether further funding was granted and if so how much and when; and (iii) the measures that are in place to ensure this situation does not occur in the 2013/14 financial year.

(AQW 21836/11-15)

Mr Ford: Since the NI Legal Services Commission (NILSC) received £10m additional funding and requested further funding for the 2012/13 financial year, the Department allocated a further £6m as part of the January Monitoring Round process. This provided the Commission with additional funding of £16m in 2012/13.

During 2013/14 the Department of Justice will continue to work with the NILSC to address funding pressures and these will be considered as part of the monitoring round process. In addition, the Department continues to take forward a series of reforms aimed at further reducing legal aid expenditure.

Duty Reviews Inquiry

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 21227/11-15, why the figures for the total number of reviews do not correlate with the number of results.

(AQW 21856/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Policing Board has confirmed the information was provided as part of the response to AQW/21227/11-15.

The number of reviews does not tally with the number of results due to the overlapping from one financial year to another.

Guidance on Medical Pensions and Injury on Duty Awards

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 17706/11-15, to detail (i) if the Draft Guidance on Injury on Duty Reviews was presented to the National Attendance Management Forum; and (ii) if they have been considered by the Policing Board.

(AQW 21889/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Policing Board has confirmed (i) Draft Guidance provided by the National Attendance Management Forum relating to Injury on Duty awards was circulated to its members in March 2013; (ii) the Guidance has not yet been considered by the Board but has been shared with the sub-group set up to consider the administration of percentage disablement reviews.

Community Safety College at Desertcreat

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 20844/11-15, what facilities or elements of the original scheme have been omitted to date in any revised scheme.

(AQW 21909/11-15)

Mr Ford: Substantial progress has been made in reducing the cost overrun, although the detail of the cost reductions have not been finalised. The Programme Board intends to submit a business case addendum to the Department of Justice and the Department of Health and Social Services within days, appraising options which deliver cost reductions without significantly reducing the functionality of the college. It is therefore not possible to specify what reductions are planned, at this time.

Prison Service Staff

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 18977/11-15, since 2004 how many Northern Ireland Prison Service staff have been dismissed but subsequently had the decision overturned by the Northern Ireland Civil Service Appeal Board and are awaiting, or in discussions for, compensation.

(AQW 21915/11-15)

Mr Ford: This information has been withheld as disclosure would be contrary to the Data Protection Act 1998.

Prison Service: Code of Conduct and Discipline

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 20453/11-15, whether the Code of Conduct and Discipline referred to is currently under review; and how many reviews were carried out during the periods of suspension.

(AQW 21916/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Member will be aware from earlier responses that the current Code of Conduct and Discipline (COCD) has been reviewed as part of a review of the overall Disciplinary Process in the Northern Ireland Prison Service.

No reviews of the COCD were carried out during the periods of suspension.

Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice to outline the oversight mechanisms that are in place, and those that are planned, for the Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland.

(AQW 21923/11-15)

Mr Ford: There is in place an agreed Management Statement and Financial Memorandum between the Police Ombudsman's Office and my Department. This document sets out the broad framework within which the Office operates and the conditions under which any public funds are paid to the Office, together with how the Office is held to account for its performance.

Specifically, I formally approve the Office's corporate and business plans on the basis that the work of the Office supports my Department's aims and objectives. Also, my officials attend the Office's Audit Committee meetings in an observer capacity and hold quarterly governance meetings with the Chief Executive to review performance.

Additionally, and in light of the recent Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland follow-up report to their report in September 2011 and the decision of the Ombudsman to recommence history investigations, Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland will conduct a further review once three substantial history investigations have been completed. This will provide further assurance on progress and that this aspect of OPONI's new strategic plan is operating effectively.

I am confident that, as this progress continues, the enhanced professionalism in how the Office operates with a particular focus on higher quality work in its investigations will all add to rebuild public confidence in the Office.

Community Safety College at Desertcreat

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 20844/11-15, to detail the areas of projected savings within the scheme.

(AQW 21957/11-15)

Mr Ford: Substantial progress has been made in reducing the cost overrun, although the detail of the cost reductions have not been finalised. The Project Board are expecting to submit a business case addendum to the Department of Justice and the Department of Health and Social Services within days, appraising options which deliver cost reductions without significantly reducing the functionality of the college. It is therefore not possible to specify the areas of projected savings at this time.

Community Safety College at Desertcreat

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 20844/11-15, what level of consultation has taken place; and what consultation is proposed with the bidding contractors on any changes, to ensure that the most economically advantageous price is achieved for the public purse and that the original specification is not compromised.

(AQW 21958/11-15)

Mr Ford: During the bidding stage it was agreed with all five bidding consortia that in the event of the tendered costs exceeding the available budget, the client would liaise with, and use the rates of, the preferred bidder to reduce costs via a Bill of Reductions exercise. For legal and procurement reasons, it is not appropriate or recommended to re-open the competition.

The proposed cost reductions have been found on the basis of omissions and replacements using schedules of tendered rates provided by the preferred bidder. The most economically advantageous tender to the public purse was achieved through the detailed breakdown of costs presented by bidders through the competitive process.

The Programme Board is taking great care to ensure that the cost reductions exercise does not significantly impact the functionality of the college. This point is being fully addressed in the business case addendum.

The preferred bidder has not been engaged in negotiations, as the business case addendum has yet to be approved.

Prince's Trust Programmes for Young Offenders

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) for his assessment of the Prince's Trust programmes for young offenders; (ii) whether his Department, or its arm's-length bodies or agencies such as the Probation Board and Youth Justice, make referrals to the Prince's Trust; (iii) what is the uptake rate; (iv) how much funding his Department has given the Prince's Trust in each of the last three years; and (v) what are the re-offender rates after completing a programme with the Prince's Trust.

(AQW 21959/11-15)

Mr Ford:

- (i) The Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS), Youth Justice Agency (YJA) and the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI), all have well established links with the Prince's Trust. I recognise the value of Prince's Trust programmes to young offenders, in supporting their transition from custody to community, and their wider contribution to our efforts to reduce re-offending.
- (ii) PBNI and the YJA both make referrals to the Prince's Trust.
- (iii) The uptake rates are not available.
- (iv) No funding has been allocated to the Prince's Trust by the Department of Justice since justice was devolved.
- (v) Re-offender rates cannot be determined as the number of participants in Prince's Trust programmes is relatively small and it is impossible to differentiate between the impact of such programmes and other inputs or interventions that offenders may be receiving in parallel.

Prison Service Staff

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) how many prison staff at each prison facility are on sick leave; (ii) what is the cost of their sick absence; (iii) what steps the Prison Service has taken to address the issues of conformity in Sickness Absence Procedures in terms of the number of warnings issued to staff and the need for return to work interviews; and (iv) what assurances he can give that prison staff on sick absence receive equitable treatment.

(AQW 21960/11-15)

Mr Ford: The number of prison staff who have taken a period of sick absence at each prison facility during the period 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013 is shown in the table below:

Establishment	No. of staff who had instances of absence during the period	Number of staff currently on sick absence
Maghaberry	381	39

Establishment	No. of staff who had instances of absence during the period	Number of staff currently on sick absence
Magilligan	154	21
Hydebank Wood	150	23

The cost of sickness absence in terms of Occupational Sick Pay for all prison staff during the same period of time is £3,143,884.07. It is not possible to provide a breakdown of the cost per prison establishment.

In the Northern Ireland Prison Service sickness absence is managed under the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) policies on Sickness Absence and Inefficiency Sickness Absence. The aim of these policies is to promote regular attendance at work, minimise absence across the service and to provide a framework within which sickness absence can be effectively managed. The policies are set out for all staff and managers in the NICS HR Handbook.

All staff, irrespective of grade, are managed under these policies. Each case is managed taking account of individual circumstances in accordance with the policies which include appeal arrangements.

Prisoners Suffering Trauma of Abuse, Rape or Domestic Violence

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail the nature of the services available to prisoners suffering the trauma of abuse, rape or domestic violence.

(AQW 21963/11-15)

Mr Ford: Services available to all prisoners, including those suffering the trauma of abuse, rape or domestic violence are governed by a multi agency resettlement framework that has been developed by the Northern Ireland Prison Service in partnership with the Probation Board for Northern Ireland and other partner agencies.

Pathway 8 of the framework – ‘Supporting offenders who have been abused, raped or who have experienced domestic violence’ aims to scope the extent and prevalence of this issue amongst offenders, assess the needs of those who have been affected and seek to provide a range of supportive interventions. But it does not deliver services in isolation – rather, a range of support services, including access to the 24 hour Domestic Violence Helpline, a Regional Directory of Services for victims of sexual violence and abuse, Lifeline, Victim Support and NEXUS counselling, are available under the joint DOJ/DHSSPS Strategy.

The South Eastern Trust will also provide support on sexually transmitted diseases and mental health support to those who are suffering specific trauma.

Counsel Travel Payments

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice whether counsel, who normally practise outside Northern Ireland, are entitled to payment from public funds for travel and hotel expenses when they travel here to appear in a case; and whether any such payments have been made, and to what extent.

(AQW 21977/11-15)

Mr Ford: In respect of legal aid, counsel wishing to appear before the courts in Northern Ireland must first be called to the Bar here. Once called to the Bar, that barrister would be treated, by the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission (NILSC), as a member of the Bar of Northern Ireland and accordingly the NILSC would not reimburse any travel or hotel expenses.

The NILSC’s case management system does not differentiate between counsel and the jurisdiction in which they normally practice and it is therefore unable to quantify how many cases involved counsel from outside Northern Ireland.

Payments to counsel engaged by the Departmental Solicitor’s Office in respect of Northern Ireland Departments fall within the responsibility of the Finance Minister, Mr Sammy Wilson MLA.

HMP Maghaberry

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice (i) what subversive devices or components have been found within HMP Maghaberry in the last year; (ii) when these devices were found; and (iii) whether any were deemed viable.

(AQW 21980/11-15)

Mr Ford: A suspicious/suspect device was found within Maghaberry Prison on each of the following occasions in the last year: 11 February 2013 and 17 April 2013. None were deemed viable.

Legal Services Commission

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Justice what consideration he has given to the business case prepared by the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission on a new pay strategy for the organisation; and when he will be in a position to make a recommendation on the proposal.

(AQW 22003/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission (NILSC) submitted a Pay Strategy Business Case to the Department of Justice on 22 January 2013 for consideration. At that time a number of queries were raised with the NILSC, some of which have yet to be resolved between the NILSC and my Department.

My officials will continue to work with the NILSC to address the outstanding issues and to ensure that, when completed, any agreed Pay Strategy is passed to DFP for financial approval.

Prison Service Trust Outreach Workers

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Justice what discussions he has had with (i) the Board of Directors of the Prison Service Trust; and (ii) other relevant bodies on the effectiveness and importance of Prison Service Trust outreach workers; and whether any concerns have been raised about these outreach workers.

(AQW 22218/11-15)

Mr Ford: I have not had any discussions with either the Prison Service Trust or other relevant bodies regarding the effectiveness and importance of Prison Service Trust outreach workers. Responsibility for these employees rests with the Board of Directors of the Prison Service Trust and no concerns have been raised with me.

Scanners in Prison Estates

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Justice (i) whether his Department has submitted an application under the Ionizing Radiation Regulations for the use of scanners in the prison estate; (ii) on what date was it submitted; and (iii) whether his Department has received an estimated time for processing the application.

(AQW 22384/11-15)

Mr Ford: I have recently received and agreed the Northern Ireland Prison Service Justification Application for the initial trialling and possible future use of transmission x-ray body scanners.

This application has been submitted for consideration to the Department of Energy and Climate Change on 2 May 2013.

This is a complicated process that has never been undertaken by any Prison Service or Devolved Administration within the United Kingdom; therefore it is not possible to provide a timescale for completion of the process.

Bail Law

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Justice what action he is taking to reform bail law in criminal proceedings.

(AQO 3903/11-15)

Mr Ford: As part of its first Programme of Law Reform the Northern Ireland Law Commission has reviewed the law on bail in criminal proceedings and in the Autumn of last year the Commission presented me with their report and draft Bill. It is my intention to consult on the Commission's proposals with a view to new legislation.

I presented my proposed consultation to the Justice Committee on Thursday of last week which I now intend to publish. Subject to the outcome, new bail legislation would be brought forward early in the next Assembly mandate.

Prison Review

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the implementation of the recommendations of the Prison Review Team.

(AQO 3905/11-15)

Mr Ford: Work is continuing towards the implementation of the recommendations from the Prison Review Team and I am encouraged by the progress that is being made.

Four update reports from the Prison Review Oversight Group have now been provided to the Justice Committee. A copy of each has been deposited in the Assembly Library and published on the Northern Ireland Prison Service website.

The Oversight Group is also preparing its first annual report, to be presented to the Justice Committee on 9 May. Following this it will also be available in the Library and on the Prison Service website.

An event will take place in June to provide an overview of achievements to date and build upon the ongoing engagement with key stakeholders.

Youth Justice Services Directorate

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the functioning of the Youth Justice Services directorate.

(AQO 3906/11-15)

Mr Ford: Youth Justice Services was created following a period of radical restructuring within the Youth Justice Agency (Agency) 18 months ago. The new arrangements are now well established, and the responses received to a stakeholder survey undertaken by the Agency have been positive and encouraging.

Through the implementation of many of the recommendations in the Youth Justice Review, Youth Justice Services has contributed to faster, fairer justice and to making communities safer.

For example, during the last year Parent Support groups have been established in all eight Youth Justice Services operational teams, supporting parents working with their children's troublesome behaviours. I recently attended a Parents Support Group event where I heard first hand accounts from parents about the positive work they are undertaking.

Youth Justice Services is currently working with around 1000 young people and their families across Northern Ireland. It facilitates many of these young people to meet face to face with their victims in order to try and repair the harm that has been caused. Ninety five percent of victims have expressed satisfaction with this process.

The Agency is committed to continuous improvement and is planning to undertake an evaluation of the restructuring in the Autumn.

Prisons: Drugs

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice what steps he proposes to take to tackle the increasing drugs problem in prisons. (AQO 3907/11-15)

Mr Ford: While there is no evidence that the misuse of drugs is on the rise in prisons, I am not complacent about the task faced by NIPS in tackling drugs.

Within prisons the abuse of both illicit and prescription drugs is being challenged by effective searching, testing, education and treatment.

In respect of prescription drugs, the South Eastern Trust recently changed arrangements around the issue of several drugs. Those drugs classed as 'highly tradable' are now only given by 'supervised swallow' in Hydebank and Magilligan. This practice will roll out to Maghaberry shortly.

A new drugs strategy has been drafted by NIPS and the South Eastern Trust. This will give an effective multi-agency approach to the problem of drugs in prisons.

Rural Crime

Mr Milne asked the Minister of Justice to outline what his Department is doing to tackle rural crime. (AQO 3908/11-15)

Mr Ford: Reducing opportunities to commit crime and make rural communities safer is a key strand of the Community Safety Strategy.

Action Plans, including one focused on Business and Rural Crime, have been developed in conjunction with statutory and non-statutory partners to deliver the commitments made in the Community Safety Strategy. Copies of these Action Plans, which have been approved by the Justice Committee, are available on my Department's website.

A key mechanism for ensuring delivery of the strategic actions outlined in the Business and Rural Crime Action Plan is the Business Crime Partnership, which brings together representatives from my Department, the PSNI, the Ulster Farmers' Union, NFU Mutual, the Rural Community Network and private sector business organisations.

A recent example of the benefits of this strategic partnership approach was demonstrated when the Agriculture and Rural Development Minister and I jointly launched the Rural Crimestoppers campaign. This initiative was specifically designed to raise awareness of rural crime and its impact on the rural community, and aims to contribute to a reduction in thefts from farms.

The Business Crime Partnership is also developing a joint initiative aimed at identifying key trends in rural crime and targeting resources to tackle this type of crime. This initiative will be formally launched in the coming weeks.

At a local level, Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs) have developed Action Plans to address local community concerns, which include the development of tailored solutions to address rural crime where appropriate.

Initiatives being delivered in the Mid Ulster area include:

- crime prevention initiatives, such as trailer marking days, CESAR marking and Farm Watch schemes;
- public meetings to raise awareness around the prevention of rural crime;
- provision of home security equipment to older and vulnerable people and victims of rural crime; and
- provision of Good Morning Services by Agewell, which provides reassurance to older and vulnerable residents to reduce the fear of crime.

In addition, my Department is also represented on the Interdepartmental Group on the Rural White Paper Action Plan and provides updates on progress on the delivery of our commitments to ensure that the needs of the rural community are reflected in the Community Safety Strategy Action Plans and in Policing and Community Safety Partnership Action Plans.

Criminal Justice: Female Offenders

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the reasons for the increase in the number of women in custody and under community supervision.

(AQO 3900/11-15)

Mr Ford: There are no obvious reasons to explain the increase. Offending behaviour among women is often linked to drug or alcohol misuse, mental ill-health, abuse or relationship difficulties. Increased confidence in the police and the justice system becoming more effective in securing convictions could also be having an effect.

I expect that the increase is the product of a complex interaction of factors and while I could commission some research into this area, my concern would be that the relatively small numbers involved would make such research inconclusive.

I am committed to working with partners across the Executive and the voluntary and community sector to address the issues associated with offending behaviour among women. I particularly want to build on the success of the Inspire model and, through the refresh of the Women Offenders Strategy, promote actions to prevent and divert women from coming into the justice system.

Community Safety College at Desertcreat

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the Northern Ireland Community Safety College at Desertcreat.

(AQO 3904/11-15)

Mr Ford: I previously informed the Assembly on 8 April that the construction tender cost was £30m higher than budget; and that the Project Board had established a working group which sought measures to deliver cost reductions whilst not affecting the overall operational functionality of the college.

A business case addendum with options based on this work was presented to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Department of Justice, for approval on Friday past. It contains various cost saving measures which do not significantly reduce the functionality of the college.

Whilst it is not yet possible to give a new final cost for the build, I can report that substantial progress has been made in reducing the cost overrun, although it remains likely that the final cost will exceed the original budget.

Should this addendum demonstrate that an integrated college in Desertcreat represents value for money and is affordable, it will be submitted to DFP for approval.

Department for Regional Development

Parking Tickets in Aughnacloy, Fivemiletown, Coalisland and Donaghmore

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 21277/11-15, to provide the same information in respect of Aughnacloy, Fivemiletown, Coalisland and Donaghmore.

(AQW 21613/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): Details of the number of Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) issued in Aughnacloy, Fivemiletown, Coalisland and Donaghmore during the 12 months, to end February 2013, are shown in the table below:

Town	PCNs Issued
Aughnacloy	7
Fivemiletown	58
Coalisland	Nil
Donaghmore	Nil

A20 Newtownards to Portaferry Road

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development whether Roads Service has any plans for further resurfacing and road safety measures on the A20 Newtownards to Portaferry road.

(AQW 21724/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has carried out a number of resurfacing schemes on the A20 Newtownards to Portaferry Road, in the past few years and is committed to carrying out further resurfacing on a number of sections of the road.

However, as the budget allocations for structural maintenance for 2013/14 have not yet been finalised, I am unable to provide the Member with a definite timescale for when any works might be programmed.

Roads Service has completed a number of Road Safety schemes on this route, the most recent being the completion of a junction improvement scheme at Rowreagh Road/ Gransha Road, on the main A20, outside Kircubbin in 2011. A further improvement scheme has been prioritised within the Minor Improvements programme for the Ards Council Area, and a sightline improvement scheme is proposed for Rowreagh Road/Rubane Road junction, along the A20 route. This Road Safety scheme is programmed to commence during this 2013/14 financial year, subject to the successful acquisition of the necessary lands.

I can advise the Member that my officials will continue to monitor and inspect this route, in conjunction with the PSNI Road Policing Unit, and implement additional traffic management measures to promote Roads Safety, where it would be appropriate to do so.

If the Member has specific concerns regarding individual locations, along this 19 mile route, he should contact officials at Roads Service Southern Division at Rathkeltair House, Downpatrick.

Roads: Yellow Lines

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the criteria for deciding whether and where yellow lines are located close to a junction.

(AQW 21760/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Member may be aware it is an offence to park within 15 metres of any junction whether the corner is marked with double yellow lines or not. Double yellow line road markings are installed at corners, to emphasise the restriction, where it is evident there are traffic progression or road safety issues.

My Department generally introduces waiting restrictions for traffic progression or road safety reasons. Double yellow lines are introduced where the restriction is to apply at all times and single yellow lines are used, when the restriction is to cover a shorter time period.

These restrictions may be introduced where parking has caused an obstruction to other traffic, impeding traffic progression, which manifests itself in the form of regular queues, tailbacks, or turning movement difficulties, or it may be necessary to maximise the full width of the carriageway for traffic capacity reasons. Waiting restrictions may also be introduced where there is a measurable road safety issue caused by parked vehicles, this could be at junctions, brows of hills, or locations with restricted forward sight distances.

Residents' Parking Schemes

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the plans for residents' parking schemes.

(AQW 21770/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department currently has a number of Residents' Parking Schemes at various stages of development. Roads Service is continuing to progress these schemes and the legislation required, as quickly as possible, with schemes likely to be delivered early 2014. Among the first schemes to be delivered will be schemes at the Bogside, Londonderry and at Clarke Court and Massereene Street in Antrim.

A consultation exercise was carried out in the Lower Malone area in November 2012, which received sufficient level of community support to allow Roads Service officials to begin preparations to proceed to the more formal legislative stage, which they anticipate will take place later this year. Discussions with residents and business associations in the Stranmillis area continue with the aim of implementing a scheme. Officials are also working with residents and local representatives in the Rugby Road/College Park Avenue area and the Donegall Pass and Sandy Row areas of Belfast. Officials still have to agree details of local consultation but hope to be in a position, to consult with each of the communities later this year.

A5 Road Scheme

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Regional Development whether his Department intends to reallocate the resources designated for the A5 road scheme to the A6 project.

(AQW 21775/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has received funding for the A5 dual carriageway project as a result of an Executive decision.

However, I do recognise it is important that other schemes, in a position to be progressed ahead of the A5, are given full consideration by the Executive. Therefore, my officials are continuing to engage with their counterparts in the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) to bring a paper forward to the Executive, detailing other options, such as moving forward with procurement on other possible schemes.

In the meantime, Roads Service is continuing to develop the A6 schemes to a procurement ready position, should additional funding become available.

A5 Road Project

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the scope of Mouchel's involvement in the A5 road project.

(AQW 21782/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service commissioned Mouchel in 2007, under a Consultancy Framework Contract, to advise on the following elements of work relating to the A5 project:

- **Business Case and Corridor Constraints Assessment Phase** – this critical phase defined the scheme delivery criteria;
- **Health and Safety** – to ensure that all Health and Safety requirements for the scheme are executed in accordance with relevant legislation;
- **Public Consultation Phase** – to obtain feedback from key stakeholders at various stages to inform the design;
- **Options Development Phase** – to examine the constraints and scheme delivery criteria to develop a route corridor options report;
- **Selection of Preferred Route Phase** – to refine the route corridor options report to deliver a 'Preferred Route';
- **Procurement Phase** – to prepare scheme-specific tender documentation for the procurement of the Integrated Delivery Teams (IDTs);
- **Preliminary Design and Draft Orders** – to develop a 'specimen design' and ensure that all the appropriate statutory requirements are followed to allow the implementation of the scheme;
- **Public Inquiry Phase** – to take the proposed scheme through the Public Inquiry process;
- **Detailed Design Phase** – to ensure the delivery of a robust design for implementation; and
- **Construction Phase** – this phase, which has not been awarded, would relate to the construction of the project.

A5 Road Project

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Regional Development, in relation to the proposed A5 road project, to detail (i) the organisation responsible for carrying out an appropriate assessment of the Rivers Foyle and Finn Special Areas of Conservation under the Habitats Directive; and (ii) what action he intends to take against this organisation for failing in its responsibility.

(AQW 21802/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As I advised the Member in my answer to his previous Assembly Question, AQW 21541/11-15, my Department is responsible for carrying out an appropriate assessment under the Habitats Directive.

As with any such project the issues will be the subject of a thorough review.

Adopted Roads

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the roads that have been adopted; broken down by District Council area, in the last two years.

(AQW 21831/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would advise the Member that a list of the roads that have been adopted in the last two years is available in the Assembly Library.

Door-2-Door Transport

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Regional Development whether there are adequate procedures in place to ensure that the recent changes to the delivery of the Door-2-Door Transport scheme will result in a service that is delivered to an equal or better standard than the previous scheme in rural areas; and what processes are in place monitor the short and long term outcomes.

(AQW 21847/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Disability Action have operational and governance responsibility for the interim service which commenced on 01 April 2013. They are satisfied that their scheme will provide members who use it across all areas with a better standard of overall service. My Department will continue to ensure that the grant funding given to Disability Action to provide this interim service is used for the purposes it is intended and in accordance with the terms and conditions of grant as set out in our letter of offer to Disability Action. The previous Door-2-Door service contract operated only in urban areas.

Roads Service: Snow Removal

Mr Ó hOisín asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the (i) number; and (ii) type of machinery used to remove snow in the Northern Division of the Roads Service.

(AQW 21848/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has the following snow clearance machinery assigned to its Northern Division:

- 5 snow blowers;
- 64 lorry mounted snow ploughs; and
- 35 tractor mounted snow ploughs.

During periods of increased demand, additional snow clearance machinery may be redeployed from other areas where they are not required and Divisions may call upon additional resources from external contractors. During the recent snow clearance operations, Northern Division made use of the following external items of plant:

- 64 100hp+ tractors with ploughs;
- 54 tracked excavators (from 3 to 21tonne);
- 19 rubber tyred excavators;
- 15 telescopic handlers;
- 13 quarry loading shovels;
- 6 lorries with grabs;
- 2 landrovers (4wd) to tow fuel bowzers;
- 2 unimogs (4wd) one to tow fuel bowser; and
- 3 fuel bowzers.

Disability Action Transport Scheme

Mr Clarke asked the Minister for Regional Development how the interim Disability Action Transport Scheme will ensure a better service than the Door-2-Door Transport scheme.

(AQW 21880/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Disability Action aims to ensure that the interim service will provide a better service than the previous Door-2-Door scheme by offering a high standard of customer care, by using accessible vehicles where requested, by working with service delivery partners in the operational areas to ensure a prompt efficient service and by using their experience in providing transport services for disabled people to ensure that the highest standards of customer safety are consistently met.

Parking Meters and Penalty Charge Notices

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail for the most recent available financial year (i) how much money has been raised through (a) Penalty Charge Notices; and (b) parking meters; (ii) how much money was paid to private firms to manage the services; (iii) the cost to his Department to administer the system; (iv) the total income against total expenditure; and (v) how much of the money raised was spent.

(AQW 21881/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am not able to provide the Member with details of income received from Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) and parking meters during the financial year 2012/13, as these are still being finalised and cannot be released until the Department's accounts are laid before the Assembly. However, details for the 2011/12 financial year are shown in the table below:

	Income Received
Penalty Charge Notices	£4.63million
Off Street and On Street parking	£11.36million

My Department paid private firms £10.22million for the management and processing of parking enforcement and car park management during the same period, whilst the cost to my Department of administering the system was just over £2million

Total income for the 2011/12 financial year was almost £16million, against total costs of just over £23million. These costs included contract costs, direct administration costs, rent, rates, maintenance and accountancy costs, including depreciation and interest on capital employed.

All revenue generated from car parking charges, along with income from parking penalty charge notices, is used to supplement the overall financing of Roads Service by Central Government. I would point out that the cost of managing our off-street car parks and enforcing the on-street parking restrictions exceeds the total revenue received.

Public Grit Boxes

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of public grit boxes, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 21920/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of the number of salt bins provided by my Department's Roads Service, in each winter since 2011, are provided in the table below:

Year	Number of Salt Bins provided
2011	4,281
2012	4,759
2013	4,763

Public Grit Boxes

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the annual maintenance cost of public grit boxes, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 21921/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I assume the Member's question relates to public salt bins. Details of the average annual cost of maintaining these bins, in each of the last three years since 2011, are provided in the table below:

Year	Annual Maintenance Cost of Salt Bins
2011	£315,000
2012	£350,000
2013	£350,000

These figures are based on average replenishment rates.

Public Grit Boxes

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the location of public grit boxes in (i) North Down; and (ii) Ards Borough Council areas.

(AQW 21922/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Firstly for the purposes of clarification, I would advise the Member that my Department provides salt bins and grit piles, but not grit boxes.

Roads Service currently provides 183 salt bins within the North Down Borough Council area and 148 within the Ards Borough Council area. The locations are as follows:

Holywood

- Cultra Slip Road Belfast bound to Folk Museum
- East Link S/L 2
- West Link S/L 8
- Abbey Ring S/L 34
- Abbey Ring S/L 12
- Abbots Wood near junction Demesne Road
- Strathearn Court at S/L No. 1
- Cedar Grove opposite S/L No.4
- Firmount Crescent @ No.15
- Firmount Crescent @ No.81
- The Green at S/L No.1
- Inver Park opposite S/L No.4
- Demense Park at No.15 at wall
- Demense Avenue at No.15
- Spencer Street opp No.55 @ jct with Hillview Place
- Elizabeth Road opp S/L No.3
- Croft Park @ S/L 9
- Ardmore Road at S/L No.6
- Ardmore Heights opposite No.9 at S/L No.6
- Ardmore Road No.39 (past No. 39) near radius
- Glenview Road No.7
- Glenview Avenue opposite S/L No.3
- Ardmore Park at No.3
- Brook Street at Clinic
- Windsor Avenue at No.12
- Victoria Road at end of grass verge
- The Esplanade, RHS to rear of bridge
- Tudor Oaks No 3 at wall
- Old Quay Court No.4
- Kintyre Avenue at S/L No.5
- Princess Gardens at S/L No.16
- Princess Park opposite No.9 on corner
- Princess Gardens jct of Lochinver Ave opp 109 @ green box
- Torgrange at No.10 near S/L
- Invergourie Road at Stathleven Park name plate
- Entrance to The Coaches, Brown's Brae
- The Spires at S/L No 3
- Woodcroft Park outside No 3
- Seafront Road jct with Circular Rd @ S/L No.6
- Station Road, Craigavad No.4
- Carlston Avenue No.1/Whinney Hill
- Old Seahill Road jct Seahill Drive at white wall
- Martello Park No.10
- Martello Park No 28
- Rhanbuoy Park S/L10
- Larch Hill No.1 (half way up hill)
- Larch Hill Ave No.5 junction with Larch Hill Drive
- Ballygrainey Road No.3 (at wall near A2)
- Dalchoolin at No 19
- Cultra Avenue opposite No.41
- Tarawood at S/L No.1
- Carney Hill near junction A2

Helen's Bay

- Quarry Court past S/L No.3
- Grey Point at S/L No.3

Crawfordsburn

- Ballymullen Road opposite No.40
- Ballymullen Road at No.6
- Meadow Way (junction near Ballymullen Road)
- Burnside Park at No.2 (at wall/Meadow Way)
- Meadow Park North No 11 at mini pillar
- Carolsteen Park at No.1A junction Bridge Road

Bangor

- Killaire Avenue opposite S/L No.8 (at fence)
- Ailsa Park at S/L No.3
- Ravelstone Avenue junction Killaire Park (at wall)
- Killaire Avenue at No 5
- Station Rd opposite S/L No.15 (on grass) below No.68 on waste ground
- Station View at S/L No.1
- Wandsworth Park junction Wandsworth Road
- Lyndhurst Avenue opposite No.2
- Sharman Rise opp no.10
- Kilieen Avenue near S/L No.9
- Jubilee Drive near S/L No.15
- Viceroy's Wood at entrance 1/2 way up hill
- Springhill Heights No.10
- Farm Grove junction Springhill Avenue
- Bryansford Meadow opp S/L No.3
- Ballyquinton Gardens side of No.18 at BT pole
- Kilclief Gardens at S/L No.474
- Craigboy Mews at telegraph pole
- Balligan Gardens at S/L No.403
- Birch Park junction Birch Drive
- Clandeboye Way at S/L No.1
- Monea Way at S/L No.11 at wall
- Rostrevor Way at No.12
- Clandeboye Way near SL No 10
- Rostrevor Drive opposite name plate
- Enterprise Road opp S/L No.2
- Moyne Road, Conlig, junction Vermont Avenue at S/L No.5
- Bangor Road, Conlig, at top of Green Road
- Meadowvale opposite No.15
- Meadowvale Park at S/L No.2
- Beechfield junction Main Street, Conlig
- Beechfield Avenue @ S/L No.18
- Tower Road/Main Street, Conlig
- Forrest Hill/Main Street, Conlig
- Forrest Hill, Conlig at S/L 10 at side of No. 74
- Westmorland Crescent side of No.2 (on grass)
- Westmorland Crescent at S/L No.8
- Harehills Drive junction Westmorland Crescent
- Silverstream Crescent at No.61 (in laneway)
- Silverstream Road at S/L 9
- Silverstream Drive at No.18 (at wall)
- Silverstream Avenue at No 31
- Manor Park/Manor Avenue
- Hillcrest Walk outside No 9
- Bangor Police Station/Castle Park Avenue
- King Street at sign no. 4
- Tennyson Avenue at S/L No.1
- Princetown Road at Junction of Seacourt Lane
- Lorelei opp S/L 1 @ garage
- Ranfurly Avenue S/L 15
- Princetown Road opp S/L 9
- Knockmore Park S/L 12
- Manse Road @ Ent to No.12
- Railwayview Street No.54
- Windsor Gardens at No.2-4
- Rugby Avenue at no.44
- Donard Avenue No.44 (upper side of BT pole)
- Donard Avenue No.25
- Maryville Park opposite No.22
- Bryansglen Park @ s/l 31
- Bryansglen West No.7 (lower side of S/L)
- Bryansglen Avenue No.21
- Grange Avenue No.5
- Bryansburn Gardens @ No.10 in corner
- Downshire Road upper side of Maxwell Road at S/L No.14
- Downshire Road lower side of Maxwell Road at S/L 15
- Clelland Park South at No.12
- Alexandra Gardens SL 6
- Church Avenue junction Church Drive at wall
- Abbey Park No.49/51
- Balloo Crescent opp Howells
- Ballyree Gardens opp No 9 near steps
- Willowbrook Rise at side of No 1 @ wall
- Willowbrook Park @ No.62
- Cranley Road opposite No.4
- Cranley Grove S/L No. 4
- Cranley Grove SL No 9
- Cranley Hill No.2
- Cranley Ave opp S/L No.1
- Irvine Park outside No 38
- Hanover Chase at wide footpath beside No 7 Hanover Court
- Regency Square @ s/l 2
- Beaumont Drive outside No.26
- Ashbury Avenue @ s/l 29

- Ravenswood opp No 10
- Kinwood Road @ No.2 Jct with Albany Road
- Marlo Cres @ S/L No.2
- Fernbank Park opp S/L 3
- Knightsbridge Court at entrance to NIE substation
- Fairfield Road at wall of No.60
- Fairfield Road opposite No.103 on verge
- Dellmont Drive at S/L 4 outside No 10
- Sunningdale Park No.7
- Glenanne Park opp Sunningdale Court between hedges
- Stanley Road opposite No.9
- Seaforth Road opposite S/L No.3
- Grove Park junction Bellevue
- Baylands Fourth Avenue at No.4
- Beverly Hills junction Beverly Drive at white wall
- Beverly Gardens junction Beverly Drive opposite

Groomsport

- The Hill opp No.5
- The Brae junction Ard-Na-Ree
- Springwell Drive beside S/L No.3
- Springwell Drive juncton The Brae opposite No.7 P/C 4643
- Springwell Crescent No.58 at BT pole
- Springwell Crescent opposite S/L 4 at rose bed
- The Brae (at wall opposite Hillfoot)
- Glenganagh Park at S/L 3
- North West Ards
- Marcella Pk, Ho No 17
- Marcella Pk, Old B'fast Rd Jct (10M Below SI 16)
- Aldergrange Avenue, S/L 8
- Glenford Road, No 47
- Old B'fast Rd, On Verge At Ho No 29
- Westmount Pk, 20M From Bradshaw Brae
- Pascali Dr, Ho No 17
- Valencia Way Sth, Jct Saratoga Ave (At Nameplate)
- Valencia Way Nrth, At House No 1 (At Nameplate)
- Galla Way, Corner Above SI No.2
- Glenmount Dr, Footway 23/30
- Glenmount Pk, 9-11 Waste Ground
- Saratoga Ave, C'burn Jct (At Nameplate)
- Mountain Road, SI 4
- Glenview Park, Mountain Rd Jct (At Stone Wall)
- Whiteways, Mountain Rd Jct (Beside Post Box)
- Hillside, Ho No 11 On Grass Verge
- Falcon Heights, At Top At No 16
- Falcon Ave, House No 43
- Falcon Ave, Corner House 17/19
- Falcon Pk, Wide F'way Near SI No 4
- Abbey Mews, Side Of No 1 At Movilla Rd
- Penryhn Pk, Gable No 64 Brentwood Way
- Chesterbrook Cres, Jct Penryhn Pk (At Nameplate)
- Chesterbrook Cres, Opp No 11 (On Island)

No.34

- Conniston Drive beside S/L No.2
 - Ambleside Road opp S/L at No.10
 - Chippendale Vale junction Chippendale Park
 - Ardmillan Park S/L 4
 - Thornleigh Gardens S/L 6
 - Windmill Lane at S/L No.1
 - Portview/Ballymacconnell Road
 - Towerview at S/L No.4
 - Ivyhill Crescent at S/L No. 2
 - Ballymacormick Park at name plate
 - Ballymacormick Cres at S/L1
 - Towerview Crescent opposite No.101 @ S/L No.20
 - Towerview Crescent at side wall of No 125
 - Towerview Avenue outside No 14
 - Sherwood Road opp No.22 at green box
-
- Abbeydale Drive, Abbeydale Ave Jct
 - Abbeydale Pk, Opp Ho No 3
 - Abbeydale Pk, Opp Ho No 59 At Wall
 - Old Forge Crescent, No 2
 - Stratheden Heights, Ho No 1
 - Heron Pk, SI No.1
 - Thornleigh Ave, Stratheden Hts Jct Opp No 2
 - Edenvale Crescent, No 1 On Grass Mandaville Ave
 - Mandeville Avenue, No 54
 - Cooleen Ave, SI 4
 - Cloverhill Pk, House No 6
 - Parkland Cres, Ingledene Park Jct (Opp Nameplate)
 - Ballyharry Pk, SI 4
 - Wyndell Heights, SI No 2 (At Fence)
 - Newtown Cres, House 1
 - Cronstown Road, Jct With D'dee Road
 - Regency Gardens, On F'way Opp SI No.3
 - Tara Crescent, No 16 At Fence
 - Boretree Island Park, No 1
 - Rosevale Ave, SI No 2 (At Fence)
 - Rosevale Ave, SI No 17 (Ho No 50)
 - Beverley Walk, No 31
 - Beverley Heights, Lhs Post Box At End Of F/Way
 - Beverley Ave, Beverly Hts Jct (Opp SI No.7)
 - Orchard Lane, SI 3
 - Victoria Cresc, House No 1A
 - Belverdere Rd, Bangor Rd Jct (At Stone Wall)
 - Bladon Ave, No 4
 - Alpine Road, Belverdere Rd Jct (At Plastered Wall)
 - Dorrondale Rd, Belverdere Rd Jct (At Nameplate)
 - Belverdere Rd, L'derry Rd Jct (At Nameplate)
 - Hillcrest Ave, SI 3
 - Ballyrogan Rd, B'fast Rd Jct At Giveway Sign
 - Belair Pk, SI4

- Belair Ave, Opp Ho No 2 On Grass Verge
- Belair Ave, Opp SI No. 6 At Tp Pole
- Old B'barnes Rd, New Ballybarnes Road
- Rosepark, Edith Helen Rd Jct (Opp Nameplate)
- Greenwell Street , S/L2
- East Street , S/L 10
- East Street , Opp Rhs S/L23 On Grss
- Queens Square, Lhs Entrance To Community House
- The Oaks , No 7
- The Oaks, No 12
- The Oaks , No 46
- Cranmore Ave, Bank At Bottom Of Hill
- Slieve Bearnagh Pk, Jct Slievicroob Ave
- Tudor Abbey, No 26
- Strangford Hts, Old Movilla Rd Jct (10M Below SI)
- Strangford Hts, S/L 2
- Strangford Hts, Slievicroob Ave Jct (Opp Ho No 2)
- Binnon Court, No 8
- Ringhaddy Gardens, No 2
- Morston Pk, No 9
- Eastmount , Jct Rockland Cresc (At Nameplate)
- Meadow Pk/Fairfield Crt, Lay-By At SI No.1
- South West Ards & Comber
- Moorfield Gardens, Grass Lhs S/L2 At No 5
- Dermott Crescent, House No 17
- Dermott Road, House No 61
- Dermott Road, Opp Ho No 27
- Copeland Crescent, Copeland Avenue
- Copeland Crescent, Grass At S/L 2
- Castlehill Crescent, No 4
- Castlehill Way, SI No 1
- Philip Way, Jun Coronation Cres
- Graffan Gardens, No 20
- Longlands Road, Opp No 41
- Linley Drive, Opp No 54 On Grass Verge
- Car Park Rd (Side Of Sup Value), Opp Mini Pillar No C4020
- Lime Grove, No 3
- Londonderry Ave, Between Ho Nos 26&28
- Londonderry Park, Grass Verge - Against Tp
- Londonderry Hill, Ho No 1
- Glenside, Jun Londonderry Pk
- Glenariff Drive, No 25
- Glenariff Drive, Ho No 3
- Heathermount Park, SI No 1
- Heathermount Park, Upp Jct Of Heathermount Cresc
- Heathermount Cresc, SI No 1
- Heathermount Cresc, SI No 3
- Heathermount Cresc, SI No 6(Ho No 12)
- Heathermount Court, Ho No 13
- Dalton Rise, Dalton Cresc Jct (At Bt Pole)
- Dalton Rise, Dalton Glen Jct (Beside SI No 4)
- Ballystockart Road, Grass Verge Opp Kathleen Drive
- Riverside (Off Castle Lane), SI 21 Near Brookview Jct
- Castlodge Avenue, Opp SI No 1
- Enler Park, Ho No 24
- Ardarawood, Opp No10 On F/Way At Grass
- Andara Grove, Opp No. 4 Wall At Nie Sub Stat
- High Street Grove, Opp No 24 At Hedge
- High Street Court, SI 8 At End Of Cul De Sac
- Parkway, Opp S/L2
- Hillside Park (Off High St), Opp SI No 3
- De Wind Drive, Jun Cherryvalley Drive
- De Wind Drive, SI No 6 (Beside Steps On Main F'way)
- De Wind Drive, SI No 12
- Laburnum Grove, Opp SI No 3
- Carnesure Park (Off A22), SI No 6
- Carnesure Manor, Beside To No. N6
- Craigarusky Road, Opp Ho No 10 - Beside Steps
- Ganaway Drive, SI1 (Off Whiterock Bay)
- Inisharoan, No 3 (Lhs Jun Insishanier)
- Main Street, Rhs Ent To Ardview Park.
- Churchill Park, No 9
- Killinchy Village, Church Hill/Church Hill Pk Jct
- Whiterock Road, Under Chevron Sign - On Bend
- Oakdale, No 32
- Wheatfield, Side No 6
- Ardmore Grange, No 8
- Brae Park B'gowan, Jun The Brae
- Churchill Park, Gable No 2
- The Brae B'gowan, Beside SI 8
- The Hamptons, Lhs At Entrance On Belfast Rd
- Prospect Hill, At Entrance
- Prospect Court, Opp Ho No 2 (Off Prospect Rd)
- Carsons Road, 15M R/H/S Carsons Mews
- Old Mill Race, Opp S/L2
- Carnesure Road, Old B'gowan Rd Jct (At SI No 1)
- Carnesure Road, 15M R/H/S Carsons Mews
- Cuttles Road, Old B'gowan Rd Jct (At SI No 1)
- Cuttles Road, SI 7 Opp Jct Cuttles Ridge

Traffic Management: Park Avenue and Bishop Street, Derry

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister for Regional Development whether there are any plans to reactivate proposals for traffic management systems in the Park Avenue and Bishop Street areas of Derry city.
(AQW 21929/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The traffic management scheme, incorporating a one way system for the Bishop Street area, was designed to allow Councillor Patricia Logue and Catherine Pollock, of the TRIAX community group, the opportunity to carry out a consultation exercise with residents and businesses in the area, to gauge support, or otherwise, for the scheme.

This was to allow the Department to determine the merits of initiating the lengthy legislative process required to implement the scheme. Unfortunately, a number of businesses and residents submitted objections to the proposals and consequently my officials are not proposing to develop this scheme any further.

In addition, a traffic management scheme was designed for Park Avenue, to facilitate a consultation exercise, again to gauge support, or otherwise, for the scheme prior to commencement of the statutory processes. Officials have requested further information on the content of the consultation. Once officials have reviewed this information, a decision will be taken on the best way forward.

My Department has received representation from a business owner in Park Avenue indicating he would not be in support of the proposed scheme.

A5 and A6 Roads: Vehicle Numbers

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development what are the (i) maximum; (ii) average; and (iii) minimum number of vehicles per day on the (a) A5 between Aughnacloy and Londonderry; and (b) A6 between Dungiven and Londonderry. (AQW 21941/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department collects data from automatic traffic counting sites located throughout Northern Ireland. Details of the Annual Average Daily Traffic flow information and the minimum and maximum values from the weekly volume reports, recorded at various locations on the A5 and A6, are provided in the table below:

Route	CP No.	Location	Direction	Min.	Avg.	Max.
A5	390	Londonderry – Strabane, at New Buildings	All Directions	8,202	11,459	12,916
A5	391	Victoria Road, Londonderry, at Bolies	All Directions	13,441	17,368	19,336
A5	608	Ballygawley – Aughnacloy (South of A4 Junction)	All Directions	5,880	6,503	7,689
A5	610	Omagh – Ballygawley, South of B122 (past junction of U1306)	All Directions	9,964	11,863	13,630
A5	623	Sion Mills – Strabane, at Ballyfatten	All Directions	10,740	13,548	15,731
A5	626	Omagh – Newtownstewart, at Conneywarren	All Directions	9,188	12,825	15,063
A5	644	Omagh Throughpass (West of Dublin Road at Academy)	All Directions	15,843	22,149	26,224
A5	645	Omagh By-Pass, at footbridge	All Directions	14,894	21,172	24,145
A5	648	Strabane By-Pass (Barnhill Road West of Derry Road)	All Directions	10,112	13,009	15,256
A5	649	Omagh By-Pass, at Gortrush	All Directions	11,075	17,108	19,961
A5	652	Aughnacloy – Monaghan (North of River Blackwater)	All Directions	6,392	6,988	8,361
A5	653	Ballygawley - Omagh (North of Ballygawley Roundabout)	All Directions	9,760	11,700	14,095
A5	657	Newtownstewart By-Pass (West of Plumbridge Road, opposite lay-by)	All Directions	7,862	9,473	11,158
A5	659	Strabane By-pass Stage 2	All Directions	11,863	15,605	18,260
A5	660	Omagh – Ballygawley, South of Crevenagh Road Roundabout	All Directions	11,996	15,442	18,271
A5	663	Victoria Road, Strabane, Co. Tyrone	All Directions	8,243	11,127	12,746
A5	675	Tullyvar Road, Ballygawley	All Directions	5,961	7,099	8,694
A6	306	Dungiven - Londonderry, East of B74	All Directions	11,497	14,524	16,869
A6	360	Dungiven Road, Londonderry, at Drumahoe East	All Directions	10,235	13,222	15,344
A6	362	Dungiven Road, Londonderry, at Altnagelvin Roundabout	All Directions	19,688	27,571	31,203

Route	CP No.	Location	Direction	Min.	Avg.	Max.
A6	363	Dungiven Road, Londonderry, at Rosstown Roundabout	All Directions	17,279	24,900	28,669
A6	366	Claudy, Dungiven side of A6/B74 junction	All Directions	7,282	9,449	11,035

Traffic Congestion

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development, given the increased traffic congestion which is created at the starting and finishing times of Primary Schools during term time, whether any discussions have taken place between his Department and the Department of Education regarding a consultation exercise around the effects of changing the times a school day starts and ends.

(AQW 21942/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can advise that no discussions have taken place between my Department and the Department of Education, regarding a consultation exercise on the effects of changing school starting and finishing times.

I consider this would be a matter for either the Department of Education or the Department of the Environment, from a road safety perspective, to initiate.

Parking Tickets

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of parking tickets issued in each constituency, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 21968/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service does not maintain an analysis of Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) issued on a constituency basis.

Water Service Premises at Ballykeel, Ballymena

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development why the flagpole was removed during renovations at the Water Service premises at Ballykeel, Ballymena; and why it has not been replaced.

(AQW 21979/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that during construction work in 2012 to refurbish its Ballykeel premises, the flag pole was damaged and subsequently removed.

Since it is NIW's policy that no flags should be flown from any of its buildings at any time, there was no requirement for the flag pole to be replaced at this site.

Roads: Strategic Development in Carrickfergus

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans there are for strategic development in Carrickfergus under the 2015 plan, in particular the Marshallstown Road.

(AQW 21981/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The strategic road improvement scheme at A2 Shore Road, Greenisland commenced in March 2013 and is expected to be completed by the summer of 2015.

As you are no doubt aware, there are no further strategic road improvement scheme proposals in Carrickfergus, proposed under the Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015 (BMAP). However, the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan (BMTP) contains a number of proposals to manage traffic and to reduce the impact of traffic on the non-strategic network.

A number of non-strategic schemes, linked to committed developments and major new developments sites, as identified by the draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015 (BMAP), were included in the BMTP. In addition, proposals for the Carrickfergus Spine Road, which includes Victoria Road and Sloefield Road schemes, were retained from the Carrickfergus Area Plan 2001 and included in BMAP, which was the subject of an Area Plan Inquiry in 2007.

The Spine Road link is considered to be fundamental to the future development of Carrickfergus and will serve as an important distributor road for the town, while facilitating the ongoing development of land in the area. However, it should be noted the scheme is developer-led and is not included within the Department's current programme for delivery.

BMTP and BMAP both advise that developers will be responsible for funding the Spine Road scheme either in full, or in substantial part. Any contribution from my Department towards the scheme will be subject to detailed economic appraisal, the availability of funding and its inclusion within the major works programme.

Lamp Posts and Street Furniture

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Regional Development who has responsibility for the removal of items that have been erected on lamp posts and other street furniture without prior permission.

(AQW 22012/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I do not condone or support the unauthorised use of my Department's lamp posts, street furniture or other property, for any purpose. The two recurring issues facing my officials relate to flags and unauthorised advertising.

The removal of flags or emblems is a highly sensitive issue, due to the political, societal and potential public order issues associated with flag flying in Northern Ireland. To deal with flags, Roads Service has signed up to the Joint Protocol on the Display of Flags in Public Areas. This multi-agency protocol recognises that widespread community support is required for the approach to be most effective.

My Department is generally not perceived to be the lead agency under the current Protocol. In most cases, other parties such as the PSNI, OFMDFM, NIHE, or DSD are better placed to assume the lead role in arranging for the removal of flags and emblems through their contacts with community groups, local elected representatives and other relevant contacts.

Under the protocol, my officials, when called upon by the lead Agency, will provide the access equipment and resources to remove unwanted flags once agreement has been reached that they should be taken down but if the community cannot reach them easily.

Experience has shown that removing flags in the absence of widespread support simply worsens the situation, with even more flags being displayed. My Department must also take account of the risks to workers in removing flags where agreement has not been reached.

In accordance with its policy in relation to unauthorised advertising, I can confirm that, where advertising is erected illegally on its property, my officials take action to try to remove these items under Articles 87 & 21 respectively of the Roads (NI) Order 1993, and may subsequently seek to recover its costs for doing so.

Rapid Transit Proposals

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the Rapid Transit proposals.

(AQW 22092/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department completed an Outline Business Case for Belfast Rapid Transit in May 2012. The recommendations of the Outline Business Case were as follows:

- The introduction of a high quality, bus-based rapid transit system operating on the following routes:
 - CITI Route - from Queen Elizabeth Bridge along Queen's Quay and Queen's Road to Titanic Quarter and returning to the city centre via Queen's Road, Queen's Quay, Station Street, Bridge End and Queen's Bridge;
 - EWAY route from the city centre along Albertbridge Road and Upper Newtownards Road and terminating at a park and ride site in Dundonald; and
 - WWAY route from the city centre along Divis Street, Falls Road, Andersonstown Road, Stewartstown Road and terminating at a park and ride site near Dairy Farm or McKinsty Road Roundabout.
- The delivery of the majority of the design and infrastructure works for Belfast Rapid Transit through the existing expertise within the Department's Roads Service.
- The award of the contract to operate Belfast Rapid Transit to Translink, subject to clarification on performance and contractual issues.

The Outline Business Case received Department of Finance and Personnel approval in August 2012. Following my approval of the recommendations, the Committee for Regional Development were briefed on the findings and recommendations of the Outline Business Case in September 2012 and expressed their continued support for the Belfast Rapid Transit project.

I subsequently presented a paper to the Executive in November 2012 and they supported progression to the detailed design and implementation of the pilot Belfast Rapid Transit system based on the Recommended Option derived from the Outline Business Case.

My Department is currently taking forward the detailed design of the pilot Belfast Rapid Transit system which will link East Belfast, West Belfast and the Titanic Quarter with and through the city centre. It is anticipated that the initial implementation works will commence in 2014, subject to the completion of the necessary statutory processes. I should point out that these works, which will include the provision of new Park & Ride facilities and work to the roads on which Belfast Rapid Transit will operate, will be of benefit to existing public transport services in advance of the Belfast Rapid Transit system becoming operational.

The Belfast Rapid Transit route in the city centre is being facilitated by the Department's Belfast on the Move Transport Masterplan which is currently being implemented.

The pilot Belfast Rapid Transit network is scheduled to come into operation in 2017, subject to the availability of funding in the next budget period and the successful completion of the statutory processes.

Reservoirs

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Regional Development which reservoirs are no longer used by Northern Ireland Water. (AQW 22149/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that 22 of its reservoirs are no longer in use as a source for the public water supply. The reservoirs and their locations are as set out in the table below.

Reservoir	Location
Lough Cowey	Portaferry
Quoile Upper	Broughshane
Quoile Lower	Broughshane
Craigahullier	Portrush
Portavo	Donaghadee
Ballyversall	Coleraine
Boomers	Lisburn
Ballydoolagh	Enniskillen
Stoneyford	Lisburn
Crieghtons Green	Craigantlet
Ballysallagh Upper	Craigantlet
Ballysallagh Lower	Craigantlet
Conlig Upper	Conlig
Conlig Lower	Conlig
Church Road	Holywood
Knockbracken	Carryduff
Dunalis	Coleraine
Killea	Londonderry
Leathemstown	Dundrod
Cappagh	Dungannon
Altmore	Pomeroy
Lough Money	Downpatrick

Gully-cleaning and Patching in the Derry City Area

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the reasons for the lack of gully-cleaning and patching in the Derry City area.

(AQW 22315/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department maintains 31,804 gullies in the Derry City Council area and endeavours to clean the majority of these gullies twice in each calendar year. During the period up to December 2012, over 36,600 cleaning operations were carried out, indicating that each gully was cleaned at least once.

Resources deployed to clean gully gullies are not fixed and staff can be redeployed to deal with emergencies and/or to address other work priorities. Gully cleaning vehicles are a key asset in dealing with flooding incidents, which regrettably have become more frequent in recent years.

Patching work is primarily undertaken to repair defects identified during routine safety inspections, which are carried out at regular intervals by Roads Service inspectors. These defects are categorised and prioritised in accordance with the "Roads Maintenance Standards for Safety", on the basis to the risk they may present to the travelling public. Consequently, each priority category of defect has a corresponding target repair time, with the most serious defects treated within much shorter timescales.

It should be noted that structural maintenance in the form of carriageway and footway resurfacing is also important. During the past financial year, Roads Service in Londonderry resurfaced 34.57 lane kilometres of road and 7.15 lane kilometres of footway, at a cost of £2.6 million and £230,000 respectively.

On the basis of this information, I do not consider there to be a lack of gully cleaning and patching in Londonderry.

Car Sharing

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline how his Department encourages car sharing.
(AQO 3914/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department encourages car sharing as a sustainable alternative to single car use through its Travelwise initiative and through the provision of Park & Share car parks by Roads Service.

Travelwise NI uses a number of promotional tools:

- the issue of press releases through the media;
- messages on relevant NI Direct web pages and in social media outlets;
- the distribution of posters and leaflets to workplaces and public buildings; and
- presentations at workplaces to promote car sharing to employees including at South West Acute Hospital in November 2012.

Travelwise NI maintains a car share website, carshareni.com and this successful website shows continued growth over the last two years with a journey match rate of over 50%. The website attracts over 4,000 visitors per month with 738 new members registered in the 12 month period from May 2011 to April 2012 and a further 874 new members registered in the 12 month period from May 2012 to April 2013.

In the 2012 / 2013 financial year, Transport NI allocated almost £500,000 for the provision of park and share facilities throughout Northern Ireland. Transport NI will work with Travelwise and Translink to continue to develop appropriate park and share facilities, through the Local Transport and Safety Measures programme.

Road Safety: Beltoy Road, Carrickfergus

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the plans to improve road safety on the Beltoy Road in Carrickfergus.
(AQO 3915/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department is aware of and very concerned about the increase in the number of road traffic collisions that have recently taken place at Beltoy Road, at its junction with Marshallstown Road.

In 2001, improvement works were carried out at this junction, which provided additional direction signage with high visibility backing board, reflective hazard marker posts, an additional sign warning of the junction ahead, and high friction surfacing on the approach road.

These works significantly improved the collision history at the location and accident statistics supplied by the PSNI indicate there was one personal injury collision recorded between 2002 and December 2012.

However, I am aware the situation has deteriorated over recent months and understand the high-visibility signage was damaged and the high friction surfacing is showing signs of normal age-related wear and tear.

I am pleased to advise the Member that new signage was erected on Wednesday 24 April 2013. Arrangements are also in place to replace the worn high friction surfacing.

It will be necessary to remove and replace the top layer of the road surfacing before the new high friction surfacing can be laid. It is hoped this work can be completed within the next three months.

The Member will recall his recent correspondence to me on this matter, requesting a site meeting with senior Departmental officials. I agree that a site meeting with senior Departmental officials might be the best way to conclude this matter.

A5 Western Transport Corridor: Habitats Directive

Mr McAleer asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline his position on the A5 western transport corridor project including the steps his Department is taking to address outstanding environmental issues relating to the EU habitats directive.
(AQO 3916/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The two A5 projects remain on the Roads Service Major Works Programme.

The Judge's ruling has quashed all the statutory orders for the proposed A5 dual carriageway. Effectively, this brings the process back one step to the point where a Public Inquiry has been carried out and I am in receipt of the Inspector's Report. I considered the very complex legal and procedural matters at length upon receiving detailed legal advice. I have consequently accepted the ruling of Mr Justice Stephens and decided not to appeal. I feel this option offers the best opportunity to progress the scheme in a reasonable timescale.

At my request, work has commenced on an Appropriate Assessment process (AA), the first step of which will consider the impacts on the Rivers Foyle and Finn Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and mitigation measures. This work will be the subject of a public consultation exercise.

The need for an addendum to the Environmental Statement (ES) is being considered.

It is important that the outcomes of any assessment are not pre-judged and, therefore, I cannot provide any further detail at this time regarding timescales other than to say that there will be substantial delay.

A5 Western Transport Corridor

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the future of the A5 Western Transport Corridor in light of the recent court ruling.

(AQO 3917/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I refer the Member to the answer I provided to the previous question (AQO 3917/11-15).

I would reiterate that the development of the A5 Western Transport Corridor remains as an Executive commitment and we are working to address the issues emanating from the Court Ruling.

A7 Road Scheme: Doran's Rock, Saintfield

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the scheme for the A7 at Doran's Rock near Saintfield.

(AQO 3918/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: This proposed improvement scheme between Rowallane and Doran's Rock, south of Saintfield, entails the widening of 1.8 kilometres of the A7 carriageway and improving the forward visibility along this section of road.

My officials in Roads Service are continuing to develop this scheme. However, in common with other road improvement schemes, its delivery is dependent upon the availability of resources, and subsequent progression to the construction stage remains subject to the scheme clearing the statutory procedures and undergoing a satisfactory economic appraisal. Given other competing priorities, its implementation will also be dependent upon the funding made available in future budget settlements.

Balmoral Show: Traffic

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline what arrangements have been made with the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society to ensure minimal traffic disruption on the road network in the Maze/Long Kesh area during the Balmoral Show.

(AQO 3919/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Member will be aware that the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society (RUAS) has lead responsibility for traffic management in relation to the Balmoral Show.

RUAS developed a Transport Management Plan which was submitted as part of the planning application for the development of part of the former Maze/Long Kesh prison site to create a showground facility. Planning permission was granted in January 2013 by DoE Minister Alex Attwood, who indicated that he had concluded that "effective traffic management by the applicant around events should keep disruption to a minimum".

In order to reduce car travel, Minister Attwood made approval conditional on the provision a shuttle bus service to and from Lisburn Railway Station. In addition, the Transport Management Plan requires to RUAS provide advanced directional signage on all main routes for the duration of the show in order to minimise traffic congestion.

Whilst not having any responsibility for, or oversight of, traffic management at the event, over recent weeks my Department has devoted considerable time and effort working with RUAS officials and their transport and planning consultant with the objective of ensuring the measures agreed by DoE, as part of the planning application, are put in place in time for the show. Travel by car to the show grounds is proposed by using three access routes:

- from Greater Belfast and the east via M1, Junction 8 (Sprucefield), Hillsborough Road and Blaris Road;
- from the south via A1 and Harry's Road; and
- from the west via M1, Junction 9 (Moirs) and A3, Moira Road.

My officials have been highlighting, to RUAS, the importance of adequately promoting, and making the public aware of, the proposed measures.

Roads Service: Snowfall in Newtownabbey

Ms Brown asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the Roads Service response to the snowfall in Newtownabbey around Easter.

(AQO 3920/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Whilst I consider that Roads Service performed very well, in terms of its planning and operations, in responding to the recent blizzard conditions, this was very much a multi-agency approach that was highly effective in ensuring relief efforts were quickly directed to the point of need and to those impacted most significantly by these very severe weather conditions. We owe a debt of gratitude to all of the services directly involved, not least the staff in my own Department, whose efforts and level of commitment were exceptional throughout.

The snowfall of 22-23 March 2013 was the most extreme we have experienced in 50 years and caused major disruption right across Counties Antrim and Down. During the snowfall, Roads Service's resources were fully stretched keeping main roads open. However, additional resources, comprising private contractors, Rivers Agency, various Councils, including Newtownabbey Borough Council and farmers were quickly mobilised to clear blocked roads using mechanical excavators. The high ground in Newtownabbey and Carrickfergus was particularly badly affected.

Snow clearance operations also took account of requests for roads to be cleared for funerals, those needing medical assistance, those stranded in rural areas, schools, access for carers and the elderly which necessitated re-prioritisation of activities on a daily basis.

The snow clearance was carried out in the most difficult of circumstances and the agencies involved worked tirelessly, for very long hours, to reopen blocked roads as quickly as possible.

One of the key outcomes of the previous review of Winter Service policy, which was fully discussed and accepted by the Northern Ireland Assembly, was that the practice of targeting our limited resources available for this service on the busier routes should continue. I hope you will appreciate it is not practicable to salt all routes across Northern Ireland, nor is it possible to have all routes cleared with immediate effect. Whilst it is inevitable that commuters, especially those who use more lightly-trafficked routes, will experience some inconvenience, every effort is made to target the worst affected areas in order to minimise the level of disruption.

As with all significant winter events, my Department will be carrying out a detailed review of its response to determine if there are lessons to be learned and actions that should be incorporated into its emergency response plans.

Belfast on the Move

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on Belfast on the Move.
(AQO 3921/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The current phase of Belfast on the Move works began on 28 January and is progressing well, in line with my Department's programme.

Works on College Avenue and College Square East have been substantially completed and the new road layouts, including a new southbound bus lane, were introduced on Friday 12 April.

Following resurfacing the new road layout on Grosvenor Road, between Durham Street and Fisherwick Place, was introduced on Friday 19 April. Resurfacing of College Square North and Durham Street to Boyne Bridge has also been completed.

Work on Great Victoria Street between Hope Street and Grosvenor Road has also now been substantially completed and the new road layout, including a new northbound bus lane, was introduced on Friday 26 April. Following the completion of further work, this northbound bus lane will be extended from Great Victoria Street through to Wellington Place later this week.

As with all new road layouts, motorists are urged to take extra care as they get used to the new arrangements and, where possible, consider using alternative routes.

The final part of the works, which will focus on Wellington Place, Donegall Square North, Donegall Square East and Chichester Street, have now commenced.

Despite the fact that our resurfacing programme was held up by the adverse weather conditions in March, I am confident that the remaining work to complete the final phase of the Sustainable Transport Enabling Measures will be completed by the end of May this year.

Buses and Coaches for People with Disabilities

Mr Sheehan asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the availability of buses and tour coaches for people with disabilities.
(AQO 3922/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Accessible Transport Strategy Action Plan 2012-15 includes a DRD commitment "to continue to ensure that any bus purchases funded through (bus purchase grant) the in-year bidding process are 100% compliant with PSV accessibility regulations".

Officials have liaised with Translink and I can advise you that:

- The entire Metro fleet is wheelchair accessible.
- Over 96% of the Ulsterbus scheduled service fleet is accessible, whilst almost 94% of the Ulsterbus fleet (including Tour Coaches) is accessible.
- Over 92% of Translink's scheduled service fleet is wheelchair accessible, whilst 89% of the Translink fleet (including Tour Coaches) is accessible
- Those vehicles not wheelchair accessible comply with Schedule 3 of the Public Service Vehicle Accessibility Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003, with particular regard to:-
 - Criteria for steps;
 - Handrails to assist disabled people;

- Visual contrast of features such as handrails and steps to help partially-sighted people;
- Easy-to-use bell pushes;
- Audible and visual signals to stop a vehicle; and
- External equipment to display the correct route and destination.

My Department has also provided over 30 16-seater minibuses to Rural Community Transport Partnerships. These buses are all fully accessible.

The Disability Action Transport Scheme which commenced on 1 April 2013 also uses fully accessible buses to provide this service.

My Department does not hold any data on the availability of accessible buses and tour coaches within the privately owned fleet – this would be a matter for DOE, who have responsibility for enforcement of the PSV accessibility regulations.

Department for Social Development

Trinity Housing Association Grant Aid

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Social Development how much grant aid has been allocated, or is planned to be allocated, by his Department to Trinity Housing Association for its development at 19 Downpatrick Road, Crossgar.
(AQW 21704/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): In January 2008, the Housing Executive approved acquisition of this site for social housing and in February 2008 paid grant of £835,215 to facilitate purchase. No further grant has or can be allocated until Trinity confirms its proposals for the site. Because the scheme being proposed no longer bears any resemblance to that approved, the Housing Executive has taken a decision to initiate recovery proceedings.

Pensioners' Bungalows at Ballyree Drive, Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the proposed plans for the pensioners' bungalows at Ballyree Drive, Bloomfield Estate in Bangor.
(AQW 21756/11-15)

Mr McCausland: An Economic Appraisal has been referred to the Department of Finance and Personnel seeking the necessary approvals to proceed with the transfer of bungalows at Bloomfield in Bangor from NIHE to a Housing Association. On receipt of this approval the Housing Executive will proceed to formal consultation with tenants on Oaklee Housing's proposals for the properties.

Housing Executive: Double Glazing

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what housing estates in (i) Millisle; and (ii) Donaghadee are still to have double glazing installed; and when the work will begin.
(AQW 21759/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that there are no double glazing installations programmed for Millisle, as all their properties in the village have already been double glazed through previous External Cyclical Maintenance schemes.

However, its Ards Peninsula Double Glazing scheme started on 15 October 2012 which includes the remainder of the homes in Donaghadee requiring double glazing. 59 of the dwellings in the scheme are located in Barnagh Park and Cypress Park, Donaghadee, and work started there on 8 April 2013. The Housing Executive's contractor expects to have completed double glazing in Donaghadee by 7 June 2013.

Social Housing: North Antrim

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of new build one and two bedroom social housing units that will be provided in the North Antrim constituency, in each of the next three years.
(AQW 21835/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The North Antrim Constituency corresponds to the NIHE Districts of Ballymena, Ballymoney and Moyle/Ballycastle. The current 3 year Social Housing Development Programme for these Districts includes a total of 9 general need schemes for 179 units. Of this, 13% (23) are for 1 bed units, 60% (107) 2 bed and 27% (49) 3 bed units.

With regard to the issue of Welfare Reform and under occupation, the NIHE is actively seeking to include smaller units with new schemes and proposals. This includes encouraging and supporting Housing Associations to provide for the inclusion of a minimum of 200 x 1 bed units in schemes within each year of the NI Regional Social Housing Development Programme. It is hoped that Housing Associations will respond to this challenge.

Social Housing Tenants: Fuel Poverty

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 16039/11-15 and given the impact of fuel poverty on social housing tenants, whether the previous commitments given on the date of awarding the new contract and the date for the completion of all replacement window schemes remain.

(AQW 21837/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In relation to the new low rise double glazing contract, the Housing Executive anticipates awarding the double glazing contracts during June, commencing on 1 July 2013. While the introduction of the new contract has slipped from the date originally envisaged, the Housing Executive remains totally confident that the target to install full double glazing in all Housing Executive dwellings by March 2015 will be met.

Employment and Support Allowance

Ms Lo asked the Minister for Social Development whether it is the responsibility of the claimant to inform their jobs and benefits office of their migration to employment and support allowance (ESA) to ensure continuity of payment of housing benefit, or whether ESA confirm this on behalf of the claimant.

(AQW 21839/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The onus is on the claimant to report any change in circumstances to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive that may affect their Housing Benefit. However, when a claim is being migrated from Incapacity Benefit to Employment and Support Allowance an electronic data transfer notification is sent to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive via the Job Seekers Allowance Payment System. This confirms that Employment and Support Allowance is being put into payment.

These notifications are sent to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive between two and four weeks before the first Employment and Support Allowance payment is due, depending on the claimant's payment cycle.

Housing Benefit Arrears

Ms Lo asked the Minister for Social Development how many people have housing benefit arrears after a delay in their payments as a result of the benefit migration process.

(AQW 21840/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive does not specifically hold any data for this. There have been some cases where they have received an electronic termination of entitlement to Incapacity Benefit without being advised of a subsequent ESA entitlement. In these cases Housing Benefit may be stopped until ESA entitlement is confirmed, at which stage Housing Benefit payments will resume retrospectively and arrangements are in place for any delayed notification of ESA entitlement to be queried and resolved promptly. Therefore as a result of the migration no one should have incurred any lasting arrears of Housing Benefit.

Older People with Learning Disabilities

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development what plans he has to work with the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to minimise the need for crisis moves by identifying and responding early to the housing and support needs of older people with a learning disability and their families.

(AQW 21846/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The 2011/2015 Comprehensive Spending Review represented the assessed need for supported housing across all supported housing needs groups including older people and people with a learning disability.

The bid reflects the priority within the Bamford Review to resettle all people with a learning disability/mental health issues residing in long term institutions and the strategic review of services for older people. This is a DHSS&PS/DSD joint bid for capital and revenue funding to facilitate these priority requirements.

An independent review of the Commissioning Body responsible for the commissioning of housing support services has been undertaken on my request to ensure that future housing and health decisions are made by the most appropriate people with the ability to effectively assess need and procure services in line with Government policy within available resources.

HMRC Staff

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Social Development whether HMRC staff will transfer to the Northern Ireland Civil Service when Universal Credit is implemented.

(AQW 21852/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Subject to approval being obtained from the Civil Service Commissioners for Northern Ireland, permanent staff remaining within the Benefits and Credits Directorate of HMRC who are based in Northern Ireland will be given the opportunity to transfer to the Department for Social Development at the end of the planned migration period for the phasing out of Tax Credits.

Transfers at the end of the migration period, which is expected to be in 2017/18 will be made under the Cabinet Office Statement of Practice for Staff Transfers in the Public Sector (COSoP) principles which will mean continuity of employment and Terms and Conditions for staff who wish to transfer.

NI Co-ownership Housing Association

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development what salaries are paid to the senior management team in NI Co-Ownership Housing Association; and by what percentage have their salaries increased in each of the last five years compared to other employees within the organisation.

(AQW 21934/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The senior management in NI Co-Ownership comprises the Chief Executive and 2 Directors (a 3rd Director retired in November 2010).

The Chief Executive has received a salary in the £90 - £95,000 salary band in each of the last four years (from March 2010, when a 2% pay increase and a 2% pay increment were awarded); in the year prior to March 2010, the Chief Executive's salary was in the £85 - £90,000 salary band. The Chief Executive is also entitled to an Employer's Pension Contribution, Healthcare and Car Allowance.

The two Directors have received a salary in the £60 - £70,000 salary band in each of the last four years (from March 2010, when a 2% pay increase was awarded); in the year prior to March 2010, the directors' salaries were in the £55 - £60,000 salary band. The Directors are also entitled to an Employer's Pension Contribution, Healthcare and Car Allowance.

All staff in NICHA receive salaries and increases in accordance with the agreed NJC local government pay scales. There has, therefore, been one increase in staff salaries in the last five years which was a 2% increase awarded in the year ended March 2010.

NI Co-ownership Housing Association

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development how have annual audit fees paid by NI Co-Ownership Housing Association ranged over the last five years; and whether the provision of such financial services are put to tender.

(AQW 21935/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The annual external audit fees paid by NI Co-Ownership Housing Association (NICHA) in each of the last five years is as follows:

2013	£25,260
2012	£25,145
2011	£28,084
2010	£17,044
2009	£25,514

The provision of external audit services for NICHA was tendered in 2011 and a three year contract awarded which will expire with the 2015 audit.

Volunteering Infrastructure Partners

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development what evidence was used for identifying the concerns over the level of non-collaboration between potential volunteering infrastructure partners.

(AQW 21995/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I terminated the new arrangements for volunteer infrastructure support due to concerns I had regarding the level of collaboration and partnership working and reservations as to whether the proposed new arrangements would assist in successfully delivering Northern Ireland's first ever Volunteering Strategy.

This was based on information which indicated the absence of a coordinated approach between volunteer infrastructure groups which could lead to the duplication of volunteering efforts in some areas and the absence of accurate and reliable volunteering data.

Pensions

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister for Social Development what action he is taking to lessen the impact of the change from the Retail Price Index to the Consumer Price Index on pensions.

(AQW 22009/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Westminster Government believes that the Consumer Prices Index (CPI) is a more suitable measure of inflation for uprating than the Retail Prices Index (RPI). It believes that the CPI is less volatile and takes better account of how

behaviour changes in response to changes in prices and more accurately reflects the inflation experience of pensioners and benefit recipients. It is also the headline inflation measure used by the Bank of England.

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions is required to review the level of benefits and pensions annually. My Department has no power to set different rates for Northern Ireland. Statutorily, the basic state pension is uprated in line with earnings, however, the current Government has given a commitment that it will uprate basic state pension by the rise in inflation, earnings or 2.5 per cent whichever is the highest. This is known as the triple lock. In addition, the minimum guarantee element of State Pension Credit, which ensures that no pensioner has to get by on less than £145.40 per week, is uprated in line with earnings. Additional state pension is also uprated in line with inflation.

Whilst the CPI is used for the purposes of the statutory minimum revaluation and indexation of occupational pension schemes and for relevant payments made by the Pension Protection Fund and the Financial Assistance Scheme, occupational pension schemes whose rules provide for uprating in line with the RPI or which wish to uprate in line with the RPI may continue to do so.

Housing Executive: Maintenance Contractor in North Belfast

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister for Social Development to outline any difficulties faced by the Housing Executive's maintenance contractor in North Belfast in meeting service delivery standards; and what action he is taking to overcome such difficulties.

(AQW 22033/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The maintenance contractor in North Belfast went into administration on 22 April 2013 and the administrator has advised that the company cannot provide any further service to the Housing Executive. The Housing Executive has now instructed their other Response Maintenance contractors to provide a back-up/support service to the Districts affected including North Belfast.

Atos Healthcare

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Social Development how much Atos Healthcare is paid for each assessment carried out. **(AQW 22034/11-15)**

Mr McCausland: I am unable to provide the specific information that relates to the costs for conducting each assessment as the charging regime within the Medical Support Services Agreement is designated as commercially sensitive information, in accordance with Schedule 30 of the Agreement.

Welfare Reform Bill: Housing Strategy

Mr B McCreagh asked the Minister for Social Development to list the action plans that have been developed under the housing strategy; and how these plans are compatible with the Welfare Reform Bill. **(AQW 22035/11-15)**

Mr McCausland: My Department is currently finalising the housing strategy action plan. This is the only action plan that has been developed under the housing strategy, and it is planned to be published in the coming weeks.

I have previously stated that my priority remains doing all I can to prevent evictions and tenants being declared homeless. The action plan will include a section specifically focusing on the impacts of Welfare Reform. I want to ensure that those affected by Welfare Reform receive the support and advice that they need, and that my Department continues to work with others to ensure that we are meeting housing need effectively.

Gas Installation Scheme: Hospital Lane, Limavady

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the reasons for the delay in starting the Phase 2 gas installation scheme in Hospital Lane, Limavady. **(AQW 22070/11-15)**

Mr McCausland: I have been advised by the Housing Executive that they are not aware of any undue delay in the commencement of the Hospital Lane, Phase 2 gas installation scheme in Limavady. The date of possession for this scheme is 22 April 2013 and the Housing Executive issued the letter of acceptance to the contractor on 17 April.

Social Security Agency Buildings: Canteen Closures

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 21781/11-15, whether his Department is seeking to re-tender the canteen provision in the affected facilities, or whether he is considering using TUPE to transfer the affected staff to departmental employment. **(AQW 22080/11-15)**

Mr McCausland: My Department, on advice from the Department of Finance and Personnel, will not be seeking to re-tender the canteen provision in the 8 affected Social Security Agency offices.

The Department is not considering using TUPE to transfer the affected Serco catering staff to departmental employment.

Housing Waiting List: Coleraine

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development how many people on the housing waiting list in Coleraine would be eligible for 3 bed, four or five person accommodation.

(AQW 22136/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that at 1 April 2013 there were 137 applicants on the Waiting List requiring three bedroom accommodation (which could accommodate up to six people) who have registered Coleraine as their first area of choice.

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Community Care Grants

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister for Social Development what is the target time in which successful applicants for Community Care Grants are to receive their grants.

(AQW 22219/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Social Security Agency currently has a clearance time target of 12 days to clear Community Care Grant applications. The target was met in the 2012/13 business year with an achievement of 9.5 days and also met in each individual month.

All payments should be made within 3 working days of the application being successful.

Housing Executive Properties

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Social Development what plans the Housing Executive has to carry out work on existing properties, where the previous tenant did not give consent for a particular scheme.

(AQW 22274/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Housing Executive tenants sometimes refuse work for a number of reasons, for example, they may have already carried out such works themselves; they do not want the inconvenience; or because of personal issues such as ill health or family bereavement. The process to subsequently deal with these dwellings is as follows:-

- While a scheme is still in progress - depending on what stage it has reached in the contractor's schedule - it may be possible to re-instate the property in the scheme if a tenant subsequently changes his/her mind on the works;
- Properties which have fallen out of previous schemes are highlighted during the annual Roll-On process through which the Housing Executive reviews its Programme requirements at a local level and introduces new planned schemes for the following three to five year period. Such properties may therefore be considered for inclusion in a future scheme planned, for example, for a nearby estate.
- If there is a re-let of such a property, depending on the type of work involved, some of this may be addressed through the Change of Tenancy repairs. Major works - for example, a complete kitchen refurbishment or a replacement heating system - are more likely to be carried out by including the property in an appropriate current or future scheme.
- In circumstances where proposed works have a health and safety dimension, for example, the installation of smoke alarms or carbon monoxide detectors, or the removal of asbestos - the Housing Executive warns tenants of the dangers of non-compliance and may issue proceedings for an injunction to pursue access in such cases to carry out the works required.

Coleraine Town Centre Master Plan

Mr McClarty asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the Coleraine town centre masterplan launched in May 2012.

(AQO 3926/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Coleraine Town Centre Masterplan was published on 9 May 2012. It includes 61 actions and 6 wider town centre strategies to be delivered over a 15 to 20 year timescale.

Responsibility for the delivery of initiatives in the Masterplan lies with Coleraine Borough Council who have established a new Town Centre Advisory Group to assist them in the delivery of these initiatives. The first meeting of the Advisory Group, which includes all statutory agencies as well as business and community representatives who have an interest or stake in Coleraine Town centre, was held on Thursday 25 April.

The first three actions to be taken forward from the Masterplan are:

- A revitalise project for the properties in the Waterside and Bridge Street areas of the town. My Department has provided funding of £250,000 for this project which will improve the visual appearance of the area by tidying up shop fronts and gap sites and running promotional activities to boost footfall and trade in the area. Work has already commenced on this project and is due to be completed by 31 March 2014.
- A review of the use of the town hall to determine how its use could be extended during evenings and weekends. This review has just commenced.

- A review of the evening economy within the town centre. This review will commence later this year.

The other initiatives in the Masterplan will be considered for delivery by the Town Centre Advisory Group during the lifetime of the Masterplan.

Housing Executive: Temporary Decampment

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Social Development what determines whether temporary decampment is required for existing tenants when major renovation of a Northern Ireland Housing Executive property takes place.

(AQO 3932/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that any improvement work they now do is mainly in relation to Kitchen Replacements, External Cyclical Maintenance, Double Glazing and Fire Door Replacement which does not normally require decanting.

However, for example, they may occasionally have a kitchen scheme where internal structural work is required or an extension is required and daytime or temporary decanting may be considered.

In relation to Major Adaptations on their properties for persons with disabilities, due to the nature of the work and the needs of the tenant, alternative accommodation can sometimes be sought to facilitate the works being carried out and to minimise disruption to the tenant, given the particular nature of their disability. Any question of whether decanting would be necessary is decided on a case by case basis in conjunction with all parties concerned, including the tenant.

Rural Housing

Mr McMullan asked the Minister for Social Development what action he will take to deal with unfit housing in rural housing.

(AQO 3933/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There are two key methods of dealing with unfit housing in rural areas, namely private sector grants and social housing new build.

Grant aid available to rural areas includes mandatory grants in the form of a Disabled Facilities Grant and Repairs Grants for Landlords. There are also Discretionary grants in the form of Rehabilitation and Replacements Grants along with funding available to low-income households to improve energy efficiency by availing of the Warm Homes or Boiler Replacement scheme.

As a last resort the Housing Executive can also exercise a system for closing orders and Demolition Notices.

The new Rural Action Plan 2013 - 2015 being launched in May 2013 highlights the increased importance of ensuring that an equitable share of mandatory grants are directed towards rural areas. The plan will also identify rural Housing Executive dwellings requiring energy efficiency works such as heating, insulation, double glazing and ensure that they are included in future programmes.

My Department has a commitment to deliver an appropriate share of new social housing in rural areas and this will also contribute to the reduction of levels of unfit housing.

Housing Executive: Oil-fired Heating

Mr McEluff asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the strategy in place to remove oil fired heating systems from Northern Ireland Housing Executive properties in order to replace them with gas systems.

(AQO 3934/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The first boilers for oil fired heating systems provided by the Housing Executive are beginning to reach the end of their useful life of 15 years during this financial year, 2013/14. These boilers are included in a planned programme for replacement.

Where a mains gas supply is available, the tenants will be offered gas. Only in exceptional circumstances and after detailed consultation will tenants retain oil fired central heating as their heat source.

DSD: Intranet

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development how his Department's Dignity at Work policy is applied to the operation of its intranet site.

(AQO 3935/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department operates under the NICS Dignity at Work policy. The NICS is committed to equality of opportunity and this policy is about creating and sustaining a working environment where everyone is treated with dignity and respect, and free from any form of inappropriate behaviour. This policy extends to all work related aspects including the operation of the Department's intranet site.

Housing Executive: Cavity Wall Insulation

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Social Development will the cavity wall insulation schemes that were scheduled to take place in Northern Ireland Housing Executive properties in East Belfast be completed on schedule.

(AQO 3936/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has no cavity wall insulation schemes programmed for East Belfast, nor has there been any planned for a number of years. There are also no schemes planned in the Housing Executive's Castlereagh District Office area.

Homeowners: Financial Assistance

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development how the ceasing of means tested financial assistance to home owners to deal with deterioration in their properties will impact on home owners in the future.

(AQO 3937/11-15)

Mr McCausland: It is important to note that the lack of available resources to assist homeowners undertake repair and/or improvement means that the current grants scheme is no longer fit for purpose. At present my Department is carrying out a review of the support for repair and improvement in the private housing sector. Responses to the proposal, to deregulate the current grants scheme and replace it with a more flexible system of help, are currently being considered and a series of proposals will be published when this consideration concludes. I anticipate any new scheme will therefore provide a viable method to assist homeowners deal with any perceived deterioration in their properties in the future.

The Housing Executive has advised that the current grants/schemes available to owner occupiers are as follows:

Renovation Grants/Home Repairs Assistance Grants

- only available in exceptional circumstances to improve homes where there is imminent and significant risk to the health and safety of the occupants

Warm Homes Scheme

- To provide loft and cavity wall insulation, and to provide new heating where none exists or to replace Economy 7 heating with oil or gas

Boiler Replacement Scheme

- To replace old, inefficient boilers which are more than 15 years old in owner occupied homes

Housing: East Belfast

Mr Newton asked the Minister for Social Development how many new build homes are planned for the East Belfast constituency in the next twelve months.

(AQO 3938/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There are a total of 93 new build homes planned for the East Belfast constituency during the 2013/14 programme year. A total of 64 units are currently programmed for General Needs and 29 units are currently programmed for Supported Housing.

The Housing Executive is currently in the process of formulating the new Social Housing Development Programme (SHDP) for 2013/14 to account for year end slippage at end of 2012/13. The SHDP will be published on the Housing Executive's website when this exercise is complete.

Welfare Reform Bill

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development how many children will be placed into poverty following the introduction of the proposed Welfare Reform Bill.

(AQO 3953/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Reform of the welfare system is absolutely essential notwithstanding the need to develop it in a way relevant to Northern Ireland's specific needs. Welfare reform will make important and substantial changes to the current tax and benefit system and Universal Credit in particular will make a positive contribution to tackling the root causes of child poverty in Northern Ireland. The removal of the 16 hour working rule before childcare costs can be reimbursed coupled with a reduction in the marginal participation tax rates means that parents in part time work will no longer have to deal with cliff edges in their take home pay when they work more than 16 or 25 hours per week. This will help to address some of the structural causes of poverty. Universal Credit is also focused on increasing the support paid to those families with the lowest incomes

Currently it is not possible to quantify the specific impact of welfare reform on child poverty but work is ongoing to develop a Household Income Administrative Database which will allow more accurate assessment of the impact on specific groups. The structure of the database should facilitate the estimation of income at an individual and household level (through benefit receipt and private sources). Not only will this facilitate an assessment of the take-up of means tested benefits but (subject to

data quality) it should also allow an analysis of the individual and combined effects (including financial) of the various Welfare Reform policies. I anticipate that the database will be ready for full testing by late summer / early autumn 2013.

My Department will of course continue to target its resources on those who experience the worst levels of disadvantage through delivering initiatives which target both the causes and consequences of poverty.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

MLA Support: Libel or Slander

Mr Swann asked the Assembly Commission to detail (i) the support available to MLAs when they are accused of, and subsequently admit or are found guilty of, libel or slander; and (ii) any variations in the support depending on circumstances. (AQW 21984/11-15)

Mr Weir (The Representative of the Assembly Commission):

- (i) Currently the Assembly Commission holds a combined Employer's and Public Liability insurance policy which covers all MLA's and Assembly Commission employees. Under the Public Liability section of this policy, libel or slander falls under the definition of "Personal Injury". As such the policy may indemnify for damages and legal costs payable to any person who is not an "employee". This cover is only applicable to an MLA when he or she is speaking in their capacity as an MLA.
- (ii) Whether a particular case is indemnified or not under the terms of the policy is a matter for the insurers. Each case is assessed by the insurers on an individual basis.

Financial Restitution

Mr Swann asked the Assembly Commission to detail any occasions since 2007 when it has provided financial restitution to a third party arising from the actions of an MLA; and the circumstances that led to the restitution. (AQW 21985/11-15)

Mr Weir (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): From 2007, the Assembly Commission has paid no financial restitution to any third parties arising from the actions of an MLA. However, you may be aware of a recent case (O'Loan v Givan and others) that has been covered in the local media. Under the personal injury section of the Assembly Commission's combined Employer's and Public Liability insurance policy an amount of damages and costs have been awarded to the plaintiff. However, the final "financial restitution" has still to be advised by the Assembly Commission's insurers.

Defamation Proceedings

Mr Allister asked the Assembly Commission, whether an MLA is entitled to avail of its insurance policy for the purpose of (i) initiating defamation proceedings; (ii) defending defamation proceedings; and (iii) the conditions attached. (AQW 22020/11-15)

Mr Weir (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Assembly Commission's Combined Employer's and Public Liability Insurance policy provides cover for Assembly Commission employees and MLAs. Under the Public Liability section of this policy, libel or slander falls under the definition of "Personal Injury". As such, the policy may indemnify for damages and compensation costs in respect of defamation proceedings.

The policy may not be used by an MLA for the purpose of initiating defamation proceedings but may provide cover for defending defamation proceedings. The conditions attached to this aspect of the policy will include standard policy conditions but more specific conditions are:

- Indemnity will not apply for any libel or slander made prior to the inception date of the policy;
- Indemnity will not apply for any libel or slander that is made by or at the direction of the insured or an employee of the insured with the knowledge of the defamatory nature thereof;
- Indemnity will not apply for any libel or slander that is made by any person acting outside the scope of their authority.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 10 May 2013

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Victims and Survivors Service

Mr Cree asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the roll out of the Victims and Survivors Service. (AQO 3833/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): The Victims and Survivors Service (VSS) is now well established.

The VSS aims to provide a high quality service to victims and survivors based on individual assessed needs. It aims to accomplish this through the funding of victim/survivor support groups and service providers, the direct commissioning of interventions, and the delivery of financial assistance to individuals in need.

The Service opened in April 2012. Since then, the following objectives have been accomplished:

- The VSS successfully launched the Victim Support Programme (VSP) in early November 2012. The VSP will provide approximately £20 million of funding for victims and survivors over the period 2013-2015.
- The VSS appointed an Independent Panel to assess applications to the VSP from more than 50 service providers in the victim/survivor sector. This assessment process was completed on schedule, by February 2013.
- The VSS has allocated the VSP funds (on the basis of the Independent Panel's assessments) and issued Letters of Offer to successful applicant organisations at the end of March 2013. The VSS is currently working closely with each organisation to develop agreed workplans and budget breakdowns for the funded period.
- We recently agreed the details of the new Individual Needs Programme (formerly administered by the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund). The VSS has developed guidance for individuals seeking to access the new Programme. As of 15 April 2013, the VSS has been communicating both directly with individuals and with funded organisations to encourage victims and survivors to access the new Programme.
- All of the staff members identified for transfer from the Community Relations Council (victims unit) and the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund have successfully taken up their posts in the VSS.
- As noted previously, the VSS has already begun the process of speaking directly with individual victims and survivors to work with them in identifying their needs. To date, over 400 individuals have availed of an Individual Needs Review with a VSS Assessor. Many of these individuals have been referred for specific interventions, or signposted to resources and support within the network of organisations funded by our Department.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Horse Passport System

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, following the BBC Spotlight programme on 5 March 2013, whether she has confidence in her Department's horse passport system. (AQW 20670/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): It is a legal requirement for all horses and ponies (and other forms of equidae) within the EU to have a passport identifying the animal. The Horse Passports Regulations (NI) 2010, on the identification of equidae, have been in operation since March 2010. These Regulations implement Commission Regulation (EC) No. 504/2008 in the north of Ireland.

In order to protect the food chain, my Department enforces these Regulations at point of slaughter and at import / export at ports in the north and I am confident in the operation of these procedures. My Department is currently reviewing its enforcement policy with regard to passports, given the current issues raised and will enhance controls as considered appropriate and proportionate within the current legal framework.

My officials are working with colleagues in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and with the Department of Agriculture Fisheries and the Marine in Dublin on improving the quality of horse passports and I have also agreed that the Equine Council for NI should work with my officials to see how the operation of the horse passports could be improved locally.

DARD Catering: Locally Sourced Food

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what measures are in place, and are planned, to ensure that food produce, especially fresh meat, served at departmental premises, including CAFRE Colleges is locally sourced; and what proportion of products is locally sourced compared with those imported.

(AQW 21080/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Department provides catering services in CAFRE and in Dundonald House through contracts tendered by Central Procurement Directorate in the Department of Finance and Personnel.

In February, I wrote to the Minister for Finance and Personnel asking for a review of public procurement of food with the intention of increasing the sourcing of local ingredients in such contracts, including beef. I understand that the Central Procurement Directorate is progressing a review of specifications for food and for catering services. The review will consider assurance measures and opportunities to highlight produce from the north. Additionally, the Central Procurement Directorate is progressing a review of the Procurement Guidance Note 01/08 – Procurement of Food and Catering Services. It is also making arrangements for networking events, which will bring together Centres of Procurement Excellence, catering services, contractors and food sector bodies and suppliers. I have written to the Minister for Finance and Personnel to ask about the amount of locally sourced produce in catering services, and if this can be increased. I have also asked that Central Procurement Directorate consider a policy derogation to require produce from the north as first choice in catering services provided for my Department only.

Axis 3 Funding

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the progress of Axis 3 funding in each regional network. (AQW 22083/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I take your reference to each regional network to mean the seven Local Action Groups delivering Axis 3 of the NIRDP on behalf of my Department. Each cluster has been given an indicative allocation of funds rather than actual funds. To 31st March 2013 the clusters have spent against their programme allocation as follows:

Cluster	Allocation	Project Spend	Admin Spend
GROW	8,890,899	3,037,405	832,656
NER	13,181,300	5,006,187	1,342,925
LRP	8,691,556	3,006,793	959,996
DRAP	13,498,066	3,447,032	1,241,593
SOAR	16,731,839	5,480,205	1,646,506
ARC	18,484,112	6,659,504	2,008,342
SWARD	20,522,227	7,947,312	2,207,804
Total	99,999,999	34,584,438	10,239,823

Agrifood Inspection Enforcement Legislation

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how agrifood enforcement legislation has changed in relation to inspections, over the last five years.

(AQW 22109/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: There have been no substantive changes to primary agrifood enforcement legislation used by my Department to discharge our official controls, such as inspection and sampling programmes, in the last five years.

As you would expect some of this legislation, such as The Food Hygiene Regulations (NI) 2006, the Official Feed and Food Controls Regulations (NI) 2005, and the Plant Health Order (NI) 2006 has been subject to amendment during this period. None of these amendments have significantly altered the way in which my Department plans and implements its programme of inspections or discharges its enforcement responsibilities.

You will be aware of my Departments 'Better Regulation' policy and the efforts that have been made towards reducing the burden on the agri-food industry in terms of risk based inspection regimes, earned recognition, and streamlining/combining inspection visits.

Farm Modernisation Scheme

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she will consider a positive weighting in the next tranche of the Farm Modernisation Scheme, for farmers affected by the recent snow crisis.

(AQW 22145/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I have yet to decide on whether there will be another tranche of the Farm Modernisation Programme.

The selection criteria for any future funding under the Farm Modernisation Programme (FMP) would be determined when the proposals for any further tranche are developed and would be subject to consultation with stakeholders.

Following the recent snow storm, I have obtained Executive agreement to immediate hardship funding measures to assist farmers worst affected by livestock losses arising from the recent snow storm. The first element of this is that my Department is paying for the costs of collection and disposal of fallen stock from the farmers most severely affected. This relieves those farmers of a potential cost to their business and protects both the environment and animal health by encouraging the proper disposal of fallen stock.

I also intend to bring to the Executive proposals for a hardship scheme, which will be the second element of the hardship measures. The hardship scheme will help to mitigate the costs of the livestock losses that have been sustained by farmers arising from the snow storm. This will be under the EU de minimis rules and capped at a maximum of 7,500 euro per farmer, including the collection and disposal costs of the fallen animals. Farmers, who have fallen stock disposed of during the period 2 April – 19 April 2013 by approved renderers, will be eligible for the hardship funding. The scheme will be framed in light of the information gathered on the extent and nature of losses, which we will build as farmers have stock removed and disposed of by the approved renderers.

I hope to release details of the scheme and how to apply as soon as possible.

Flood Risk: Ashton Park, Belfast

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the study undertaken on providing a water basin behind Ashton Park, Belfast to mitigate the local flood risk.

(AQO 3923/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Investigatory work associated with an initial study improved the flooding situation by removing a number of blockages, and further investigations of the drainage system have commenced. These will provide additional information to enable a review of options to reduce the risk of flooding, including the potential to create a storage pond to the rear of Ashton Park. As flooding is linked to a number of sources, this review will also take account of input from NI Water and Belfast City Council.

Single Farm Payments

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the amount paid in each of the top one hundred single farm payments that also received funding under Tranche 3 of the Farm Modernisation Scheme.

(AQW 22167/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Of the 100 farm businesses that applied for and held the highest value Single Farm Payments (SFP) in 2012, there are 15 farm businesses that also received Letters of Offer under Tranche 3 of the Farm Modernisation Programme. The values of the SFP entitlements held and amounts offered under the FMS for these 15 businesses are listed in the table below.

Farm Business	Value of Single Farm Entitlements Held in 2012 (£)	Farm Modernisation Scheme (Tranche 3) Letter of Offer Amount (£)
A	133,173.28	3,983.00
B	118,307.02	4,000.00
C	107,283.94	3,703.00
D	93,657.89	4,000.00
E	91,030.22	3,993.00
F	87,584.99	4,000.00
G	85,466.84	2,035.00
H	80,723.87	3,945.00
I	79,288.06	3,993.00
J	77,665.44	3,996.00
K	77,297.02	4,000.00
L	76,354.89	3,920.00

Farm Business	Value of Single Farm Entitlements Held in 2012 (£)	Farm Modernisation Scheme (Tranche 3) Letter of Offer Amount (£)
M	76,167.19	662.64
N	76,028.45	3,042.00
O	75,342.19	3,996.00

Farmers: Average Age

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline how her Department calculates the average age of a farmer and whether a cut-off age is applied in relation to those surveyed.

(AQW 22171/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Information on farmers' ages is derived from the EU Farm Structure Survey which is conducted every 3-4 years and relates to the principal owner occupier. Due to the nature of the question asked it is not possible to calculate the mean age from the data collected, but the median age from the 2010 survey was 57 years. There is no upper limit on the age of farmers surveyed.

Agri-food Inspection Branch

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many staff are employed in Agri-food Inspection Branch, and of these, how many are inspectors.

(AQW 22182/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: As at 29 April 2013 there are 70.4 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) Staff in Post employed in the Department's Agrifood Inspection Branch. Of these, 58.2 FTEs are in the Professional & Technical discipline and involved in the management and delivery of inspection and sampling programmes required to implement a range of legislation.

Bovine TB

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) for an update on the number of positive tests of Bovine TB; (ii) how this compares with (a) 3; (b) 6; (c) 9; and (d) 12 months ago; and (iii) to outline the reasons for the change in these figures.

(AQW 22220/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: (i) & (ii)

The number of positive reactors found at live animal TB surveillance (tuberculin skin and interferon gamma blood (IFNG)) tests is tabulated below. There is an unavoidable 2 month time lag on statistics while laboratory tests are completed. Therefore the current figures for TB reactor numbers refer to February 2013.

February 2013	915
November 2012	1,237
August 2012	963
May 2012	1,178
February 2012	869

(iii) The reasons for the wide variations reflect the fact that monthly figures will alter due to both the disease level and the rate of testing during that month. The volume of live cattle testing is greater during the winter housing period than during the summer grazing season.

Using the 12 month moving average incidence to monitor disease levels allows for a clearer picture of the disease trend. There was a significant rise in the 12 month moving average herd and animal incidence measures from August 2011 (4.99% & 0.425%) to October 2012 (7.46% & 0.666% respectively). Despite extensive ongoing investigations, no single causal factor for this rise has yet been identified.

The TB herd and animal incidence has reduced in recent months and were 7.1% and 0.657% respectively in the 12 months ending 28 February 2013.

Bovine TB Tests: Liver Fluke

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what impact liver fluke has on the accuracy of the (i) skin; and (ii) blood tests for Bovine TB.

(AQW 22221/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Recent experimental evidence showed that cattle infected with both liver fluke and bovine TB had significantly reduced reactions to the tuberculin skin test when compared to cattle infected only with bovine TB. An additional study, which was based on dairy herds in England and Wales, suggested that herds with evidence of high levels of liver fluke infestation were more likely to test negative compared to other herds, and that TB in these circumstances was estimated as being potentially under-detected by about one-third.

The impact of liver fluke on the gamma interferon blood test for bovine TB is similar to that for the tuberculin skin test in that co-infection reduces the magnitude of the gamma-interferon test response.

The impact of fluke co-infection on bovine TB diagnosis in the north remains unmeasured and it is unclear what effect liver fluke intervention might have on bovine TB diagnostic tests here.

However, I can advise you that the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) have recently been commissioned to conduct research into the role of endemic diseases and other factors in the occurrence of bovine TB here.

Badgers: Test and Vaccinate or Remove Research Scheme

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the Test and Vaccinate or Remove research scheme, including its commencement date and when the first results will be collated.
(AQW 22222/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I announced on 3 July 2012 that I had requested officials to design a “test and vaccinate or remove (TVR)” wildlife intervention research. TVR commands broad spectrum support from farmer, veterinary and environmental stakeholders.

Since then good progress has been made on the preparatory phases of TVR, which are vital to inform the design of the main phase. The Food and Environment Research Agency (FERA) was commissioned to undertake computerised mathematical modelling to provide information to help design and cost a TVR study. The FERA modelling analysed local farm business, TB herd history and badger population data. The FERA results indicate that the TVR areas should be at least 100km² and be located in an area of high badger density, high cattle herd density and with high levels of confirmed TB.

I announced on 29 January 2013 that the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) had been commissioned to commence a badger sett survey in a 100km² area between Banbridge and Rathfriland in Co. Down as soon as permissions from local farmers were obtained. I further announced, on 7 March 2013, that sett surveying would begin in a second 100km² area near Castlewellan in Co. Down. To date we have received permission to survey just over 75% of land in the Banbridge area and just over 55% in the Castlewellan area, with permission slips still being returned on a daily basis. The actual badger sett survey work is progressing very well and will continue as long as possible until the growth of vegetation will make surveying difficult. Any farm which cannot be surveyed in coming weeks will be scheduled for surveying next winter when cattle are rehoused and vegetation has died back.

Advice from FERA also advocates that ecological baseline monitoring should be conducted in the TVR areas and AFBI was commissioned on 17 April 2013 to develop proposals to conduct this. It is anticipated that this phase of the TVR project will commence in the summer of 2013.

Information from these fieldwork phases are important as it will help finalise the TVR project design and provide detailed information for the Outline Business Case, which has to be submitted to the Department of Personnel and Finance for their approval. In addition, prior NI Environment Agency and DHSSPS Animals Scientific Procedures Act license approval will also be needed before any main TVR interventions can begin in mid 2014. NIEA do not issue licenses in respect of the period from December to June as, during that period, pregnant badgers and female badgers with dependent young, are underground.

Tuberculin Test Supplier

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) when her Department changed the tuberculin supplier for the tuberculin test; (ii) how this change was implemented and over what period of time; and (iii) how this changed the sensitivity of the tuberculin test.
(AQW 22223/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

- (i) The Department changed supplier of tuberculin on 1st April 2007, as the previous supply was no longer available. The supplier is now the same for Ireland and Britain.
- (ii) From that date, all TB tests here were required to be conducted solely using the new supply of tuberculin.
- (iii) Tuberculin is produced to approved EU and international standards. Analysis in Britain indicates slightly decreased sensitivity and slightly increased specificity.

Farmers: Retirement

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what her Department is doing to assist farmers who are contemplating retirement and passing on their farm to family members.
(AQW 22224/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Farm Family Options (FFO) Business Mentoring Programme, which is funded under Axis 1 of the NI Rural Development Programme, is a programme of support designed to encourage farmers and farm family members to identify and consider opportunities for both their own future and that of the farm.

The Programme assists farmers and family members, with the support of an experienced agricultural business mentor, to discuss and consider the farm business' current position, address the main issues, opportunities and concerns, and develop a focused Action Plan for the future. This includes advice on succession planning and signposting to other sources of support and assistance. There is also the opportunity to avail of £250 financial support to seek legal or financial advice in relation to succession planning.

In the winter of 2012/13 CAFRE, in association with the FFO Business Mentoring Programme, organised 10 well attended Taxation and Succession Planning seminars across the country. Important issues such as personal and capital allowances, inheritance tax, and succession planning were covered.

The FFO Mentoring programme is open to all farmers and to date over 1,800 farm families have applied to the programme with almost 900 Action Plans completed.

Agri-food Branch Inspectors

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what are the projected costs of the enforcement training for Agri-food branch inspectors for the 2013/14 financial year.

(AQW 22233/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Department's Agri-food Inspection Branch implements a range of local and EU legislation relating to food & feed safety, plant health, bee health, beef classification & price reporting, product certification and marketing standards. This is achieved through a number of specialist teams of professional staff with expertise in food technology, agriculture and horticulture. It is necessary where non-compliance with legislation is identified that the most appropriate action is taken. This can on occasion require formal enforcement action and it is considered essential that inspection staff within the Branch are appropriately trained.

The training is accredited to Level 4 through the Open College Network and lasts for 6.5 days. Delivery costs associated with this training amount to approximately £3,000 per course. One course is planned for the 13/14 financial year.

Broadband: Rural Services

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 21414/11-15, whether there is a timescale by which the £5m must be spent.

(AQW 22258/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I understand that the Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) project, which is the vehicle for delivering my Departments £5m funding in rural areas, must be in place by the end of March 2015.

Broadband: Rural Services

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether her Department will fund individual rural broadband projects through rural partnerships.

(AQW 22259/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am interpreting rural partnerships to mean the Local Action Groups who deliver Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme. Under Axis 3 an applicant could apply to purchase equipment to gain access broadband. However this would have to be used by a rural business in its day to day operations or could be to set up a service that they would maintain and run as a business or community project for a minimum of 5 years from the date of any grant payment. They would have to apply to a competitive open call for applications in the Local Action Group area covering their location, a list of these can be found at

<http://www.dardni.gov.uk/index/rural-development/rdp-campaign/rdp-campaign-development-funding-schemes-and-programmes/rdp-campaign-development-rural-life/rdp-development-local-action-group-contacts.htm> .

Abandoned Animals: Protection for Landowners

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she plans to introduce legislation to protect landowners from incurring costs as a result of animals being abandoned on their land.

(AQW 22313/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Section 14 of the Welfare of Animals Act 2011 makes it an offence to abandon an animal for which that person is responsible for, irrespective of whether the animal suffers or not. My Department enforces the Act in relation to farmed animals and Councils who enforce the legislation in relation to non-farmed animals will take action against persons known to have abandoned an animal.

I understand that the Animals Order 1976, which is not the responsibility of my Department, provides any landowner on whose land animals have been abandoned with powers to either sell or retain the abandoned animals, subject to compliance with the conditions set out in the 1976 Order. This may certainly assist landowners in recouping associated costs.

Farmers and landowners are advised to take action to secure the gates to their land, particularly gates directly on the roadside, to ensure that as far as possible horses and other animals are not abandoned on their land.

I have no plans to introduce legislation for the protection of landowners from incurring costs as a result of animals being abandoned on their land.

Scrapie Monitored Flock Scheme

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) the reasons for compulsory participation in the Scrapie Monitored Flock Scheme for farmers who wish to maintain a breeding flock or herd for intra-community trade purposes; and (ii) whether she will consider removing such a prerequisite to enable sheep farmers to increase trade with the Republic of Ireland.

(AQW 22354/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

- (i) The Scrapie Monitored Flocks Scheme (SMFS) is a voluntary scheme for sheep and goat owners. The Scheme provides members with health assurance for their breeding flocks that enables them to obtain an Intra Trade Animal Health Certificate (ITAHC) for the export of their animals to the south and other Member States. This certification is an EU requirement under Regulation (EC) 999/2001 and Council Directive 91/68/EEC. Without the SMFS, DARD would be unable to provide the necessary veterinary support certification that facilitates completion of the ITAHC by an Authorised Veterinary Inspector. A similar scheme (also called the Scrapie Monitored Flocks Scheme) operates in the south.
- (ii) Like many farmers, I would prefer a situation where there is free movement of sheep and other animals on the island of Ireland as is envisaged under the All-Island Animal Health and Welfare Strategy, which was agreed by the North South Ministerial Council Ministers in March 2010. The new EU Animal Health Law (AHL), due to be published by the EU Commission in May 2013, aims to reduce administrative burdens and costs including relaxation of conditions relating to the movement of animals between member states, whilst ensuring risk-based controls are in place to reduce the incidence and impact of animal disease. The new AHL therefore represents a key opportunity for the free movement of animals on the island of Ireland, and may provide an opportunity to frame legislation in a way that could help attain this objective.

Following the publication of the EU AHL, formal negotiations will take place in regard to delegated and implementing acts so it is unlikely that changes to domestic legislation will come into effect for at least another two years. In the meantime, as is required under EU intra-community trade rules, the SMFS will continue to operate in order to facilitate the trade in breeding sheep on this island.

Agri-food Inspection Branch

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) the cost of enforcement training provided for staff from the Agri-food Inspection Branch in 2012/13; (ii) the location of the training; (iii) the duration of the training; and (iv) the accreditation provided on completion.

(AQW 22359/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The cost of enforcement training provided to Agri-food Inspection Branch Staff during 2012/13 amounts to approximately £6,000. This covers the cost of two courses run on 7 January and 21 January 2013 which trained 16 staff and 12 staff respectively. Each course lasts for 6½ days. The first course took place at the College of Agriculture Food and Rural Enterprise's (CAFRE) Greenmount Campus and the second at their Loughry Campus.

The course is accredited by the National Open College Network to the equivalent of NVQ level 4 and is known as Farm and Food Industry Regulation: Investigation, Compliance and Enforcement. Participants will receive a certificate if they successfully complete the course and associated assessments.

Agrifood Inspection Enforcement Legislation

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how agrifood inspection enforcement legislation has changed in the last five years.

(AQW 22360/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I refer the member to my previous answer AQW 22109/11-15.

Single Farm Payments: Common Agricultural Policy

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in relation to Single Farm Payment, to provide an estimate of the difference between what farmers currently receive compared to what they will receive under Common Agricultural Policy proposals in each constituency.

(AQW 22387/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: It is not possible to provide this information as future payments in each constituency will depend on a range of factors which are not yet known, such as the regional allocations of CAP monies, the payment model used to adjust payments towards a flat rate per hectare and the areas claimed by farmers each year. Intense negotiations are on-going in Brussels between the EU Commission, Council and Parliament aimed at arriving at a CAP reform agreement by the end of June 2013. It is only after this agreement has been reached that DARD can start to consider, in close consultation with stakeholders, the most appropriate farm support framework within the regional flexibilities that will be available to us.

Regeneration of Rural Villages

Ms McGahan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what funding opportunities are available for the regeneration of rural villages.

(AQW 22431/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Under Measure 3.5 Village Renewal of Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013, a budget of £12 million has been made available to the seven Joint Council Committees (JCCs) implementing the Axis on the Departments behalf. Of this £11.5m has been committed to Village Renewal projects.

The main purpose of the measure is to enable and encourage residents of villages and surrounding areas to create an integrated action plan to ensure the full potential of such areas is achieved and to support integrated village initiatives.

The programme is delivered by the seven Local Action Groups using the LEADER approach. The village renewal measure is open to all rural groups representing villages in the North, regardless of size and capacity.

Hardship Funding Applications

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether there is a timeframe for when hardship funding applications will be processed.

(AQW 22437/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I intend to bring details of the hardship scheme to the Executive for agreement very shortly. The scheme, based on EU de minimis Rules, capped at €7,500, will be framed in light of the information gathered on the extent and nature of losses, which we have been building as farmers had stock removed and disposed of by the approved renderers.

The scheme will be brought forward as quickly as possible and I hope to release details in the very near future.

Pesticides Containing Neonicotinoids

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she intends to lobby her counterparts in the UK and the Republic of Ireland about a restriction on the use of pesticides containing neonicotinoids on crops that do not attract bees or other pollinators.

(AQW 22499/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I recognise that there are a range of environmental and economic concerns relating to neonicotinoid insecticides. A proportionate and evidence-based approach should be taken to this issue, considering all of the many factors that affect bee populations.

It is important to note that the vast majority of neonicotinoids are used for the treatment of seeds and their use here in the north is relatively limited. Pesticide usage statistics from 2010, provided by the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute, indicate that the neonicotinoids were used for seed treatment on 0.6% of the agricultural land area in the north of Ireland.

Field trials recently commissioned by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on the impact of neonicotinoids on bees were inconclusive, but considered that while the possibility of adverse impacts are a concern, doubts remain about actual exposure in the field. Further research is, however justified to strengthen the evidence available.

The European Commission has indicated that it will shortly prohibit the use of 3 neonicotinoids for seed treatment, soil application and foliar treatment on bee attractive crops. The sale of these neonicotinoids to amateur growers will also be prohibited.

It is very clear that bees and pollinators face many problems unrelated to neonicotinoids and it is vital to understand them and take all the evidence into account. Restrictions on the use of neonicotinoids on crops that do not attract bees or pollinators would not be a proportionate response to the evidence we have available.

I will continue to look at bee health in the round and take whatever action is appropriate to safeguard these valuable creatures.

Single Farm Payments: Applications

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in relation to the outcome of the A5 road scheme, to outline the implications for farmers who had their land vested and will now be including it again on their Single Farm Payment application.

(AQW 22516/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am aware that the vesting of this land has affected its use in a number of different ways and that some of these (for example, if the land has been bulldozed) may have implications for Single Farm Payment (SFP).

To claim 2013 SFP, the land must be at the farmer's disposal on 15 May 2013, they must be undertaking agricultural activity on it and it must be in an eligible use throughout the year. If the land has been returned to the farmer in April 2013, then it is unlikely that these requirements can be met. However, under the force majeure provisions it may still be possible to use this land to support a 2013 SFP claim. For force majeure to be considered, any land that has been temporarily removed from agricultural use must be returned to agricultural use within the calendar year in order to meet the SFP eligibility requirements.

My advice to any farmer who had their land vested as part of the A5 road scheme, and where that land is now available to the farmer again for agricultural use, is to include the land on their 2013 Single Application and, when submitting this application, attach a request for force majeure to be considered. Each request received under force majeure will be considered individually.

It must also be pointed out that completion of the A5 is an Executive commitment and that will continue in due course.

Extreme Weather Conditions: Hardship Fund for Farmers

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how the hardship fund for farmers affected by the adverse weather will be allocated.

(AQW 22574/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I have obtained Executive agreement to hardship funding measures to assist farmers worst affected by livestock losses arising from the recent snow storm.

The first element of these measures is that DARD is paying for the costs of collection and disposal of fallen stock that have died as a direct result of the snow storm. The second element will be a Hardship Payments Scheme, which will help to mitigate the costs of the livestock losses that have been sustained by farmers arising from the snow storm. This will be under the EU de minimis rules and capped at a maximum of 7,500 euro per farmer, including the collection and disposal costs of the fallen animals. Farmers, who had livestock losses as a result of the snow storm and had fallen stock disposed of during the period 2 April – 19 April 2013 by approved renderers, will be eligible for the hardship funding.

I intend to bring details of the Hardship Payments Scheme to the Executive for agreement very shortly. The scheme will be framed in light of the information gathered on the extent and nature of losses, which we have been building as farmers have had stock removed and disposed of by the approved renderers.

The scheme will be brought forward as quickly as possible and I hope to release details in the very near future.

Farm Buildings

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how eligible farmers can avail of rural development funding to improve farm sheds and buildings in less favoured areas.

(AQO 3959/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Funding to improve farm sheds and buildings is not available under the Rural Development Programme 2007 - 2013. Capital grant support to farm businesses is available under the Farm Modernisation Programme, which aims to improve the economic performance through better use of production including the introduction of new technologies and innovation. It also covers improving the environmental, occupational safety, hygiene and animal welfare of the agricultural holdings. However, it is a small scale capital grant scheme which covers plant, machinery and equipment only and does not provide for improvements or repairs to farm sheds and buildings. Support for upgrading or replacement of farm buildings may be supported under the next Rural Development Programme, which will go out for public consultation later in the year.

Farmers: Banking Facilities

Mr Lytle asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she has any plans to meet with banks to ensure that there are adequate financial provisions, such as extra overdrafts, for those farmers that have found themselves in financial trouble as a result of the severe weather.

(AQO 3960/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Yes, I intend to meet with the banks again which is a follow on from my previous meetings. It is important that I do so due to the ongoing impact of the severe weather on farmers. I will seek to gain an assurance from the banks that they will provide farmers with the necessary support and financial flexibility to allow them to deal with the additional costs associated with the severe weather and the delay in the turnout of livestock to grass this spring due to the continuing unseasonal low temperatures.

You are aware I announced The Hardship Scheme which should support those farmers worst affected by the severe weather at the end of March.

Ash Dieback

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on her efforts to tackle Chalara Fraxinea. (AQO 3961/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: As a result of general surveillance and trace-forward exercises to date, 56 premises have been confirmed positive for Chalara fraxinea; 53 in recently planted sites and 3 findings in nursery/retail/trade situations.

Statutory Plant Health Notices requiring destruction of affected ash saplings and plant debris have been issued. Forest Service has provided assistance to ensure the sites were dealt with swiftly.

We are co-operating closely with authorities in the South on a "Fortress Ireland" type approach and with the authorities in Britain on our response to this disease. We are currently considering views from stakeholders on our draft All-Ireland Chalara Control Strategy and hope to publish this shortly. This Strategy seeks to address the risk of the disease becoming established in the wider environment; support research around spread of disease and resistance; encourage stakeholder and public engagement; and plan for resilience should the disease become established.

As part of the Strategy, the Department is commencing its 2013 survey of Ash for any symptoms of the disease. We are adopting a risk-based; intelligence-led; targeted approach. The survey covers all of the North, including recently-planted sites of ash in public & private woodland; roadside plantings; established trees & hedgerows and nursery surveillance. Any suspect trees will be sampled and undergo laboratory testing for the pathogen.

The focus of our earlier winter survey was surveillance on plants and trees planted within the last 5 years. During this exercise, 1,045 premises were surveyed.

I am grateful for stakeholders' co-operation as together we seek to tackle this disease. Stakeholder engagement has continued with the most recent event held on 25 April 2013. The event provided an overview of work to date; a research update; an overview of the All-Ireland Control Strategy; an outline of the 2013 Surveillance Plan; and ongoing plans for stakeholder and public engagement.

DARD: Headquarters

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what discussions she had with her departmental staff before announcing that her Department's headquarters would move to Ballykelly. (AQO 3962/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has consulted and continues to consult staff in Dundonald House and Hydebank in relation to the relocation of the headquarters. Under our agreed industrial relations mechanisms, known as the Whitley arrangements, a subcommittee of departmental and staff representatives was established, specifically to consult formally with NIPSA on all issues relating to relocation. The first meeting of the subcommittee was on January 2012 and the committee now meets on a monthly basis.

As I have outlined previously in this chamber, I am committed to keeping my Departmental staff fully informed of developments: this is achieved through regular monthly updates in the DARD staff magazine, regular notices to staff from my Permanent Secretary and recently my officials have developed a dedicated HQ Relocation Intranet site which contains all the key information for staff to access. This site also encourages staff to provide feedback and ask questions.

I would like to assure you that I remain committed to keeping staff fully informed and engaged throughout the programme both directly and through NIPSA. Engagement with NIPSA to date has been extensive and meaningful, and I intend to ensure that that continues.

Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute, Loughgall

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline any plans for the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute at Loughgall, Co. Armagh. (AQO 3963/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The facilities at Loughgall represent one of six DARD owned sites currently occupied by AFBI. I have no plans at this point in time to make any changes to AFBI's facilities at Loughgall.

Flood Alleviation: South Belfast

Mr Maskey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on flood alleviation measures in South Belfast. (AQO 3964/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am very aware of the hardship and distress caused by flooding and I have visited South Belfast to see at first hand the work being undertaken by Rivers Agency to reduce the risk of further flooding.

Rivers Agency has completed a number of investigations, undertaken improvement works, identified further work and where further investigation is required. Areas investigated include Orchardville, Ashton, Sicily, Greystown, Stockmans Lane and Ormonde. In undertaking this work, Rivers Agency has continued to liaise with their counterparts in NI Water and Roads Service.

Works completed to date have included repairs to infrastructure and the removal of obstructions. Rivers Agency has also taken on the maintenance responsibility of watercourses, at public expense, to ensure free flow. Rivers Agency is also working with utility companies to remove services which are obstructing a number of watercourses in the area.

In relation to Ashton Park, further investigatory work is being undertaken to identify the location and condition of the privately owned sewer network. In relation to the Sicily Park and Greystown areas the Agency is liaising with NI Water who are undertaking a study to identify the most cost effective option to reduce the risk of flooding.

While there is further work to do I am reassured that the work done to date has already reduced the risk of further flooding and the future actions planned will further improve matters.

Social Clauses

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how her Department is using social clauses in procurement contracts.

(AQO 3965/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Since publication of the Programme for Government (PfG) commitment to include social clauses in all public procurement contracts for supplies, services and construction, my Department has entered into 37 contracts over the value of £30k, all of which included social clauses. The total value of these contracts was £23m.

These contracts included clauses on Equality, Health and Safety and Early Payment. Some also included clauses in relation to providing opportunities for the unemployed, apprentices and students; providing work experience or employment opportunities; and opportunities for employees to develop essential skills.

I will continue to seek to maximise all possible opportunities to incorporate social clauses in the Department's future contracts.

Extreme Weather Conditions: Livestock Loss

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development when she will confirm the final numbers of sheep and cattle lost because of the snow around Easter.

(AQO 3966/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The collection and disposal by my Department of sheep and cattle, lost because of the snow around Easter, concluded last week. This was a huge exercise for the Department, involving over 40,000 sheep, goats and cattle. The final exact figures are being ratified as part of the Hardship Funding Scheme, but the latest figures are 43,558 sheep and 1,142 cattle.

Rural Childcare

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how she is addressing the lack of rural childcare provision.

(AQO 3967/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: As you know DARD does not hold primary responsibility for Childcare service provision. However between 2009 and 2011, as part of our wider poverty and social inclusion work, the Department developed and implemented the Rural Childcare Programme. This was 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 was subsequently provided to OFMDFM to help influence the development of the new Childcare Strategy for the north. OFMDFM is taking the lead role in developing and co-ordinating the Strategy, working in partnership with other Government Departments which have lead responsibility for key policies relevant to childcare.

OFMDFM launched their 'Towards a Childcare Strategy' for consultation in December 2012. The consultation period closed on 5 March 2013 and my officials have met with OFMDFM officials to discuss some of the emerging findings. Early indications are that there is a growing need for childcare provision, particularly in rural areas, for children of school age to enable parents to access employment, education and training.

I have asked my officials to work with OFMDFM to identify needs with the aim of bringing forward a childcare initiative to assist those living in rural areas who find it difficult to access childcare provision.

Single Farm Payments: Tree Felling

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether older trees are at risk of being felled during the mapping process in the calculation of entitlement to Single Farm Payment.

(AQO 3968/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: At this stage, DARD has no evidence to suggest that older trees are at risk of being felled.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Physical Fitness

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the targets set by her Department to improve people's physical fitness and the actions she is taking to meet the targets.

(AQW 22356/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): Responsibility for improving people's physical fitness rests, in the first instance, with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. Having said that, my Department's strategy for sport, Sport Matters, recognises the role that sport and physical recreation can play in improving public health and related fitness. For this reason, Sport Matters contains 11 targets that are specifically designed to increase participation in sport and physical recreation across the population. These participation targets are set out in the published Sport Matters strategy which is available on the DCAL website at:

http://www.dcalni.gov.uk/sport_matters.pdf

The targets themselves are also designed to be consistent with Chief Medical Officer recommendations in relation to healthy physical activity. The actions being taken to meet these targets are fully set out in the related Sport Matters Action Plan. This Action Plan has also been published and can be accessed on the Sport NI website at:

<http://www.sportni.net/about/SportMatters/Sport+Matters+Implementation>

Líofa 2015

Ms Fearon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the Líofa 2015 initiative.

(AQO 3977/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Since its launch in September 2011, over 3800 people have signed up to the Líofa campaign, so excellent progress has been made towards achieving the overall target of 5000 participants by 2015. These figures reflect the high level of interest in the campaign and the support it has received across the north of Ireland.

I have introduced a number of measures to provide practical support to Líofa participants. On 11th April I launched the Gaeltacht Bursary Scheme making 100 places available to assist people who might otherwise not be able to afford to attend an Irish Language Gaeltacht course. Foras na Gaeilge in conjunction with DCAL will develop and implement a dedicated Líofa website as part of their all Ireland portal website. The website will enhance the learning experience for Líofa participants.

This year's Líofa birthday party will be held in Derry, as part of the City of Culture. The event will be held in early September and will provide a focus for individuals and Irish Language organisations with the aim of promoting and publicising the Irish Language to all.

My Department's Líofa Development Officer has met with East Belfast Mission to discuss how we can assist their work and provide practical support to encourage uptake to Líofa.

Sports Governing Bodies

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure why there has been a delay in the funding for sports' governing bodies.

(AQO 3978/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have been informed by Sport NI that there has been no delay in the funding for sports' governing bodies in terms of recurrent costs. My Department is currently considering the detail of a business case that proposes additional funding to sports' governing bodies under the Athlete Investment Programme. That programme aims to bring improved athlete performance through providing opportunities for athletes to avail of appropriate training and competition programmes. It also aims to enable governing bodies of sport to support identified talented athletes to develop their full potential and achieve international sporting success.

Motorsport

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline her plans to improve facilities at motor sport tracks including Kirkistown, Bishopscourt and Nutts Corner.

(AQO 3979/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Responsibility for improving facilities at motor sport tracks, including Kirkistown, Bishopscourt and Nutts Corner, rests in the first instance with the owners and operators of the circuits.

In 2009 my Department, through Sport NI, provided £2m to motorsport to help bring about health and safety improvements at a number of venues across the north of Ireland. This included improvement works at Kirkistown, Bishopscourt and Nutts Corner motor sport tracks.

I can confirm that Sport NI has recently awarded a further £338,000 funding to assist the development of motorsports generally across the north, including motorsports that use Kirkistown, Bishopscourt and Nutts Corner. Any bids for additional

funding, should they materialise, would need to be considered in the context of my strategy for sport, Sport Matters, and my related priorities for promoting equality and tackling poverty and social exclusion.

DCAL: Capital Projects

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for her assessment of whether the £24.8 million overspend on the seven capital projects represents value for money.

(AQO 3980/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Department has received the NIAO report, has accepted all the recommendations contained within it and is taking action where appropriate.

I cannot comment further at this point as the Assembly's Public Accounts Committee has indicated that it will consider all NIAO reports either by way of evidence session or by written correspondence. It is therefore important that any comments should not pre-empt or pre-judge any evidence that might be given at a subsequent PAC hearing or in correspondence with the Committee.

Casement Park

Mr F McCann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the Casement Park stadium project following her recent meetings with stakeholders.

(AQO 3981/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: At the invitation of Paul Maskey, MP for West Belfast, I met with a number of representatives of community and resident groups with regard to the Casement Park redevelopment.

There is significant support within the wider community for this redevelopment, particularly with regard to the regenerative positive socio-economic impacts that will accrue.

I also met with representatives of the residents association and discussed with them initiatives which they feel will positively impact the final stadium delivery and also some concerns they may have.

I have asked my officials to review these suggestions and to revert to me as soon as possible with an update.

It is important for Ulster Council GAA and the wider area that this development goes ahead but it is also important that it has the support of the wider community and my Department is working closely with Ulster Council GAA, residents and community groups to ensure this happens.

Arts and Culture: East Belfast

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what plans her Department has to promote arts and culture in East Belfast.

(AQO 3982/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department, and its arms length bodies, work to promote arts and culture in East Belfast across a range of areas.

For example:

The Arts Council is working with the East Belfast Partnership Board in developing an arts and cultural strategy for East Belfast. The Arts Council provided £5k to the East Belfast Arts Festival in 2012 and is currently working with the festival organisers on funding for the 2013 Festival.

The Closing Ceremony for the World Police and Fire Games will be held on the Titanic Slipways on the 10th August 2013.

Foras na Gaeilge funds the Irish Language Officer post in East Belfast Mission. Irish language lessons are held regularly in East Belfast and the first ever intensive course (dianchúrsa) took place there in the East Belfast Mission in March.

National Museums engage with older people in East Belfast through its Live and Learn Programme. National Museums have used their collections to develop and deliver a cross community project with schools from East Belfast.

Libraries NI deliver an extensive programme of exhibitions, cultural events and activities in East Belfast each year e.g reading groups, writing groups, exhibitions by local arts clubs as well as special seasonal events, particularly for children.

Department of Education

Integrated Education

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Education what action his Department is taking to meet the rising demand for integrated education at both primary and post-primary level.

(AQW 21998/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): My Department takes its statutory duty to encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education very seriously.

In any year, the popularity of a school sector is most appropriately measured by the number of parents expressing a first preference on the application/transfer form for schools in that sector.

Within the integrated sector, the number of places available in both the primary and post-primary sectors slightly exceeds demand, although there may be pressure in particular areas, or for particular schools, due to parental preference.

Where pressure on places exists at a school, the Department will consider any request from a school for a temporary increase to its admission and/or enrolment numbers. Temporary variations will not be granted if there are other schools of the same sector within reasonable travelling distance with spaces available. Each case is considered on its own merits.

In the longer term, the Area Planning process aims to assess the demand for places in every sector based on robust and verifiable evidence. Where there is identified need the school managing authority will consider that need in the overall context of the area plan and if appropriate bring forward a Development Proposal to increase the number of places.

In addition, any existing grant-aided school, with the exception of a special school, may consider transforming to integrated status.

Centre of Procurement Expertise

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 18559/11-15, on what basis the 3 percent saving has been calculated.

(AQW 22160/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The 3 percent saving referred to in AQW 18559/11-15 is based on initial discussions with the Central Procurement Directorate (CPD). 3 percent savings should be achievable when CPD has been able to aggregate ESA's current and future requirements along with the NICS's current and existing demand.

Selection Process used to Appoint Commissioners

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Education what criteria or selection process his Department implements when appointing commissioners to, or advisory groups for, panels, such as the Advancing Shared Education Panel.

(AQW 22205/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The panel members for the Ministerial Advisory Group on Advancing Shared Education were chosen and appointed by me, based on their experience of cultural and social issues facing our society.

Shared and Integrated Education

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education to outline the differences between shared and integrated education.[R]

(AQW 22227/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Shared Education encompasses a number of different types of sharing, from projects and shared classes through to shared education models, such as those defined in the Bain report (eg: Federations/Confederations; Shared Campus and Shared Faith schools).

Under Article 64 (1) of The Education Reform (NI) Order 1989, integrated education is defined as "the education together at school of Protestant and Roman Catholic pupils."

The Terms of Reference for the Ministerial Advisory Group on Advancing Shared Education defined Shared Education as:

"the organisation and delivery of education so that it: meets the needs of, and provides for the education together of, learners from all Section 75 categories and socio-economic status; involves schools and other education providers of differing ownership, sectoral identity and ethos, management type or governance arrangements; and delivers educational benefits to learners, promotes the efficient and effective use of resources, and promotes equality of opportunity, good relations, equality of identity, respect for diversity and community cohesion".

By its nature, Shared Education involves more than one school type. This view has been endorsed by the Ministerial Advisory Group, which further refined the definition to "...involves two or more schools or other education institutions from different sectors working in collaboration..."

St Mary's Primary School, Annaclone

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Education how many additional places were awarded to St Mary's Primary School, Annaclone; and the reasons for the permitted increase.

(AQW 22311/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department awarded one additional place to St Mary's Primary School on the basis that there is no other alternative maintained primary school within reasonable travelling distance of the child's home.

Drumcree College, Portadown

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Education for an update on the position of Drumcree College, Portadown.
(AQW 22312/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As a maintained post-primary school it is the responsibility of the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), in the first instance, to manage provision in the maintained schools' estate and to bring forward proposals to the Department of Education (DE). Any significant change to the schools' estate, such as a school closure, would require the publication of a statutory Development Proposal to support that intent.

I am aware that the SELB post-primary area plan indicates Drumcree College is not sustainable or viable in its current format and that a managed and phased closure is required. I understand that CCMS has now completed the business case to support this process and have been advised that consultation with stakeholders took place on Tuesday 30 April 2013.

To date a Development Proposal seeking the closure of Drumcree College has not been submitted to my Department.

Education and Skills Authority

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education how many items of correspondence he has received by mail, email or other means (i) supporting; and (ii) opposing the Education and Skills Authority since the introduction of the Education Bill.
(AQW 22335/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have received 61 letters regarding various elements of the Education Bill since its introduction on 2 October 2012.

School Curriculum: Sexual Orientation

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 21936/11-15, (i) why sexual orientation is not mainstreamed throughout all stages of learning; and (ii) why pupils do not learn about homophobia in the same way they learn about racism and sectarianism, given that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people are two and a half times more likely to attempt suicide and are one and a half times more likely to suffer depression, anxiety disorders and dependence on alcohol and other substances.

(AQW 22337/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education (Curriculum Content) Order (NI) 2007 sets out the detailed requirements of what schools must teach under each Area of Learning within the revised curriculum at each key stage. There is no statutory requirement at any Key Stage for schools to teach about sexual orientation.

The Department's Guidance to schools does require schools to have in place a written policy on Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE), which has been subject to consultation with parents and endorsed by the Board of Governors. Guidance provided by the Department of Education states that RSE must be delivered in schools within a moral framework and taught in a sensitive manner that is in keeping with the ethos of the school and which is appropriate to the needs and maturity of their pupils. The Department's Guidance for Post-primary Schools on Relationships and Sexuality Education states that the issue of sexual orientation should be handled by schools in a sensitive, non-confrontational and reassuring way.

In developing or reviewing their RSE policy, schools have been advised to take account of guidance produced by the Equality Commission on eliminating sexual orientation discrimination. This guidance relates to the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (NI) 2006, which gives all pupils the right to learn in a safe environment, to be treated with respect and dignity and not be treated any less favourably on the grounds of their actual or perceived sexual orientation.

The Department recognises that young people face a range of pressures during their teenage years. Our focus is on promoting the positive emotional health and wellbeing of pupils. The "i-Matter" Programme recognises the significant role that schools can play in raising awareness of emotional health, developing the confidence and coping skills of pupils and in offering early intervention when pupils are experiencing stress.

The Programme is a vehicle to integrate a school's individual policies and support systems in a consistent and coherent way and was developed with the involvement of working groups made up of key people from other departments, professionals in the mental health field, schools and the voluntary sector.

One of the 'products' from the working groups which has been particularly successful is a range of diary inserts on topics of concern to young people such as self esteem, sexual identity, substance abuse and relationships.

In addition, the Independent Counselling Service for Schools (ICSS) offers a professional counselling service to young people in post primary schools during difficult and vulnerable periods in their lives.

Peace-building and Conflict Resolution Centre at the Maze/Long Kesh Site

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Education what action he has taken, and intends to take, to generate interest among schools in supporting and visiting the proposed peace-building and conflict resolution centre at the Maze/Long Kesh site.
(AQW 22376/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I welcome the recent announcement about the proposed Peace Centre and the educational opportunities this will provide for schools. I believe it is important for pupils to have opportunities to explore social conflict, human rights and

democracy and these are provided through Citizenship education which sits at the core of the curriculum and is included under compulsory areas of learning for pupils from Year 1 to Year 12.

The revised curriculum provides teachers with greater flexibility to decide on the educational resources and programmes they wish to use to enhance their teaching and to meet the needs of their pupils. In matters such as educational visits it would be up to individual schools to choose the venues they feel would most benefit their pupils.

When the Peace Building and Conflict Resolution Centre is operational the Department of Education will disseminate any related educational materials to schools via the channels available over the C2k's Education Network service, for example the C2k Exchange. Video content could be stored in the Video on Demand service in Equella, the new digital repository for schools and the new online learning platform, Fronter, could be used to hold a wide variety of resources that teachers could use in the context of their own classroom needs.

Area Planning Coordinating Group: Council for Catholic Maintained Schools

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 21787/11-15, why the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools has two representatives on the Area Planning Coordinating Group.

(AQW 22411/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Area Planning Co-ordinating Group has been superseded by the Area Planning Steering Group (APSG), which has been established to support my Department in its work to co-ordinate and oversee the continued development of area planning.

I refer the Member to my answer to his previous question on the membership of this group AQW 21402/11-15, published in the Official Report on 12 April 2013. This indicates that CCMS has one representative on the APSG.

'Taking Boys Seriously' Report

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 21399/11-15, whether he has any plans to encourage the education system to implement the recommendations contained in the report.

(AQW 22413/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Taking Boys Seriously report was published in November 2012, at that stage my Department circulated it to schools, Education and Library Boards, the Education and Training Inspectorate and policy makers. The report was also given a wide distribution across the youth sector and was placed on the Department's website.

The authors of the report from the Centre for Young Men's Studies at the University of Ulster have presented their findings to my officials and those in the Department of Justice. I am aware that they have also engaged widely with a range of representative groups across the education sector, including making presentations to the National Association of Head Teachers (NI) and the National Union of Teachers.

While dissemination of the report's findings continues, I would encourage everyone in the education sector to read the report and consider what actions they can take to ensure that its recommendations lead to more positive outcomes for all our children and young people.

Primary School Places

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what assistance his Department is providing for parents who have yet to find a primary school place for their children.

(AQW 22441/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards are responsible for administering the admissions process and Transfer Officers from the Boards will continue to work with parents to ensure all children are placed for September 2013.

Primary 1 and Nursery Places: East Antrim

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of (i) primary 1; and (ii) nursery pupils for the 2013-14 intake in East Antrim who did not receive a place in their first choice school or nursery unit.

(AQW 22459/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The North Eastern Education and Library Board has advised me that the number of primary and nursery pupils for the 2013 intake who did not receive a place in their first choice school or nursery unit, are as provided in the tables below.

School Name	Number of children not selected at 1st Preference – Primary School
Eden Primary School, Carrickfergus	5
Greenisland Primary School	2
Woodlawn Primary School	1

School Name	Number of children not selected at 1st Preference – Primary School
Acorn Integrated Primary School	9

Name of Nursery Unit	Number of children not selected at 1st Preference- Nursery Unit
Acorn Nursery Unit	17
Oakfield Nursery Unit	19
Silverstream Nursery Unit	6

Nursery Places: East Antrim

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of nursery places available in East Antrim for 2013-14, broken down by unit.

(AQW 22460/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The number of primary 1 and nursery places available in East Antrim Constituency for 2013/14 are as detailed in the table below.

Constituency	School Name	Approved Nursery Enrolment Number 2013/14	Approved Primary School Enrolment Number 2013/14
East Antrim	Sunnylands Nursery School	104	
East Antrim	Monkstown Nursery School	78	
East Antrim	St Anthony's Nursery School	52	
East Antrim	Carnalbanagh Primary School		8
East Antrim	Larne and Inver Primary School		34
East Antrim	Carrickfergus Model Primary School		58
East Antrim	Olderfleet Primary School		28
East Antrim	Woodburn Primary School		28
East Antrim	Mullaghduh Primary School		11
East Antrim	Eden Primary School		30
East Antrim	Glynn Primary School		15
East Antrim	Ballycarry Primary School		17
East Antrim	Greenisland Primary School		57
East Antrim	Carrickfergus Central Primary School		33
East Antrim	Whiteabbey Primary School		59
East Antrim	Upper Ballyboley Primary School		14
East Antrim	Sunnylands Primary School		41
East Antrim	Moyle Primary School	52	46
East Antrim	Whitehead Primary School	52	56
East Antrim	Linn Primary School	52	54
East Antrim	Victoria Primary School	52	82
East Antrim	Toreagh Primary School		16
East Antrim	Silverstream Primary School	26	30
East Antrim	Hollybank Primary School		60
East Antrim	Woodlawn Primary School		44
East Antrim	Oakfield Primary School	52	53

Constituency	School Name	Approved Nursery Enrolment Number 2013/14	Approved Primary School Enrolment Number 2013/14
East Antrim	Cairncastle Primary School		20
East Antrim	Glenann Primary School		9
East Antrim	St Mary's Primary School	52	30
East Antrim	Seaview Primary School		17
East Antrim	St Anthony's Primary School		60
East Antrim	St John's Primary School	52	27
East Antrim	St James' Primary School	78	55
East Antrim	St Patrick's Primary School		19
East Antrim	St Ciaran's Primary School		15
East Antrim	St Nicholas' Primary School		30
East Antrim	St Macnissi's Primary School		30
East Antrim	Kilcoan Primary School		12
East Antrim	Carnlough Controlled Integrated Primary School		9
East Antrim	Corran Integrated Primary School	26	29
East Antrim	Acorn Integrated Primary School	26	29

Primary 1 Places: East Antrim

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of primary 1 places available in East Antrim for 2013-14, broken down by school.

(AQW 22461/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The number of primary 1 and nursery places available in East Antrim Constituency for 2013/14 are as detailed in the table below.

Constituency	School Name	Approved Nursery Enrolment Number 2013/14	Approved Primary School Enrolment Number 2013/14
East Antrim	Sunnylands Nursery School	104	
East Antrim	Monkstown Nursery School	78	
East Antrim	St Anthony's Nursery School	52	
East Antrim	Carnalbanagh Primary School		8
East Antrim	Larne and Inver Primary School		34
East Antrim	Carrickfergus Model Primary School		58
East Antrim	Olderfleet Primary School		28
East Antrim	Woodburn Primary School		28
East Antrim	Mullaghduh Primary School		11
East Antrim	Eden Primary School		30
East Antrim	Glynn Primary School		15
East Antrim	Ballycarry Primary School		17
East Antrim	Greenisland Primary School		57
East Antrim	Carrickfergus Central Primary School		33
East Antrim	Whiteabbey Primary School		59
East Antrim	Upper Ballyboley Primary School		14

Constituency	School Name	Approved Nursery Enrolment Number 2013/14	Approved Primary School Enrolment Number 2013/14
East Antrim	Sunnylands Primary School		41
East Antrim	Moyle Primary School	52	46
East Antrim	Whitehead Primary School	52	56
East Antrim	Linn Primary School	52	54
East Antrim	Victoria Primary School	52	82
East Antrim	Toreagh Primary School		16
East Antrim	Silverstream Primary School	26	30
East Antrim	Hollybank Primary School		60
East Antrim	Woodlawn Primary School		44
East Antrim	Oakfield Primary School	52	53
East Antrim	Cairncastle Primary School		20
East Antrim	Glenann Primary School		9
East Antrim	St Mary's Primary School	52	30
East Antrim	Seaview Primary School		17
East Antrim	St Anthony's Primary School		60
East Antrim	St John's Primary School	52	27
East Antrim	St James' Primary School	78	55
East Antrim	St Patrick's Primary School		19
East Antrim	St Ciaran's Primary School		15
East Antrim	St Nicholas' Primary School		30
East Antrim	St Macnissi's Primary School		30
East Antrim	Kilcoan Primary School		12
East Antrim	Carnlough Controlled Integrated Primary School		9
East Antrim	Corran Integrated Primary School	26	29
East Antrim	Acorn Integrated Primary School	26	29

Catholic Certificate in Religious Education

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education whether an integrated school can require a Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies as a prerequisite qualification.

(AQW 22475/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There has never been a requirement to possess the Certificate in Religious Education to work in Integrated Primary Schools. However, Boards of Governors of Integrated Primary schools may decide to seek the Certificate in Religious Education as a job related criterion, such as for teachers whose responsibility it is to prepare pupils, in years 3, 4 and 7, for their sacraments. In these instances, the Certificate would be required as a prerequisite qualification.

Central Procurement Directorate

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 19802/11-15, on what date the report was completed.

(AQW 22486/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The paper detailing the transfer of the CoPE function for supplies and services to the Central Procurement Directorate was completed in April 2012.

Shared Education Programme

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education to detail the (i) schools which have participated, or are participating, in the Shared Education Programme referred to in the Report of The Ministerial Advisory Group; (ii) funding given to those schools

for participation in the Shared Education exercise; and (iii) whether the source of this funding was from the public or private sector.

(AQW 22497/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Shared Education Programme referred to in the Ministerial Advisory Group report is funded by the International Fund for Ireland and, in line with the Fund's policy, any queries in relation to this programme should be directed to the Chair of the Fund.

Academic Selection

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education under what rationale the Report of the Ministerial Advisory Group breached its Terms of Reference by recommending that academic selection to grammar schools be made illegal.

(AQW 22498/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Ministerial Advisory Group on Advancing Shared Education did not breach its Terms of Reference.

The Terms of Reference tasked the Group with taking account of 'any barriers to the advancement of shared education'.

Based on their research, the Ministerial Advisory Group concluded that, in their view, academic selection is one such barrier to advancing shared education.

Gallagher and Smith Main Report

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education to place in the Assembly library a copy of the book referred to in footnotes 4, 9, 10 and 87 of the Gallagher and Smith Main Report, published by his Department in 2000.

(AQW 22500/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am not aware of any recent references that the Department has made specifically to the publication referred to in footnotes 4, 9, 10 and 87 of the Gallagher and Smith Main Report on the Effects of the Selective System of Secondary Education here. The Department does not hold a copy of this publication and it appears to be out of print. It will therefore not be possible to place a copy in the Assembly library.

Gallagher and Smith Main Report

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education why his Department continues to reference the book cited in footnotes 4, 9, 10 and 87 of the Gallagher and Smith Main Report on the Selective System of Secondary Education published by his Department in 2000.

(AQW 22502/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am not aware of any recent references that the Department has made specifically to the publication referred to in footnotes 4, 9, 10 and 87 of the Gallagher and Smith Main Report on the Effects of the Selective System of Secondary Education here. The Department does not hold a copy of this publication and it appears to be out of print. It will therefore not be possible to place a copy in the Assembly library.

Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment: A2 Level Moderators

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the number of A2 Level moderators employed by the Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment in the last five years; (ii) the percentage of those A2 Level moderators who were selected from the Grammar School sector, including retired people; and (iii) the percentage of those A2 Level moderators selected from the non-Grammar sector, including retired people.

(AQW 22530/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: CCEA does not select moderators on the basis of the sector in which they teach. Statistics provided in the table below are based on an interpretation of 'non-grammar' to include:

- Non-grammar post-primary school
- Integrated; and
- Training organisations

CCEA records do not hold data about previous places of employment for retired moderators or those employed by CCEA who did not have other permanent employment at the time of their employment with CCEA as a moderator. They are categorised below as 'other'.

Year	Number of A2 moderators employed by CCEA	Percentage employed from grammar sectors	Percentage employed from non-grammar sectors	Other
2008-09	101	40%	23%	37%
2009-10	91	44%	26%	30%

Year	Number of A2 moderators employed by CCEA	Percentage employed from grammar sectors	Percentage employed from non-grammar sectors	Other
2010-11	84	39%	31%	30%
2011-12	96	32%	41%	27%
2012-13	92	34%	41%	25%

Preschool Places: North Antrim

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of (i) funded; and (ii) non-funded pre-school places in North Antrim.

(AQW 22539/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In 2012/13, there are 1,338 funded pre-school education places in the North Antrim constituency area: 770 in statutory settings and 568 in voluntary and private settings.

The Department does not hold details of non-funded places in voluntary and private settings.

Primary School Places: North Antrim

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of primary one places in North Antrim.

(AQW 22540/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There are a total of 1628 primary 1 places in North Antrim for 2013/14. The table below details each school's approved admissions number.

School Name	Approved Admissions Number 2013/14 School Year
Longstone Primary School	10
Carrowreagh Primary School	15
Garryduff Primary School	10
Buick Memorial Primary School	60
Dunseverick Primary School	24
Kirkinriola Primary School	14
Harryville Primary School	30
Lislagan Primary School	16
Gracehill Primary School	58
Landhead Primary School	9
Eden Primary School	15
Straidbilly Primary School	15
Moorfields Primary School	30
Carnaghts Primary School	17
The Diamond Primary School	20
Clough Primary School	23
Kells & Connor Primary School	29
The Wm Pinkerton Memorial Primary School	23
Bushmills Primary School	30
Ballymena Primary School	53
Kilmoyle Primary School	18
Fourtowns Primary School	41
Knockahollet Primary School	15

School Name	Approved Admissions Number 2013/14 School Year
Broughshane Primary School	46
Ballykeel Primary School	58
Camphill Primary School	58
Leaney Primary School	46
Armoy Primary School	17
Dunclug Primary School	37
Rasharkin Primary School	24
Carniny Primary School	40
Cloughmills Primary School	20
Portglenone Primary School	29
Hazelbank Primary School	17
Balnamore Primary School	16
Bushvalley Primary School	25
Millquarter Primary School	21
St Mary's Primary School	4
St Mary's Primary School	29
St Mary's Primary School Glenravel	18
St Olcan's Primary School	14
Barnish Primary School	16
St Brigid's Primary School	15
St Anne's Primary School	13
Glenravel Primary School	23
St Patrick's Primary School	39
St Brigid's Primary School	44
St Patrick's Primary School	30
St Joseph's Primary School	43
St Patrick's & St Brigid's Primary School	58
St Colmcille's Primary School	46
St Brigid's Primary School	46
St Paul's Primary School	12
Gaelscoil an Chaistil	17
Ballymoney Controlled Integrated Primary School	59
Ballycastle Integrated Primary School	23
Braidside Integrated Primary School	50

Special Educational Needs

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 21050/11-15, to detail the number of statements that specify, in Part 3 of the statement, the number of classroom assistant hours allocated, broken down by Education and Library Board. (AQW 22546/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards have advised that detailing the number of statements that specify classroom assistant hours would be cost prohibitive.

Primary 1 Places: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the first choice applications for primary 1 places in each primary school in North Down for the 2013/14 academic year.

(AQW 22588/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The following figures, provided by the South Eastern Education and Library Board, confirm the number of first choice applications by parents for admission for a primary 1 place, and the total number of applications for each primary school in North Down for the 2013/14 academic year:-

School Name	1st Preference (including reception)	Total number of applications (including reception)
Ballyholme Primary School	93	124
Ballymagee Primary School	67	104
Ballyvester Primary School	18	23
Bangor Central Integrated Primary School	81	104
Bloomfield Primary School	61	76
Clandeboyne Primary School	32	47
Crawfordsburn Primary School	31	46
Donaghadee Primary School	58	63
Glencraig Primary School	45	53
Grange Park Primary School	69	93
Hollywood Primary School	63	81
Kilcooley Primary School	17	18
Kilmaine Primary School	104	133
Millisle Primary School	27	27
Rathmore Primary School	74	99
St Anne's Primary School, Donaghadee	5	6
St Comgall's Primary School, Bangor	57	62
St Malachy's Primary School, Bangor	56	68
St Patrick's Primary School, Hollywood	24	26
Towerview Primary School	53	78
Total	1,035	1,331

Notes:

1. The figures for first preference applications and total number of applications reflect the position as at the conclusion of the annual admissions procedure.
2. The figures exclude any children who are in receipt of a statement of special educational needs who are admitted over and above a schools' approved admissions number.
3. The figures for the total number of applications for primary 1 places, represent all applications considered by each school and include first, second and any other preference applications passed to them in the course of the process. Some of these applicants may therefore be included in the totals for more than one of the listed schools.

Primary 1 Places: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the total number of applications for primary 1 places for each primary school in North Down for 2013/14.

(AQW 22589/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The following figures, provided by the South Eastern Education and Library Board, confirm the number of first choice applications by parents for admission for a primary 1 place, and the total number of applications for each primary school in North Down for the 2013/14 academic year:-

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Donaghadee Primary School	58	63
Glencraig Primary School	45	53
Grange Park Primary School	69	93
Hollywood Primary School	63	81
Kilcooley Primary School	17	18
Kilmaine Primary School	104	133
Millisle Primary School	27	27
Rathmore Primary School	74	99
St Anne's Primary School, Donaghadee	5	6
St Comgall's Primary School, Bangor	57	62
St Malachy's Primary School, Bangor	56	68
St Patrick's Primary School, Hollywood	24	26
Towerview Primary School	53	78
Total	1,035	1,331

Notes:

- The figures for first preference applications and total number of applications reflect the position as at the conclusion of the annual admissions procedure.
- The figures exclude any children who are in receipt of a statement of special educational needs who are admitted over and above a schools' approved admissions number.
- The figures for the total number of applications for primary 1 places, represent all applications considered by each school and include first, second and any other preference applications passed to them in the course of the process. Some of these applicants may therefore be included in the totals for more than one of the listed schools.

Certificate of Religious Education

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Education how many teachers have taken up a position in a Council for Catholic Maintained School without holding a Certificate of Religious Education.

(AQO 3987/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools has advised that there are currently no teachers employed in permanent positions in a Catholic Maintained Nursery or Primary School who do not hold a Certificate of Religious Education.

A teacher is not required to hold the Certificate to teach in a post-primary school.

It is not, however, a mandatory requirement that teachers would hold this Certificate in order to take up the offer of substitute employment in a Catholic Maintained Primary or Nursery School. In practice schools engage a wide range of substitute teachers, many of whom will not have obtained the Certificate.

Preschool Places: Foyle

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Education, of the 1030 children who have remained unplaced after the first round of the allocation of pre-school places, to outline which pre-schools in the Foyle constituency are over-subscribed.

(AQO 3989/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: At this stage of the process there are 67 target age children unplaced and 135 places available in the Foyle constituency. These include both statutory nursery and voluntary/private pre-school settings.

There are 43 Pre-School settings in the constituency. At the end of stage 1 of the pre-school admissions process, 23 were oversubscribed with applications from target aged children.

In 2 settings the applications matched the admission number. Places remain available in the other 18 settings.

The table below provides further details on the pre-school settings in the Foyle constituency which were oversubscribed at the end of stage 1 and those settings with places remaining.

Pre-School Education for the Foyle Constituency 2013/14 – Position at End of Stage 1 of the Application Process

Nursery Schools	Admission Numbers	Total Number of Preferences	Spaces Left
Belmont Nursery	78	162	0
Bligh's Lane Nursery	52	67	0
Carnhill Nursery	52	81	0
Galliagh Nursery	52	73	0
Lisnagelvin Nursery	78	135	0
Strathfoyle Nursery	52	60	0
The Academy Nursery	78	120	14(1)
Trench Road Nursery	52	62	0

1. Afternoon session undersubscribed

Community Nursery Schools	Admission Numbers	Total Number of Preferences	Spaces Left
Ballyore	26	34	0
Eglinton	26	24	2

2. Undersubscribed plus one place to be re-allocated due to withdrawal of child

Primary Schools with Nursery Units	Admission Numbers	Total Number of Preferences	Spaces Left
Ashlea	26	33	0
Ebrington	52	56	0
Fountain	26	22	4
Glendermott	26	16	10
Good Shepherd	52	63	0
Greenhaw	52	76	0
Hollybush	52	41	11
Holy Child	52	50	3(2)
Holy Family	52	83	0
Londonderry Model	26	58	0
Longtower	26	38	0
Naiscoil Dhoire	26	16	10
Naiscoil Eadain Mhoir	26	24	2
Nazareth House	26	41	0
Oakgrove Integrated	52	60	0
Rosemount	52	77	0

Primary Schools with Nursery Units	Admission Numbers	Total Number of Preferences	Spaces Left
St Brigid's, Carnhill	26	42	0
St Eugene's	26	31	0
St Paul's, Slievemore	26	20	6
Steelstown	26	53	0

Playgroups	Admission Numbers	Total Number of Preferences	Spaces Left
Chapel Road Community	24	27	0
Craigbrack Pre School Group	16	8	8
Drumahoe Community	22	11	11
Eglinton Community Pre-School Centre	24	19	5
Little Acorns Pre School	10	3	7
Little Diamonds Community	16	10	6
Mullabuoy Pre School Centre	17	10	7
Naiscoil na Daroige	13	13	0
Park Community	20	21	0
Rainbow Child and Family Centre	21	11	10
St Bernadette's	24	6	18
St Josephs Community	16	16	0
Straidarran Community	23	22	1

Schools: Common Funding Scheme

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Education how he intends to support strategically important small schools in light of Sir Robert Salisbury's report on the Common Funding Formula recommending the removal of the Small Schools Support Factor. (AQO 3990/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am currently considering all the recommendations in the independent report on the Review of the Common Funding Scheme and their potential impact on all schools, including small schools.

There is no doubt that fundamental changes are needed in the way schools are funded and I intend to address the current inequalities.

For example, the report raised concerns that small schools support is currently provided to all small schools, irrespective of circumstances.

It recognised that some schools receive £14,000 per pupil per year to keep them in a small school whereas others, often in more needy areas receive, only £2,400.

I have said many times that schools will not be closed simply because they fall below a particular threshold. Where there is evidence that a small school is needed, for example to serve an isolated rural community, it should be retained and supported appropriately to ensure that its pupils receive an appropriate quality of education.

The review recommended that funding for these strategically important small schools should be outside the formula. How we fund them is one of the areas I am still considering.

In the coming weeks, I will be making a statement to the Assembly setting out my response to the report and my proposals for reform of the Common Formula Scheme. This will be followed by a full consultation with key stakeholders, including schools.

Post-primary Education: Selection

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education to outline his proposals to improve the selection process for entry into post-primary education. (AQO 3991/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department has published guidance setting out a framework for the process of transfer from primary to post-primary school. This guidance has been in place since 2010, which was the first year that children were not subjected to a state-sponsored transfer test. The guidance strongly recommends that schools do not use criteria related to academic ability.

It goes on to recommend a menu of non-academic admissions criteria from which Boards of Governors of post-primary schools should draw in deciding their admissions criteria. This includes giving priority to children in receipt of free school meals, those with a sibling currently attending the school and applicants who are the eldest child. It also includes geographic criteria relating to feeder primary schools, or a named parish or catchment area, all to be used in conjunction with "nearest suitable school" to ensure that rural children are not disadvantaged.

It is my firm belief that the transfer process, as experienced by parents and children, would be greatly improved if all schools followed the Department's guidance and ceased the use of academic selection and rejection to gain entry into schools.

Primary Schools: Moy, County Tyrone

Ms McGahan asked the Minister of Education for an update on the proposals for a shared campus for Moy Regional and St John's primary schools, Co Tyrone.

(AQO 3992/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As you will be aware from our meeting on 26 March with representatives of the schools, I am supportive in principle of any proposal to co-locate schools and share facilities. An objective included in the Terms of Reference for Area Planning is to "identify realistic, innovative and creative solutions to address need, including opportunities for shared schooling on a cross sectoral basis."

However, it is the responsibility of the school managing authorities in the first instance to manage provision in the schools' estate and to bring forward proposals to the Department to meet local demand, including any proposals to co-locate schools and share facilities.

In this instance the managing authorities are the SELB and CCMS and it would be for them and the School Trustees to agree the way forward on the issues of school management and building ownership. My Department would of course be happy to facilitate these discussions if requested.

The schools may also wish to examine whether the solution being sought could be achieved through an extension to an existing school building, which may enable a bid to be made to the new Schools Enhancement Programme.

To date, however, neither of the managing authorities has approached my Department in respect of the proposal to co-locate Moy Regional PS, St John's PS and Moy Area Playgroup.

'Advancing Shared Education' Report

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Education to outline any discussions that have taken place between his Department and the Department for Employment and Learning regarding the Advancing Shared Education report.

(AQO 3993/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am currently considering the Ministerial Advisory Group's report on shared education prior to determining the way forward. Consequently there have been no discussions to date with the Department for Employment and Learning.

However the references to further education colleges and teacher training with the Ministerial Advisory Group's report were brought to the attention of DEL officials on the day it was launched.

Early Years

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Education how he intends to address the apparent lack of provision for 0-3 year olds in the Early Years framework.

(AQO 3994/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I launched 'Learning to Learn - A Framework for Early Education and Learning' in December for focused consultation.

I have set out within the Framework key principles which will underpin the planning and delivery of early years education and learning services, and enhance collaborative working across a range of services and sectors outside the remit of the Department of Education. One of those principles is that education and learning begins at birth.

The Learning to Learn Framework already includes a number of important actions focused on the 0-3 age range including a review of the Sure Start Programme, the development of potential options for the expansion of a two year old programme and increasing support for parents as first educators.

It also proposes a number of actions aimed at collaborating with other departments to work towards a common goal of improving outcomes for children. These include closer integration with health and social services structures, as the main delivery mechanism for services for the 0-3 age range, and identifying opportunities for joint investment in family intervention and parenting programmes.

I am also working with Ministerial colleagues to explore the potential for enhanced co-operation around early years and early intervention under the Delivering Social Change Framework.

Schools: Financial Deficits

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Education how many primary and post-primary schools had a financial deficit on the last financial year.

(AQO 3995/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The latest financial year for which audited data is currently available is the year to 31 March 2012. At the 31 March 2012 there were 163 Primary Schools and 56 Post-Primary schools that had a cumulative delegated budgetary deficit.

Individual school data may be found in the Funding Authority Schools' Outturn Statements which have been deposited in the Assembly Library.

DE: Capital Investment

Ms Fearon asked the Minister of Education to outline the minor and major works included in his capital investment programme.

(AQO 3996/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Over the past year I have announced that 40 new school building projects are to proceed, representing a potential investment of some £353million.

These major projects obviously generate a significant amount of interest and have a positive impact not only on those individual school communities but also on the local economy.

However, in addition to these more high profile projects it is important to note that there continues to be investment in the schools estate on an ongoing basis and I have committed to spend £52m on minor works in 2013/14

This work ranges from minor repairs to more significant refurbishment projects and extensions. Examples of the benefits to schools include refurbished science labs and IT suites, improved school meals accommodation and new nursery units.

The completion of these works will ultimately provide better facilities for our children and young people to learn in and an improved working environment for teachers and other school staff.

Lisanelly Shared Education Campus, Omagh

Mr McAleer asked the Minister of Education for an update on the progress of the Lisanelly Shared Education Campus, Omagh.

(AQO 3997/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am pleased to report that tangible progress is being made on the Lisanelly Shared Education Campus project.

The School Authorities responsible for 5 schools in Omagh have recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding, committing them to working together with the relevant authorities on the development and implementation of the Lisanelly Shared Education Campus as soon as practicable.

The Outline Planning Application has been referred to Omagh District Council by the Department of the Environment and I am hoping to achieve approval in the coming weeks.

And finally, work has begun on taking forward the procurement and construction of phase 1 of the Lisanelly project – a new building for Arvalee School & Resource Centre.

Department for Employment and Learning

Access to Work Scheme

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many people currently avail of the Access to Work scheme, and of these, how many have a learning disability and no other disability.

(AQW 22113/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): There are currently 629 people with disabilities availing of the Access to Work scheme, 143 of these people have a learning disability and no other disability.

The Department also administers the Workable (NI) programme. This is another in-work support programme for people with a disability. Of the 419 employees being supported through Workable (NI), 230 have a learning disability as their primary health condition.

Belfast Metropolitan College: Registered Sign Language Interpreter

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning why there has been a delay in providing Registered Sign Language Interpreter Level 3 students at Belfast Metropolitan College with their results and certificates in respect of courses completed in June 2012.

(AQW 22117/11-15)

Dr Farry: As Belfast Metropolitan College has responsibility for the delivery of this course, including results and award of certificates, my officials have contacted the college directly for information related to this question.

The college has advised that the course is delivered as a two year programme, as planned and agreed in consultation with experienced sign language tutors. In the second year, students improve their sign language skills and gather evidence to be included in their portfolio. At the end of this year, students submit completed portfolios for accreditation. Achievement of the qualification is when all quality assurance processes are complete and the results are ratified by the awarding organisation, in this instance Signature.

All dates for visits by the awarding organisation's external verifier visits, the time between visits, and the notification of final award outcomes are at the discretion of the awarding organisation, and are beyond the college's control.

This can cause a delay in certification release, but the college aim to keep this to a minimum. Each awarding organisation can operate in different ways, with some giving the centre approval to release qualifications/certificates on completion of internal verification, while others require colleges to await external verifier approval before release.

The time line of the process for the qualification in question is set out below.

- In May 2012, the NVQ level 3 students submitted their portfolios of evidence.
- The Internal Verifier carried out internal Quality Assurance checks of the portfolios which were completed June 2012.
- An External Verifier (EV) visit was requested from Signature in June, but did not take place until 6 September 2012.
- The College was informed by Signature, on 24 October 2012, that there was one piece of evidence missing in the sample selected. The students were contacted immediately and given a reasonable time to submit the further evidence requested.
- The Internal Verification process was then repeated to ensure that the new evidence presented by the students met the requirements.
- The College made a request for a return External Verifier visit during December 2012, which subsequently took place on 29 January 2013.
- The centre manager was notified on 25 March 2013 that results had been released and the students were informed immediately of the outcome.

The college considers the above to be within the normal process for quality assurance of qualification outcomes set by this awarding organisation.

Registered Sign Language Courses

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many people are currently enrolled on Registered Sign Language Courses and at what level are they studying.

(AQW 22118/11-15)

Dr Farry: Analysis of 2011/12 (latest full year available) Further Education data show that there were 645 student enrolments on Professional and Technical courses related to Registered Sign Language courses. The majority, 515, were enrolled at level 1 and entry level, 105 were enrolled at level 2, there were 10 enrolments at level 3, and a further 15 enrolments at Higher Education level at the Northern Ireland Further Education Colleges.

Catholic Certificate in Religious Education: St Mary's University College

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the cost of a Certificate of Religious Education as part of the Bachelor of Education course at St Mary's University College.

(AQW 22119/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Certificate in Religious Education is not part of the Bachelor of Education course. There is no cost to my Department for the provision of the separate course leading to the certificate at St Mary's University College as the College does not receive any additional funding for it. However, the College estimates that the cost of providing the course, to those students who wish to avail of it, amounts to £188,000 per annum.

Regional Colleges: Complaints

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many formal written complaints were lodged by staff at each of the Regional Colleges in 2012.

(AQW 22141/11-15)

Dr Farry: Each Further Education college, in its capacity as an employing authority, is responsible for all employment-related matters. Consequently, my Department does not hold the information requested.

I have asked the directors of each of the six Further Education colleges to respond to the Member directly on this matter.

Emergency Service Workers

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the rights of workers in the emergency services to strike. (AQW 22147/11-15)

Dr Farry: Industrial action, which includes strike action, is 'official' if it is formally backed by a trade union, and members of that trade union are taking part in it. Members of the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service, the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service, and HM Coastguard are entitled to join trade unions and are therefore eligible to take industrial action, and be protected against dismissal for industrial action, provided the union follows the correct procedures when organising such action.

Members of the Police Service of Northern Ireland are prohibited from trade union membership by section 35 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 1998. Police officers may join the Police Federation NI, which is a representative body similar to a trade union, but without the right to undertake industrial action.

Further and Higher Education: Complaints

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the number of complaints, relating to a personal grievance, received by the campus of each (i) Further Education College; and (ii) Higher Education Institution, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 22158/11-15)

Dr Farry: All Higher Education institutions and Further Education colleges are employing authorities in their own right and are responsible for all matters relating to staff, including the application of grievance procedures. Therefore, my Department does not collate information on the number of personal grievances raised in each institution or colleges.

I have asked the respective Higher Education institutions and Further Education colleges to respond to the Member directly on this matter.

Catholic Certificate in Religious Education: Stranmillis University College

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether his Department will consider funding the current cost of £480 for teachers to obtain the Certificate of Religious Education through distance learning with Stranmillis University College, Belfast.

(AQW 22169/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department already funds the cost of student teachers at Stranmillis University College obtaining the Certificate in Religious Education through distance learning. This arrangement has been in place since 2005.

Economy

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the input he has had into the discussions with the Secretary of State regarding a new package of measures to revitalise the economy.

(AQW 22208/11-15)

Dr Farry: I have met with the Secretary of State to discuss proposals to develop a further package of economic measures for Northern Ireland in partnership with the UK Government. I will support fully any efforts designed to boost the local economy. While I recognise that the work required to develop this additional package is ongoing, I can assure you that my Department is engaged fully in this process and has made a number of proposals. My Department's engagement reflects the central importance of skills, innovation and employment to Northern Ireland's future economic success and to a shared future.

People Not in Education, Employment or Training

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail (i) how many families have taken part in the pilot intervention to support those deemed Not in Education, Employment or Training, in developing skills, and linking them to the employment market; (ii) what structured programmes and projects have been used; and (iii) the number of jobs created as a result.

(AQW 22209/11-15)

Dr Farry:

- (i) 47 families have participated in the Community Family Support Programme pilot since it began in January 2013.
- (ii) The programme includes a structured Strengthen Families component designed to help address issues that families are faced with in their daily lives, including for example family values, changing behaviour, anger management, drug and alcohol misuse, speaking and listening. This is a compulsory module which all family members attend. In addition to this, 13 individual family members have elected to enter education and training, and a further 20 family members

have availed of specialist provision such as drug and alcohol counselling, debt management and disability services. Family members have also engaged in motivational activities such as goals training and those of working age have been concentrating on increasing their employability skills. Activities such as volunteering, walking and daily exercise have also being encouraged.

- (iii) The programme is primarily designed to support families identify and address health, social, economic and employment issues and barriers and ultimately support family members move into education, training and employment. Many of these issues are complex and will take time to address; therefore none of the current participants have yet progressed into employment.

Further Education Students

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether he would consider introducing accredited courses, for further education students, on understanding and supporting fellow students with disabilities, encouraging their inclusion in peer groups and general comprehension of welfare, care and respect.

(AQW 22232/11-15)

Dr Farry: While my Department sets the strategic direction for the Further Education Sector in Northern Ireland, it is the responsibility of individual colleges to design and deliver curriculum which meets the needs of learners and employers in their areas. However, I can confirm that there are already accredited qualifications available to further education colleges, and other providers, at Level 2 and 3 providing courses in "Supporting Individuals with Learning Difficulties".

In addition, all further education colleges are designated as public authorities, and under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 they are obliged to promote equality of opportunity between people with a disability and those without a disability.

Further education colleges have a range of formal policies and procedures in place to help students to understand and support fellow students, including those with disabilities. Colleges also aim to promote social inclusion, respect and dignity within the student body, as well as equality of opportunity. This information is made readily available, and all students are encouraged to familiarise themselves with the policies during the induction process. As part of the colleges' admissions processes, all potential students are made aware of colleges' strategies to promote welfare, care and respect through pre-entry advice and guidance sessions.

Colleges also offer a wide range of support designed to help with the transition to further education for students with disabilities.

Youth Employment Scheme: North Antrim

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of employers in North Antrim that have signed agreements for the youth employment scheme since its introduction in 2012, broken down by council area.

(AQW 22273/11-15)

Dr Farry: In the North Antrim area, serviced by Ballymena and Ballymoney Jobs & Benefits office, a total of 83 employer agreements have been signed since I launched the Youth Employment Scheme in July 2012. Employers have made 108 opportunities available and to date 43 young people have availed of a placement, 19 of these having secured subsidised employment.

My Department is actively working with employers to source as many opportunities as possible across Northern Ireland. I have been encouraged by the response of employers so far (more than 1,000 have signed up to the scheme) and I expect many more to come forward to offer opportunities for young people in the coming months.

The focus of the Youth Employment Scheme is on early intervention for young people aged 18 to 24 with the specific aim of helping this group gain work experience, develop additional skills and achieve recognised relevant qualifications needed by those sectors that have the potential for future growth. This scheme is specifically designed to help those young people claiming Jobseekers Allowance and who are almost job ready move into employment.

I appreciate your interest in the Youth Employment Scheme and would ask you to encourage employers and young people in your constituency to become involved.

Students with Special Needs

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many adults aged over nineteen with special needs are enrolled as students, broken down by educational facility.

(AQW 22317/11-15)

Dr Farry: In answering this question the term 'Special Needs' has been defined as the number of students aged 19 and over who reported a disability. Figures are presented separately for the Northern Ireland Higher Education Institutions, Further Education Colleges and Training providers in 2011/12. These have been placed in the Assembly Library and on my department's website at <http://www.delni.gov.uk/>.

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises: Advice and Information

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail (i) the measures in place to ensure that relevant advice and information will be provided directly to small and medium-sized enterprises, micro businesses, universities, colleges and other stakeholders to maximise the benefits from Horizon 2020 and other relevant EU funding streams; (ii) how advice and information measures are to be provided using collaboration with other Departments; and (iii) the departmental co-operation used to date.

(AQW 22381/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department plays a full part in the Barroso Task Force arrangements introduced by the Northern Ireland Executive, particularly those pertaining to the European Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development; both the current programme ("FP7") and its successor ("Horizon 2020").

Under the Task Force, Northern Ireland is committed to increasing its drawdown of competitive European funding by 20% by 2015 and it is anticipated that the Northern Ireland Executive will set a target for Horizon 2020, which at least doubles the €50 million target for FP7.

As you may be aware, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI), as the policy lead in the Executive, has recently published a highly specific "Horizon 2020 Action Plan for Northern Ireland (2013)" which encompasses the work of all relevant Departments, including DEL, and details a series of key actions to be undertaken during 2013 that will ensure that NI researchers across academia, industry and the public sector have the necessary levels of support to be successful in Horizon 2020.

The actions have been agreed with all key stakeholders who have been involved in FP7 and builds on the progressive work which has already been undertaken following the DETI-led review of FP7 support mechanisms.

The actions identified in the 2013 Plan will be delivered by both the public and private sector and reflect the requirement for a more coordinated approach to Horizon 2020, so that we can align our support to the needs of all applicants in this highly competitive programme. Progress on delivery of these actions will be overseen by the NI Horizon 2020 Steering Group, of which this Department is a key member, along with other Executive Departments, the two universities, CollegesNI, the CBI, InterTradelreland, Matrix, the Northern Ireland Science Park and both Belfast and Derry City Councils.

Having been responsible to date for approximately 75% of the total Northern Ireland drawdown under FP7, clearly the two universities will play a critical role in achieving the challenging targets for Horizon 2020. Therefore, one of the key actions under the Action Plan has been the establishment, jointly by myself and Minister Foster, of a new "Higher Education - EU Support Fund" which will provide Queen's University Belfast and the University of Ulster with significant financial support to assist them to develop and implement a strategic approach to becoming more successful in FP7 and, particularly, Horizon 2020.

Specifically, the fund will support the employment of seven "Northern Ireland Horizon 2020 Contact Points" to be known as NICPs. They will provide specialist advice and assistance to academics and businesses across areas of economic relevance to Northern Ireland and of priority to the European Commission. This will include areas such as energy, advanced materials and transport technologies, information and communication technologies, and connected health.

The NICP network, which will be coordinated by a Northern Ireland Horizon 2020 Manager based in DETI, will be supplemented by Invest NI, which will assume the role of NICP for SMEs, and also by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development which is to appoint a dedicated Contact Point for the agri-food sector to be based within the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI). These experts will provide direct support to potential Horizon 2020 applicants across all sectors and interested parties in Northern Ireland, through activities such as workshops on specific areas of the scheme. This Network will complement the ongoing support provided by Invest NI, as well as by InterTradelreland who will continue to support and encourage collaborative applications with the Republic of Ireland.

However, as well as promoting the mainstream opportunities under Horizon 2020, the NICP network will also be seeking to maximise the opportunities under related research and technology programmes such as those which will be available through the European Research Council (ERC) and Marie Curie Actions.

This approach reflects the emphasis attached in the Action Plan to the "Excellent Science" Pillar of Horizon 2020 and hence the requirement for specific strategies in relation to the accessing of these two very important schemes.

This collaborative, coordinated and inclusive approach to targeting all aspects of Horizon 2020 is something which I strongly endorse as engagement with Horizon 2020, will be about much more than just the receipt of funding but also about the collaborative links that can be made across the EU. It will help raise the profile of Northern Ireland research and innovation capabilities, providing access to potential new markets and customers and provide invaluable opportunities for our researchers to work with world class research organisations and global companies where it would not otherwise be possible.

I believe that, in particular, the new NICP network is an excellent example of joined-up Government across the Northern Ireland Executive and reflects the long-term, strategic and coordinated approach we must adopt to meet the challenging targets set for Northern Ireland under the Barroso Task Force.

Given the tenure of your question with its emphasis on the need for collaboration and inclusivity, I am confident that I can count on your support as I work with my Executive colleagues to ensure that the maximum possible benefit accrues to Northern Ireland from Horizon 2020 and that, equally importantly, Northern Ireland is seen to contribute meaningfully to the Commission's research agenda.

University Library Fines

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how much universities received from students in library fines, in the last 12 months.

(AQW 22412/11-15)

Dr Farry: This information requested is not held by my department. The universities are autonomous bodies and this is not a matter for my department. I would suggest that you approach each university and request the information from them.

Students with Special Needs

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many support staff are available for students with special needs, broken down by Further Education College.

(AQW 22434/11-15)

Dr Farry: There are currently of 351 full-time and part-time support staff available for students with special needs, in the Further Education (FE) sector. The table overleaf details the number of support staff available in each FE college.

Further Education College	Number of Support Staff
North West Regional College	66
South Eastern Regional College	76
South West College	34
Northern Regional College	86
Belfast Metropolitan College	23
Southern Regional College	66

Recruitment Agencies

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what his Department is doing to stop the employment of highly-skilled workers, such as nurses and social workers, by recruitment agencies paying significantly less than would be paid for the same job in the public sector.

(AQW 22547/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department's role in regulating the private recruitment sector is limited to the provisions of the Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Businesses Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005, and the Employment (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1981. This legislation does not address rates of pay, other than to ensure that workers receive at least the National Minimum Wage.

My Department did introduce the Agency Workers Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 in December 2011. Under these regulations, an agency worker should, after a 12-week qualifying period, generally be paid the same rate of pay as a comparable worker. Where this is not the case, the worker may be entitled to bring a claim to an industrial tribunal.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Tourism: Motorhomes

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what assessment has been carried out on the value of motor home tourism to the economy.

(AQW 21036/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): The sample size and design of recent surveys does not specifically assess the value of motor home tourism. However, the proportion of Northern Ireland residents taking overnight domestic trips in 2011, whose main form of transport was a motorised caravan/camper/dormobile, was less than 1%. Also the proportion of visitors from Great Britain and overseas in 2011, whose main form of transport was a motorised caravan/camper/dormobile, and who exited through a Northern Ireland sea port, was less than 1%.

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) specifically promotes Aires de Service (motorhome service points) in Northern Ireland on their consumer website discovernorthernireland.com/accomfinder.

On 18 October 2013 NITB met Waterways Ireland, at the invitation of the Northern Ireland Motorhome Association, to discuss supporting motorhome tourism using Waterways Ireland marinas as Aires de Service.

NITB continues to work with Northern Ireland Motorhome Association and local councils to promote motorhome tourism and maximising the motorhome tourism opportunities in Northern Ireland.

Patton Group

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the (i) number; and (ii) names of companies that are now insolvent and owed money by the Patton Group.

(AQW 22014/11-15)

Mrs Foster: We do not hold the information requested. The administrator Tom Keenan of Keenan CF, Arthur House, Arthur Street, Belfast, BT1 4GB should be able to provide a list of creditors.

Belfast Welcome Centre

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment why Belfast Welcome Centre is facilitating Republican tours of the Maze prison by providing the phone number of Coiste Political Tours.

(AQW 22174/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Belfast Welcome Centre is managed by The Belfast Visitor & Convention Bureau. They operate as a separate entity with their own Board and on a membership basis.

Wind Turbines

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 17648/11-15, for an up-to-date breakdown of the number of (i) 0kW – 50kW; (ii) 50kW – 100kW; (iii) 100kW – 200kW; and (iv) 200kW – 250kW single wind turbines contributing to the current installed renewable energy capacity at small scale level.

(AQW 22284/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Department only retains records of the number of generating stations, not single wind turbines; however a large majority of onshore wind generating stations up to 250kW would be single turbines.

Table 1: Accreditations for small scale onshore wind under the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation at 7 December 2012 (AQW 17648/11-15) and 26 May 2013.

Live and Preliminary Accreditations under the NIRO

Installed Capacity	7 December 2012		26 April 2013	
	Number of stations	Total Capacity	Number of stations	Total Capacity
0 -50kW	377	3MW	379	3.1MW
51kW -100kW	20	1.6MW	24	2MW
101kW -200kW	13	1.7MW	14	2MW
201kW -250kW	28	6.6MW	36	8.4MW
Total	438	12.9Mw	453	15.5Mw

Source: Ofgem Renewables and CHP Register

Ballylumford Power Station

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether the closure of Ballylumford B generation station will affect the price of domestic gas supply in the Greater Larne area.

(AQW 22362/11-15)

Mrs Foster: There should be no significant impact on gas prices from closure of the Ballylumford B station, as the B station tends to have a low operation rate compared to other gas fired generation.

Ballylumford Power Station

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the plans for power generation at Ballylumford Power Station after 2015; and when Trade Unions will be consulted regarding potential job losses.

(AQW 22363/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My officials have been engaging with the Utility Regulator and the system operator SONI to consider how best to ensure there is a sufficient future conventional generation capacity margin and therefore adequate security of electricity supply for Northern Ireland after 2015.

I have also agreed to meet with the unions representing Ballylumford power station employees on 8 May 2013 to understand their concerns.

Department of the Environment

Dogs: Control, Fouling and Licensing

Mr Ross asked the Minister of the Environment what guidance his Department has given to councils on the issues of dog control, dog fouling and unlicensed dogs.

(AQW 21815/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): District Councils were given new powers by Clean Neighbourhoods legislation to deal with irresponsible dog ownership by means of Dog Control Orders.

The Department issued guidance on such Dog Control Orders with effect from 1 April 2012.

Clean Neighbourhoods legislation provides for five offences which may be prescribed in a local council Dog Control Order, these are:-

- failing to remove dog faeces
- not keeping a dog on a lead
- not putting, and keeping, a dog on a lead when directed to do so by an authorised officer;
- permitting a dog to enter land from which dogs are excluded, and
- taking more than a specified number of dogs onto land.

The penalty for committing an offence contained in a Dog Control Order is a maximum of £1,000. Alternatively, the opportunity to pay a fixed penalty may be offered in lieu of prosecution.

The guidance issued by the Department makes clear that district councils may make Dog Control Orders, provided that they are satisfied that an Order is justified, and they have followed the necessary procedures.

All dog owners have a responsibility to ensure the welfare of the dog in their care and to make sure that their dog does not become a problem to themselves or other people. The law on Dog Control Orders exist primarily to ensure that people and dogs can live happily and safely together.

The control of dogs is also legislated for here by the Dogs Order 1983. The Dogs Order provides for the licensing of dogs by Councils and other related enforcement matters. Following a comprehensive review of the dog control legislation, the Dogs (Amendment) Act 2011 was introduced.

The 2011 Act enhanced existing dog control measures by introducing: the compulsory microchipping of dogs; making it an offence to allow a dog to attack and injure any animal owned by another person; a system of control conditions for problem dogs, which enables Dog Wardens to impose controls on a dog licence, where a breach of the Dogs Order has occurred; an increase in the dog licence fee (with concessions for certain owners); and an increase in certain fines and fixed penalties. One of the aims of the Dogs (Amendment) Act 2011 was to increase the income to council dog warden services by increasing dog licence fees and also allowing councils to retain any fees from the increased fixed penalties.

DARD issued guidance to Council Dog Wardens following the introduction of the 2011 Act. The guidance for enforcers is intended to be used as a reference document to aid understanding of the new provisions of the 2011 Act and to ensure consistent enforcement across all Council areas. The guidance is intended to be read in conjunction with the legislation. Whilst the guidance is designed to be as helpful as possible, ultimately, the interpretation of the wording of the law is for the Courts to determine. Therefore where difficulties arise Councils are advised to take advice from their own legal services. DARD officials also engage with the Councils' Dog Advisory Group (NIDAG) on a regular basis.

National Park: Glens and Causeway Areas

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of the Environment (i) when consultation will take place on a national park in the Glens and Causeway areas; (ii) what has been the cost of producing promotional material on National Parks in these areas; and (iii) what budget his Department has allocated for the necessary economic appraisals.

(AQW 21830/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I have repeatedly said, I am consulting and will continue to consult with a wide range of people and groups on where DOE should go on the issue of a national park. This is done to identify how to positively develop the wonderful heritage assets of NI. When others complain about potential initiatives and fail to come forward with innovative proposals, given the scale of youth unemployment and rural worklessness and the economic threats we all face, I do not consider their approach responsible. The challenges we that are emerging need to be faced up to, those who make worst fear arguments and exploit concerns should reflect on their approach. All should join in my consultation and work out how to best proceed.

Archives and Artefacts

Mr Ó hOisín asked the Minister of the Environment what action has been taken to secure the long-term curation of archives and artefacts from developer-led excavations and other sources.

(AQW 21855/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Following a joint Assembly Committee motion tabled for debate on 2 July 2012, NIEA was tasked with undertaking a baseline quantification survey of the archival material held by archaeological practices who had undertaken excavations in Northern Ireland. The survey was undertaken in order to provide a base from which solutions could be identified and developed.

The NIEA baseline quantification survey has been completed and a draft report submitted.

That draft report was supplied to our professional colleagues in the National Museums Northern Ireland (NMNI). It formed the basis of discussion in a meeting between NMNI and NIEA on 28 March 2013.

The draft report proposes a number of questions to guide further debate and recommendations to promote immediate and future action.

I am meeting with officials shortly to identify how to move forward and then update the Environment Committee and the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee.

Excavation of Drumclay Crannog

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the time allocated for the excavation of Drumclay Crannog.

(AQW 22025/11-15)

Mr Attwood: As I have outlined previously to the Environment Committee, the excavation at Drumclay Crannóg was an unprecedented archaeological project. Additional time for the excavation would have resulted in a fuller investigation of the site. However, in the event the archaeologists at the site were able to recover the maximum amount of information about the site during the excavation, including the earliest levels of the site. More time would have been useful. However, DRD has been helpful and positive in relation to the excavation over a long period of time.

The excavation has now been concluded, as of Monday 15 April 2013, and road-building has restarted at the site. Officials are currently providing for me recommendations for the necessary post excavation works, which are likely to last for some years.

Officials from the Department of the Environment and the Department for Regional Development had ongoing discussions, throughout the project, about the time allocated for the excavations. Discussion of timetables formed a core part of their discussions from June 2013 onwards. As a result of those discussions, and following briefing from my officials, I extended the time allocated for the excavations on several occasions. These extensions were necessary because the volume of material being uncovered at the site was unprecedented, and the emerging complexity of the remains meant that more time was needed in order to get the maximum information from the site. Throughout this period officials from both departments were in ongoing communication to achieve the archaeological excavation in the time available, and to re-programme the road-building works.

I have ordered a review of the history to this matter and recommendations for the future. I also believe that having given this excavation more time and significant monies, time and money is now needed to do properly the post excavation, to understand fully this unprecedented excavation.

Excavation of Drumclay Crannog

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment whether he has any plans to extend the time allocated for the excavation of Drumclay Crannog.

(AQW 22026/11-15)

Mr Attwood: As I have outlined previously to the Environment Committee, the excavation at Drumclay Crannóg was an unprecedented archaeological project. Additional time for the excavation would have resulted in a fuller investigation of the site. However, in the event the archaeologists at the site were able to recover the maximum amount of information about the site during the excavation, including the earliest levels of the site. More time would have been useful. However, DRD has been helpful and positive in relation to the excavation over a long period of time.

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Excavation of Drumclay Crannog

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what discussions his officials have had with their counterparts in the Department for Regional Development on the time allocated for the excavation of Drumclay Crannog.

(AQW 22027/11-15)

Mr Attwood: As I have outlined previously to the Environment Committee, the excavation at Drumclay Crannóg was an unprecedented archaeological project. Additional time for the excavation would have resulted in a fuller investigation of the site. However, in the event the archaeologists at the site were able to recover the maximum amount of information about the site during the excavation, including the earliest levels of the site. More time would have been useful. However, DRD has been helpful and positive in relation to the excavation over a long period of time.

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I have ordered a review of the history to this matter and recommendations for the future. I also believe that having given this excavation more time and significant monies, time and money is now needed to do properly the post excavation, to understand fully this unprecedented excavation.

Councillors: Shadow Councils

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment whether councillors, who are not MLAs, will be able to serve on their existing council as well as the newly elected shadow council.

(AQW 22028/11-15)

Mr Attwood: It is likely that many existing councillors will be elected to the new councils in 2014, and will thus hold a dual role during the shadow period. The intention is that new and re-elected councillors operating during the shadow period will build upon the work of the statutory transition committees and perform a limited number of functions for the purpose of enabling the new councils to discharge fully all of their functions from 1 April 2015.

During the shadow period, the 26 existing councils and their members will continue to be responsible for service delivery to the ratepayer (for example, waste collection; registration of births, deaths and marriages; leisure centres etc.). The newly elected members of the new councils will, during the shadow period, prepare themselves to adopt their full range of powers and responsibilities on 1 April 2015, by undertaking key preparatory tasks such as the striking of the rate for the first financial year of the new council and agreeing a corporate and business plan for the new council.

The forthcoming reorganisation Bill will create a statutory bar on MLA/MP/MEP councillor double jobbing and the allowance to councillors who are currently MLAs has been reduced by 5/6 over the last year.

Councillor Salaries

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment whether councillors who serve on their existing council and the newly elected shadow council will receive one salary.

(AQW 22029/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I am in the process of establishing a panel, using the public appointments procedure, to conduct a review of councillors' remuneration and to advise me on the system and level of allowances appropriate for the new councils. The membership was confirmed on 1 May 2013.

The panel will also consider the allowances that should be paid during the shadow period following the local government elections in 2014. I will be asking the panel to make recommendations on remuneration that will fairly reflect the roles and responsibilities of councillors serving on existing councils and in the new councils, during the shadow period. I have made it clear that I do not consider that where there are double mandates there should be double incomes. Of course, it is for the remuneration committee to make recommendations

Vintage Cars

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment what action he plans to take to encourage vintage car owners to use their vehicles on public roads.

(AQW 22060/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Veteran or vintage car owners are free to use their vehicles as they wish, provided of course they do so in compliance with vehicle approval, licensing and testing requirements for road use.

I do plan, however, to make it less burdensome for those who own vintage cars manufactured before 1960 to operate their vehicle on public roads by exempting these vehicles from MOT testing. This follows a consultation which showed broad support for Northern Ireland to be brought in line with Britain, where this exemption has been operational since 18 November 2012.

I anticipate that legislation to bring this into effect will be introduced shortly and this exemption should be operational by the autumn.

Review of Public Administration: Staff Transfers

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment (i) how many staff in each Department will be transferring to the new councils under the Review of Public Administration; (ii) how the Civil Service grades they hold will be reflected in the new arrangements; and (iii) whether the transfers will be voluntary.

(AQW 22116/11-15)

Mr Attwood: When agreeing the transfer of functions package I announced in the Assembly on Monday 22 April 2103, the Executive also agreed that Ministers of transferring departments should, by 31 May 2013, provide me with the details of budget and staff to transfer with those functions. Staff will transfer to councils at an equivalent grade, however, further work has to be done through the implementation machinery I have put in place to determine how those staff will be integrated into the new council structures.

The information requested under parts (i) and (ii) of the question is therefore not yet available. The answer below to part (iii) of the question has been provided by the Minister for Finance and Personnel whose Department has responsibility for the terms and conditions of Northern Ireland civil servants including the terms of their transfer to new councils.

“(iii) Transfers will be compulsory and the contractual terms and conditions of affected staff will be protected in accordance with the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 (TUPE). This is in keeping with the RPA Code of Practice (Staff Transfers) produced to give effect to the Public Service Commission’s 3rd and addendum to the 3rd Guiding Principle

Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan

Mr Givan asked the Minister of the Environment when the final version of the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan will be published. (AQW 22138/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Work is ongoing and at an advanced stage in relation to the content of BMAP. I always work towards creating certainty and avoiding doubt and that is the case for BMAP. I hope that the content of BMAP will be finalised shortly and the required processes completed quickly.

Tamboran Resources: Use of Chemicals

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment whether his Department, or any regulators under its remit, has ever indicated to Tamboran Resources that it would be obliged to use chemicals in any hydrocarbon exploration or extraction. (AQW 22229/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Clearly, the Department has never indicated to Tamboran Resources that they would be obliged to use chemicals in any hydrocarbon exploration or extraction and the Department would want to know if it is being claimed otherwise.

The onus is on the company to explain the detailed methods of exploration and extraction and potential impacts on the environment. In terms of any planning application to extract hydrocarbons the issue would be considered through the Environmental Impact Assessment process. The Department’s role is to regulate the process by granting conditional planning permission and other environmental consents if that was considered appropriate after a full assessment of all the environmental impacts.

I again repeat that in making any assessment of Tamboran’s proposals, there will be a need to apply best science and deploy best practise if the project was ever to proceed. That is not currently the case.

Planning Bill

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment how he defines sustainable development in clause 2 of the Planning Bill. (AQW 22281/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The most commonly used definition of sustainable development is “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. For the purposes of planning, Planning Policy Statement 1 General Principles sets out the Department’s current policy in relation to sustainable development. It explains that sustainable development seeks to deliver the objective of achieving, now and in the future, economic development to secure higher living standards while protecting and enhancing the environment.

I will elaborate on sustainable development in the forthcoming draft single Strategic Planning Policy Statement which will be out for public consultation towards the end of the year.

Councils: Usable Reserves

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of the Environment how much each council held in usable reserves at 31 March 2013. (AQW 22309/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department of the Environment does not hold this information at this time.

The twenty-six councils are required to submit uncertified accounts for the year ended 31 March 2013 to the Department of the Environment by 30 June 2013. The uncertified accounts will show how much each council held in usable reserves at 31 March 2013.

The Local Government (Accounts and Audit) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 require councils to publish their statement of accounts for the year ended 31 March 2013, together with any certificate, opinion or report issued by the local government auditor, before 31 October 2013. Where no such opinion has been given, publication of the statement of accounts should proceed together with a declaration and explanation that the local government auditor has given no such opinion.

I firmly believe that usable Council reserves must be part of the family of funding of the costs of council reform together with low cost loans, the £47.8m Executive contribution and acceleration of sharing and collaboration. Reserves are the monies of the ratepayers and can be a vital element in ensuring the ratepayer does not pay for reform. This is the principle I work to.

Councils: Annual Accounts

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of the Environment to list the councils that are awaiting formal sign-off of their annual accounts by the Local Government Auditor; and why these accounts have not yet been signed off. (AQW 22310/11-15)

Mr Attwood: As at 30 April 2013, only Craigavon Borough Council is awaiting formal sign-off of their 2011/2012 accounts. This is due to ongoing consideration of an objection received by the Local Government Auditor under the Local Government (Northern Ireland) Order 2005. I have asked for details of this matter which appear to have been "live" for approaching a year.

Seat Belts

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of the Environment for an estimate of the percentage of drivers who do not wear seat belts. (AQW 22445/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The percentage of car drivers who do not wear seat belts is available from the annual 'Northern Ireland Survey of Seat Belt Wearing' report. In 2012, the latest year for which estimates are available, 2% of car drivers, 2% of front seat passengers and 6% of backseat passengers were recorded as not wearing a seat belt.

Drink-driving

Mr Lynch asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the difference between driving under the influence of alcohol and being drunk in charge of a vehicle. (AQW 22465/11-15)

Mr Attwood: 'Driving under the influence of alcohol' is an offence under Article 15(1) of the Road Traffic (NI) Order 1995 and being 'drunk in charge of a vehicle' is an offence under Article 15(2), as set out below:

"Driving, or being in charge, when under the influence of drink or drugs

15(1) – A person who, when driving or attempting to drive a mechanically propelled vehicle on a road or other public place, is unfit to drive through drink or drugs is guilty of an offence.

(2) Without prejudice to paragraph (1), a person who, when in charge of a mechanically propelled vehicle which is on a road or other public place, is unfit to drive through drink or drugs is guilty of an offence."

For both offences it must be proven that the person is 'unfit' to drive and a person is taken as being 'unfit' if his ability to drive properly is for the time being impaired. This is usually proved by evidence of the amount of alcohol taken by the person as revealed by a test of his breath, blood or urine. The main difference between the offences is in what is meant by 'driving' or being 'in charge of' a vehicle and this is often dependent on the facts of the individual case.

'Driving', given its ordinary and natural meaning, is fairly easily understood and it is generally held that the question is one of fact dependent on the degree and extent to which the person has control of the direction and movement of the vehicle, and this has been decided on a case by case basis.

The words 'in charge of' are not defined in legislation and again the meaning has been developed through case-law. In DPP v Watkins [1989] Lord Justice Taylor set out the following points that should be taken into account in determining such cases:

- whether and where the person was in the vehicle or how far he was from it;
- what he was doing at the relevant time;

- whether he was in possession of a key that fitted the ignition;
- whether there was evidence of an intention to take or assert control of the car by driving or otherwise;
- whether any person was in, at or near the vehicle and, if so, the like particulars in respect of that person.

It is then for a Court to consider all these factors with any others that might be relevant and to reach its decision as a matter of fact and degree. A statutory defence is provided in Article 15(3) which provides that a person shall be deemed not to have been 'in charge' of the vehicle if he proves that at the material time the circumstances were such that there was no likelihood of his driving it so long as he remained unfit through drink or drugs. This defence can be advanced in Court but the onus of proof is clearly on the person to show that there was no likelihood of him driving the vehicle.

The remaining difference between the offences is reflected in the penalties with 'driving' under the influence being viewed as the more serious with the person being liable to 6 months imprisonment or a fine of up to £5,000 or both, obligatory disqualification and between 3-11 penalty points. The 'in charge' offence attracts 3 months imprisonment or a fine of up to £2,500 or both, discretionary disqualification and 10 penalty points.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Civil Service: Vacancies

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the current Staff Officer vacancies, including (i) Department; (ii) job role; and (iii) location within the Northern Ireland Civil Service based in the council areas of (a) Derry; (b) Strabane; and (c) Limavady.
(AQW 21789/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): At 16 April 2013, the Northern Ireland Civil Service had 1 Staff Officer vacancy based in the council areas of (a) Derry; (b) Strabane; and (c) Limavady. Details of job role and location are attached.

Job Role

Staff Officer - Policy and Legislation Unit in Corporate HR - Civil Service Pensions based in Londonderry.

Responsibility for reviewing current and emerging civil service pensions legislation arising out of decisions taken by the Westminster Government and the Northern Ireland Assembly in respect of pensions matters affecting all Northern Ireland public service pensions schemes, with specific responsibility for the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme. A key role for this post is to lead on the initial drafting of all documentation to progress the Public Service Pensions Bill through the Northern Ireland Assembly legislative process. This is an important post in a high profile policy and legislation area that will require the individual to be well organised and motivated with high levels of drive and determination to deliver required documentation to the highest degree of accuracy within extremely challenging timescales. Other key responsibilities would be to draft secondary legislation and scheme amendments, Policy Employer Pension Notices and Office Memos, Equality impact screenings, Explanatory Memorandums for Office of legislative Council and performing research to support the drafting of briefing and policy documents.

Civil Service: Vacancies

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of vacancies in the Civil Service in the Derry City Council area, broken down by (i) grade; and (ii) Department.
(AQW 21827/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The number of vacancies in permanent Northern Ireland Civil Service posts, located in the Derry City Council area, in each of the Northern Ireland Departments including their Agencies at 17 April 2013, is set out in the table overleaf.

NICS Vacancies (Full Time Equivalent (FTE) basis) in the Derry City Council area, Broken down by Grade and Government Department at 17 April 2013

	AA	AO	EO2	EO1	SO	DP	G7	Other		Total
								No.	Grade	
DARD	1		2	3			1			7
DE			2	1						3
DFP			2	2	1	2				7
DOE							1	1	Traffic Examiner	4
								2	Professional & Technical Officer (PTO)	

	AA	AO	EO2	EO1	SO	DP	G7	Other		Total
								No.	Grade	
DRD								1	PTO Graphic Designer	1
DSD	2	3	11							16
Totals	3	3	17	6	1	2	2	4		38

Departments not shown in the table had no vacancies.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

DHSSPS: Sub-economic Tendering

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the prevalence of sub-economic tendering his Department has experienced with building contracts over the last three years; and what plans are in place to discourage this practice.

(AQW 22017/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I can confirm that my Department has experienced a trend of keen tender prices with building contracts over the last three years. This reflects the current depressed market conditions with fewer tender opportunities that are impacting on the local construction industry. I can advise that my Department has not been required to accept any tenders that we would consider to be abnormally low over this period.

I would also confirm that my Department, through Health Estates Investment Group in its role as Centre of Procurement Expertise (CoPE), has been working in collaboration with DFP's Central Procurement Directorate and the other CoPEs in the development of mechanisms to deal with many of the issues facing local contractors and their supply chains, e.g. procedures to be adopted on receipt of sub-economic/ abnormally low tenders. It is hoped that these procedures will be a deterrent and discourage this practice in the future.

Intermediate Care Beds: Brooklands, Antrim

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to list the providers and locations that were assessed in the business case to provide the 15 intermediate care beds that were commissioned by the Northern Health and Social Care Trust at Brooklands Antrim Health Centre.

(AQW 22047/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am advised that the business case for the 15 intermediate care beds did not outline any specific potential providers or locations, beyond that the home should be within the Northern Trust area. Following approval of the business case a competitive tendering exercise was carried out.

The Providers who submitted tenders were:

- Wilson Group for their Nursing Home in Whitehead;
- Four Seasons for Ballymena, Antrim and Ballymoney locations;
- The Conway Group, Antrim;
- Larne Private Nursing Home, Larne; and
- Drapersfield Private Nursing Home, Cookstown.

Bereavement Midwives

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many bereavement midwives have been employed in each Health and Social Care Trust for the past five years.

(AQW 22103/11-15)

Mr Poots: The South Eastern HSC Trust has confirmed they have 1 (1.0 whole-time equivalent) dedicated specialist bereavement midwife. The other Trusts have confirmed they do not have distinct bereavement midwife roles.

Bereavement Midwives

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what services have been put in place within Health and Social Care Trusts that do not employ bereavement midwives, to ensure that mothers who have had still births receive adequate support.

(AQW 22107/11-15)

Mr Poots: All women and their partners who experience the death of a baby are supported initially by the midwifery staff and obstetric team responsible for care at the time of their loss. Further bereavement care and support is provided following discharge from hospital by the General Practitioner, Community Midwife and Health Visitor to whom the mother is referred for follow up care.

Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts work closely with SANDS, the Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Society, which provides memory boxes and information packs in Trust hospitals for all parents who have suffered stillbirth or neonatal death. There is a book of remembrance and an annual remembrance service for parents, families and friends bereaved of a baby or child.

All HSC Trusts in Northern Ireland have bereavement coordinators who work within Trusts to develop bereavement care, standards and training for all types of bereavement, including miscarriage, stillbirth and neonatal death. All midwives undergo bereavement training on how to support and care for grieving parents.

Causeway Hospital and Altnagelvin Area Hospital Integration

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) what meetings officials from his Department have had with the Western Health and Social Care Trust to explore the integration of the Causeway Hospital and Altnagelvin Area Hospital; and (ii) what meetings have taken place between the Northern Health and Social Care Trust and the Western Health and Social Care Trust to explore greater co-operation between the Causeway Hospital and Altnagelvin Area Hospital, with a view to securing the future of the former.

(AQW 22121/11-15)

Mr Poots: I can confirm that a meeting took place on 19 November 2012 with senior officials from my Department, the Health and Social Care Board and the Western Health and Social Care Trust which included an initial discussion of the proposed arrangements for the Causeway Hospital as presented in the 'Transforming Your Care: Vision to Action' consultation document.

I can confirm that a meeting took place on 19 November 2012 with senior officials from my Department, the Health and Social Care Board and the Western Health and Social Care Trust which included an initial discussion of the proposed arrangements for the Causeway Hospital as presented in the 'Transforming Your Care: Vision to Action' consultation document.

While discussion around opportunities for co-operation between Causeway and Altnagelvin Area Hospitals is part of normal networking arrangements to support the delivery of joined up services, I understand there have no meetings to date between the Western and Northern Health and Social Care Trusts specifically on more formalised integrated working options between the two hospitals as set out in 'Transforming Your Care: Vision to Action'.

I made a Statement to the House on 19 March 2013, setting out the findings of the consultation and the way forward. In that Statement I indicated that officials will begin work on a detailed options appraisal on the future management arrangements for Causeway Hospital. This work will be taken forward with a view to completing the appraisal within six months.

Doctor and Nurse Recruitment

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many (i) doctors; and (ii) nurses have been recruited into hospitals in each of the last five years; and how many of these have been recruited locally.

(AQW 22128/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested is shown in the tables below. It has been assumed that 'recruited locally' refers to staff from Northern Ireland; however, it is not possible to provide this. As an alternative, Trusts (excluding Northern HSC Trust) have provided the number of Non-European Union (non-EU) recruits. These figures were obtained from the HSC Trusts, and have not been validated by the Department.

i) Number of doctors recruited

Year	Total Recruits	Non-EU Recruits*
2012-2013	1917	108
2011-2012	1886	125
2010-2011	1771	114
2009-2010	1767	190
2008-2009	1785	246

*excluding Northern HSC Trust

ii) Number of qualified nurses recruited

Year	Total Recruits	Non-EU Recruits*
2012-2013	1261	19

Year	Total Recruits	Non-EU Recruits*
2011-2012	826	12
2010-2011	464	8
2009-2010	896	13
2008-2009	848	29

*excluding Northern HSC Trust

Source: Northern Ireland Health & Social Care Trusts

Notes:

- 1 Bank staff are excluded.
- 2 Figures include rotational doctors in training who are recruited centrally by the Northern Ireland Medical & Dental Training Agency to work in Trusts.

Transforming Your Care

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the consultation on Transforming Your Care; and when the final plan will be published.

(AQW 22154/11-15)

Mr Poots: In my Statement to the House on 19 March 2013, I set out the outcome of the consultation exercise on the proposals contained in 'Transforming Your Care: Vision to Action'.

Full details of the findings of the consultation are set out in the post-consultation report which was produced by the Health and Social Care Board and which is available at: www.tycconsultation.hscni.net

A draft Strategic Implementation Plan was published when the consultation exercise was launched on 9 October 2012. The Plan is currently being updated to reflect the conclusions of the consultation exercise and it is anticipated the revisions will be completed later this month. It is now important that we move forward with the changes necessary to improve the quality of care in our community.

Young Adults with a Disability

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the same management and staff teams have responsibility for all areas of care and service provision for young adults with a disability within Armagh and Dungannon.

(AQW 22161/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Southern Health and Social Care Trust advise that some clarification is required on the definition of a young adult. Individuals below the age of 18 are cared for by the Trust's Children's Disability Team. Those over 18 are cared for by one of a number of teams depending on the nature of the individual's disability.

These teams can include the Mental Health Team, Learning Disability Team, Hearing Impaired Team, Visually Impaired Team or Physical Disability Team. In addition, a young adult with a disability may also have contact with a Transitions Worker, a Community Access Officer, or Daytime Opportunities staff.

In relation to Autism services, the Southern Trust has established a trans-generational model with collective responsibility between Children and Adult Directorates.

Smoking Cessation Services

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how much his Department has spent on smoking cessation services in each of the last five years; (ii) what is the 'cost per quit' of smoking cessation services; and (iii) to detail the reduction in the proportion of the population that smokes over each of the last five years.

(AQW 22193/11-15)

Mr Poots: Smoking cessation interventions include the provision of brief opportunistic advice by a range of health professionals and specialist services delivered by trained practitioners, usually in the form of clinics or one-to-one sessions. There are over 600 specialist providers across Northern Ireland. The answers to questions (i) and (ii) relate to specialist cessation services only.

- (i) Information available on spend on smoking cessation services in each of the last five years is provided in the table below. These figures include the provisions of Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT) through community pharmacy cessation services.

Year	Spend
2008/09	£1.48m
2009/10	Information not available
2010/11	£3.4m
2011/12	£4.8m
2012/13	£4.5m

Information from the Public Health Agency (PHA) on spend on smoking cessation services for 2009/10 is not available as the financial systems were in transition during this period. In 2009/10, the PHA received £2.35m from the Department towards the overall tobacco control programme and NRT provision.

- (ii) There is no agreed formula for estimating the cost per quit across the UK. However, based on information available for 2011/12, taking into account the 20,229 people who had successfully quit after 4 weeks through smoking cessation services, the cost per quit can be estimated at £236.
- (iii) The proportion of smokers present in the Northern Ireland population has remained relatively constant over the past 5 years as presented in the following table:

Year	Smokers
2007/08	23.03%
2008/09	23.83%
2009/10	23.74%
2010/11	23.89%
2011/12	24.74%

The figures included in the table above are derived from the Health Survey Northern Ireland (10/11 and 11/12) and from the Continuous Household Survey (07/08, 08/09 and 09/10).

Nicotine Replacement Therapy

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much his Department has spent on nicotine replacement therapy, prescribed through the E-lite system, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 22195/11-15)

Mr Poots: NRT is available on prescription in Northern Ireland and can also be prescribed by pharmacists to smokers who sign up for pharmacy-based smoking cessation services.

Elite Training and Consultancy Services Ltd provide the Department with data on the number of people receiving nicotine replacement therapy via smoking cessation services and the type of medication they are receiving. However, the data provided does not include associated costs. It is not possible to calculate the cost of nicotine replacement therapy from the information provided as the strength or amount of nicotine replacement products dispensed and the length of treatment time is not provided.

Information is also available for all NRT prescribed in Northern Ireland. These figures include NRT prescribed by GPs to smokers who may decide not to participate in smoking cessation services, as well as NRT prescribed through smoking cessation services in settings such as pharmacies or GP surgeries. These costs are currently only available by calendar year and are set out in the following table:

Year	Costs for all NRT prescribed in Northern Ireland
2008	£2,087,801
2009	£2,762,734
2010	£3,142,772
2011	£3,888,566
2012	£3,709,339

Dental Services

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether there is an arrangement between Health Service dental services and the private sector to facilitate necessary treatments which may not be otherwise available through the Health Service; and to provide details of this contract.

(AQW 22196/11-15)

Mr Poots: Dentists are expected to provide all treatments set out in the Statement of Dental Remuneration to their registered patients where it is clinically appropriate to do so and they are competent to carry out the treatment. Further more specialised services are available, on referral from their dentist, through some High Street specialists, the Community Dental Services, or the Hospital Dental Service.

There is no contract between my Department or the Health and Social Care Board and the private sector to facilitate treatments that fall outside these arrangements.

Smoking-related Ill-health

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the annual cost of treating smoking related ill-health.

(AQW 22199/11-15)

Mr Poots: Whilst smoking is recognised as a major risk factor in a number of illnesses there is no universal consensus of those illnesses. By adapting a methodology devised by the Royal College of Physicians my Department has estimated the 2011/12 hospital costs of treating diseases, of which smoking could be a contributory factor, as £164m.

Smoking Cessation Courses

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he has any plans to assess the effectiveness of smoking cessation courses by determining the number of participants who have stopped smoking at the end of the 12 weeks course.

(AQW 22200/11-15)

Mr Poots: The effectiveness of smoking cessation services is assessed by the quit rate of those enrolling. Service providers are required to assess a client's smoking status four weeks after their quit date as recommended by NHS service delivery and monitoring guidance. A client's quit date is usually set as a specific date during the 6-12 week course. In addition, service providers in Northern Ireland are also required to carry out a follow-up of a client's smoking status after 52 weeks.

An analysis report of data collected from the monitoring system including service uptake, four week quitting activity and 52 week quitting activity is usually completed in September each year.

I, therefore, have no plans to assess the effectiveness of smoking cessation courses by determining the number of participants who have stopped smoking at the end of the 12 weeks course.

Smoking Cessation Services

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what smoking cessation services are (i) provided by each Local Commissioning Group; and (ii) available in each constituency.

(AQW 22201/11-15)

Mr Poots: Specialist smoking cessation services are provided across Northern Ireland and are designed specifically for those smokers who are motivated, ready to quit and prepared to set a quit date. These services are offered in a range of local settings including GP practices, pharmacies, hospitals, and community based settings.

In relation to (i) the table below shows the total number of stop smoking service providers by Local Commissioning Group area;

HSCT	Provider type		
	GP Practice	Pharmacist	Other
Belfast LCG area	29	95	25
Northern LCG area	48	97	6
South Eastern LCG area	17	70	13
Southern LCG area	26	72	10
Western LCG area	12	84	3
Total	132	418	57

In relation to (ii) the numbers of stop smoking service providers in each constituency is set out in the table below;

HSCT	Provider type		
	GP Practice	Pharmacist	Other
Belfast East	9	22	4
Belfast North	5	22	10
Belfast South	10	27	8
Belfast West	6	25	4
East Antrim	6	15	0
East Londonderry	8	25	2
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	6	34	0
Foyle	0	30	3
Lagan Valley	7	21	2
Mid Ulster	7	20	1
Newry and Armagh	8	23	3
North Antrim	23	25	0
North Down	7	18	2
South Antrim	8	20	2
South Down	8	28	3
Strangford	4	17	4
Upper Bann	5	24	8
West Tyrone	5	22	0
Unknown / unable to link data to constituency	0	0	1
Total	132	418	57

Smoking Cessation Courses

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the current method of assessing the effectiveness of a smoking cessation course.

(AQW 22202/11-15)

Mr Poots: The effectiveness of smoking cessation services commissioned by the Public Health Agency is assessed by the measuring quit rate of those enrolling. The proportion of smokers, based on the overall number of smokers in Northern Ireland, who access cessation services is also of importance. In addition to setting performance indicators for commissioned smoking cessation services, the Public Health Agency requires these services to comply with a number of Quality Standards.

Data on stop smoking services is collected by service providers and entered onto the ELITE electronic system. This information forms the basis of a smoking cessation report which my Department publishes annually.

A comparison of smoking cessation services between Northern Ireland and other UK countries shows that Northern Ireland is performing well both in terms of the estimated proportion of smoking population accessing services and in the four week self-reported quit rates.

Congenital Diaphragmatic Hernia

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether his Department is funding research into congenital diaphragmatic hernia with a view to identifying prevention strategies and better treatment of the condition.

(AQW 22226/11-15)

Mr Poots: Research relevant to health and social care is undertaken in Northern Ireland with funding from a wide range of sources, including my own Department's HSC R&D Fund as well as local and national charities. As a very small region with only two universities and a limited number of researchers based within Trusts, we do not have research activity to cover the full spectrum of illnesses. No funding has been provided for research on congenital diaphragmatic hernia through our HSC R&D Fund and no relevant research is currently undertaken in any Northern Ireland HSC Trust.

However, good research that is undertaken anywhere in the world is reported in appropriate medical or scientific journals or at conferences. Any beneficial advances are then incorporated into clinical practice guidelines.

Thus clinicians locally are able to access the knowledge from research undertaken locally or globally to ensure that people in NI receive the best possible services and care.

Carers: Recruitment in West Tyrone

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) to detail the barriers to recruiting carers in West Tyrone; (ii) the impact this is having on the health and well-being of people who require care; and (iii) to outline his Department's action plan to overcome these barriers.

(AQW 22264/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) Recruitment is a matter for individual Health and Social Care Trusts based on service needs and available resources. The Western HSC Trust has advised me that Trust Homecare staff turnover rates within West Tyrone were less than 2% for 2012, which would indicate a stable workforce. The Trust reports that where difficulties may arise occasionally in sourcing a domiciliary care service response from the range of providers, the Trust explores all options to resolve the matter as quickly and effectively as possible within the available resources.
- (ii) In recent years demand for homecare services across the Trust has been rising given the ageing population. This leads to pressures on the service and a requirement to prioritise by directing resources to those having the greatest need. The Trust is in discussion with the Local Commissioning Group to explore how this demographic growth pressure might be addressed.
- (iii) My Department is currently taking forward a three stage project to review and reform Adult Care and Support in Northern Ireland. Stage 1, a six month consultation on the discussion document "Who Cares?" The Future of Adult Care and Support in NI", concluded on 15 March 2013. A number of issues relating to workforce were highlighted during the consultation, including issues around recruitment and retention and training of care and support staff. These and other issues will be considered during the next stage of the reform process, which will involve developing a range of proposals for change.

Fluoridation

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether any recent assessment has been made of public attitudes to the possible fluoridation of public water supplies.

(AQW 22268/11-15)

Mr Poots: I indicated on 25 April 2012 that it was appropriate that I should give consideration to fluoridation of the water supplies in Northern Ireland. I continue to consult with my Executive colleagues on the matter before coming to a decision.

I have received correspondence on this matter from members of the public and elected representatives. In terms of public opinion, this would appear to mainly relate to a relatively small number of people from an anti-fluoridationist perspective raising the issue directly and indirectly.

If a proposal to fluoridate the water supplies is made, the appropriate evidence from reputable scientific and medical sources will be considered, and we are required under, The Water and Sewerage Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 to consult, and ascertain, public opinion. Should such a consultation proceed, we would welcome the views of all interested parties, at that time.

Substance Abuse

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what services are available in the Causeway coast area for the treatment of people under 17 years who have become addicted to substance abuse.

(AQW 22269/11-15)

Mr Poots: Through my Department's New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs Phase Two, the Health & Social Care Board and the Public Health Agency commission alcohol and drug services (from education and prevention through to treatment and support) for children and young people that are provided across the Northern Health and Social Care Trust (NHSCT) area, both by Statutory and Voluntary/Community sectors.

Services available across the Trust area include:

- Dunlewey Substance Advice Centre delivers a range of counselling, support and mentoring interventions for those aged 17 and under. Outreach clinics are provided in Ballycastle, Coleraine and Ballymoney. As appropriate, work is also undertaken with the young person's family.
- The NHSCT's generic Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) has been offering support to children and young people under the age of 18 who are addicted to substances and who are suffering from poor mental health. Through the support of the PHA, a specialist Substance Misuse Worker has been placed in the CAMHS team since April 2013, and they are developing a specialist service for this client group, with the aim of offering support to those with severe problems in relation to legal, prescription, or illicit drugs, and alcohol in connection with mental health problems.

- NHSCT in partnership with the Youth Justice Agency deliver a Criminal Justice early intervention, education and prevention service.
- The Hope Centre delivers a Family Support Service with fortnightly support groups established in Ballycastle, Larne and Carrickfergus.
- Causeway Rural and Urban Network (CRUN) delivers targeted education and prevention programmes throughout Moyle, Ballymoney and Coleraine council areas. These programmes are delivered through a personal development and lifestyle context and link to other risk behaviours including mental and emotional wellbeing, suicide prevention, unsafe sex and self harm.
- The Public Health Agency is in the final stages of commissioning a new One-Stop-Shop service for young people aged 11-25 in the Causeway area. When established this service will provide objective information about personal health and wellbeing issues, choices, where to find help and advice and how to access it.

There are also a number of related services, across the NHSCT area, that promote mental health and prevent suicide, including:

- Northern Area Young Men's Support Project (for ages 16-25years), delivered by the NEELB Youth Service. This initiative focuses on building resilience and coping skills with young men
- ZEST – Family Outreach Support for Self Harm
- Barnardo's - Children and Young People Bereaved by Suicide Support Project for under 18s.

Details of the full range of alcohol and drug services (for both young people and adults) in the Northern area can be found by accessing the following link:

http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/sites/default/files/DrugsAlcohol_Directory_Northern_12_12.pdf

Fluoridation

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether his Department has investigated into the impact of fluoridation in water; and to detail his position on this matter.

(AQW 22271/11-15)

Mr Poots: I indicated on 25 April 2012 that it was appropriate that I should give consideration to fluoridation of the water supplies in Northern Ireland.

Fluoridation of the water supplies is internationally recognised as the most effective, cost-effective and equitable way of improving dental health. Many reputable health bodies including the World Health Organisation, the UK Health Departments, the Royal College of Physicians, the British Medical Association, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (USA) and the FDI World Dental Federation; have endorsed the effectiveness and safety of water fluoridation, having considered the findings of available published research. The European Commission's 'Scientific Committee on Health and Environmental Risks' (SCHER) 2010 review of health and environmental risks of fluoride and fluoridation in reported "limited evidence from epidemiological studies points towards adverse health effects following systemic fluoride consumption e.g. carcinogenicity, developmental neurotoxicity and reproductive toxicity, but using a weight of evidence approach these observations cannot be substantiated". The SCHER report also found that the added risk of drinking water fluoridation to the environment should be considered negligible.

I continue to consult with my Executive colleagues on the matter before coming to a decision. If a proposal to fluoridate the water supplies is made, the appropriate evidence from reputable scientific and medical sources will be considered, and we are required under, The Water and Sewerage Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 to consult, and ascertain, public opinion. Should such a consultation proceed, we would welcome the views of all interested parties, at that time.

Antrim Area Hospital: Accident and Emergency

Mr Milne asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps he is taking to address the capacity issues at Antrim Area Hospital's Accident and Emergency department.

(AQW 22277/11-15)

Mr Poots: I refer the member to my answer to AQW 21876/11-15.

Antrim Area Hospital: Death of a Baby

Mr Milne asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether an independent investigation has been ordered into the recent death of a baby in Antrim Area Hospital; and what is the timescale for any such investigation.

(AQW 22278/11-15)

Mr Poots: It is assumed this refers to the recent case of a baby who was brought to Antrim Area Hospital emergency department, stabilised and transferred to the Royal Victoria Hospital but sadly later died. The Northern Health and Social Care Trust has initiated a full Serious Adverse Incident review into the child's care in Antrim Area Hospital. The review will be carried out by four professionals, three of whom are from outside the Northern Trust. The Trust expects to have the review completed by the end of June 2013.

Fire and Rescue Service: Director of Planning Performance and Corporate Affairs

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what investigation has been carried out into the offering of the post of Director of Planning Performance and Corporate Affairs in the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service to one candidate, who verbally accepted the offer, but another candidate was subsequently appointed.

(AQW 22293/11-15)

Mr Poots: Following a complaint made by the unsuccessful candidate, NIFRS has been informed that the Northern Ireland Ombudsman is to investigate a claim of maladministration. Although the investigation has not yet commenced NIFRS has assured me it will co-operate fully with the Ombudsman's Office.

No appointment has been made.

Communication Devices

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why there is no regional service for the provision of communication devices to people who need them as a result serious injuries or the onset of voice-damaging diseases.

(AQW 22294/11-15)

Mr Poots: A Regional Communication Advice Centre is hosted by the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust at Musgrave Park Hospital.

Referral into this centre is from speech and language therapists in each trust area. The local speech and language therapy department will assess the needs of those people who need communication devices as a result of serious injuries or the onset of voice-damaging diseases and will refer them to the Regional Communication Advice Centre if appropriate.

A range of less complex communication devices can be provided locally in each Trust area.

Social Workers

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of Social Workers per head of population in each constituency.

(AQW 22298/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information on Health and Social Care (HSC) staff is not available by constituency. However, the number of qualified Social Workers (in terms of whole-time equivalent) per estimated head of population in each of the Health and Social Care Trust areas is shown below.

HSC Trust	Qualified Social Workers (WTE)	Trust Area Population (est.)	Qualified Social Workers per head (est.)
Belfast	777.73	334,820	0.0023
Northern	765.14	460,364	0.0017
South-Eastern	555.41	348,301	0.0016
Southern	585.59	362,711	0.0016
Western	599.02	300,677	0.0020

Notes:

- Population figures by Trust area have been taken from the most recent published sub-national population estimates for mid-2011, which are derived from the 2001 Census.
- The number of qualified social workers employed by the Health & Social Care Trusts, as at 31st December 2012, was taken from the HSC Human Resources Management Systems (excluding staff on career breaks and bank staff). These figures exclude 49.4 WTE qualified social workers who are employed by other HSC organisations that cannot be assigned to Trust areas.

Maternity Care: EU and Non-EU Nationals

Ms McGahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether working EU or non-EU nationals are entitled to free Health Service maternity care.

(AQW 22303/11-15)

Mr Poots: Generally, anyone may access the full range of free health services (including maternity services) in Northern Ireland provided they are ordinarily resident here. This means a person must live here lawfully and on a continuous and settled basis, usually for a period longer than six months to be entitled to services, although each case is looked at on an individual basis. Persons are expected to provide evidence of their status via documents such as employment contracts, passports/visas or utility bills etc.

The Provision of Health Services to Persons Not Ordinarily Resident Regulations 2005 set out a number of other categories of persons European Economic Area (EEA) citizens and non-EEA persons who come from countries with which the UK has a reciprocal agreement) who may also avail of free health services. EEA includes all those countries signed up to the relevant parts of EU legislation with a bearing on healthcare entitlement, and includes all the EU countries. Anyone claiming an EEA or non-EEA exemption will need to evidence this with relevant documents, which may include evidence of employment in Northern Ireland.

Vaccination Charges

Ms P Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether a General Practitioner can charge a Health Service patient a fee for administering a (i) Hepatitis A; (ii) Tetanus; or (iii) Typhoid vaccination which has been prescribed for free.

(AQW 22308/11-15)

Mr Poots: General Practitioners are paid via the GMS Contract to administer Hepatitis A, Tetanus and Typhoid vaccinations and should not be charging a fee for administering those vaccines.

The General Medical Services Contract Regulations allows a General Practitioner to levy a fee for administering travel immunisations and vaccines for which they do not receive payment from the Health and Social Care Board.

Drug Abuse

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what new strategies his Department is pursuing to combat drug abuse.

(AQW 22328/11-15)

Mr Poots: In 2012, I launched the revised five year cross-departmental strategy to prevent and address the harm related to alcohol and drug misuse, known as the New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs Phase 2. 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.

This Strategy seeks to direct action across five pillars: education, prevention and early intervention; harm reduction; treatment and support; law and criminal justice; and monitoring, evaluation and research. It also contains a number of priority areas for action including: developing a regional commissioning framework for alcohol and drug services; tackling drug-related anti-social behaviour; targeting those at risk and vulnerable; reducing the availability of illicit drugs; and addressing local community issues.

A range of services are funded through the NSD Phase 2, and these are summarised for each area on the Public Health Agency website: <http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/drug-and-alcohol-directories-services>

In addition, the link between alcohol, drugs and suicide is well established, and in 2012 I also launched the refreshed Protect Life suicide prevention strategy which identifies drugs and alcohol misuse as a key target area in its revised action plan. Protect Life funding supports counselling for those experiencing emotional distress and suicidal thoughts due to problems with addiction.

Breastfeeding Strategy

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what coordination there has been between the breastfeeding strategy and the review of the breastfeeding strategic plan in the Republic of Ireland.

(AQW 22338/11-15)

Mr Poots: There is regular engagement between the Regional Breastfeeding lead in the Public Health Agency and the National Breastfeeding Coordinator in the Republic of Ireland. Those involved in promoting and supporting breastfeeding in the Republic of Ireland were consulted during the review of the 1999 Breastfeeding Strategy for Northern Ireland in 2010. The review Report, which recommended the development of a new 10 year Breastfeeding Strategy for Northern Ireland, also proposed that collaboration with the Republic of Ireland should be expanded in the areas of research and evaluation, resource development and activities to promote and support breastfeeding.

I understand that the review of the Breastfeeding Strategic Plan in the Republic of Ireland is currently underway. The difference in timing means that it will not be possible for the review to inform development of the new 10 year Breastfeeding Strategy for Northern Ireland which, following public consultation, is being finalised for publication in June.

Physical Fitness

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what targets he has set to improve physical fitness among the population; and what actions he is taking to achieve these aims.

(AQW 22339/11-15)

Mr Poots: The obesity prevention framework, A Fitter Future for All, was launched on 9th March 2012. This Framework contains the following targets: to reduce the level of obesity by 4% and overweight and obesity by 3% among adults by 2022; and a 3% reduction of obesity and 2% reduction of overweight and obesity among children by 2022

The Framework acknowledges the importance of eating a healthy diet in conjunction with greater participation in physical activity in order to meet these targets and contains a number of outcomes to promote the awareness of the importance of physical activity and provide opportunities for participation throughout the population.

The revised Chief Medical Officers' Physical Activity Guidelines, Start Active, Stay Active, provides guidance on recommended levels of physical activity and steps to improve physical health and wellbeing. The proportion of people meeting these guidelines will be measured to provide an indicator of progress on delivering on the framework.

The Public Health Agency is leading on implementing the outcomes contained within the Department's obesity prevention framework and supports a number of schemes and initiatives to promote participation in physical activity, including:

- physical activity co-ordinators in place across Northern Ireland;
- school based initiatives, such as positive playgrounds and Bike-It;
- healthy towns initiatives and 'Active Belfast';
- Joint working arrangements with local government on physical activity opportunities, such as Give it a Go! and Inspiring Communities to Get Active Together;
- physical activity referral schemes; and
- outdoor gyms.

My Department also works in partnership with the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure on the Sport Matters strategy, and the Department of Regional Development on the Active Travel strategy, both of which help to promote increased physical activity in a range of settings.

Southern Health and Social Care Trust: Residential Homes

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many residents live in each of the five residential homes currently controlled by the Southern Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 22340/11-15)

Mr Poots: This information is not collected centrally but was requested from the Southern Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust. Their response is provided in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Number of available places and residents in statutory residential care in the Southern HSC Trust

Home	Location	No. of places available including respite and intermediate care	Number of permanent beds	No. of permanent residents as at 29 April 2013
Cloughreagh House	Bessbrook	23	18	18
Crozier House	Banbridge	27	18	16 + 8 Skeagh House Residents
Roxborough House	Moy	30	24	19
Skeagh House	Dromore	24	18	Home currently closed due to environmental risk. 8 Skeagh Residents in Crozier House. 3 Skeagh Residents are located to Independent Sector.
Slieve Roe House	Kilkeel	17	12	10

Currently there are 7 unoccupied permanent beds out of a current maximum of 72 (due to 18 reduced permanent beds with temporary Skeagh House closure).

Source: Southern HSC Trust

Health and Social Care Trusts: Accident and Emergency

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the current (i) admission rate; and (ii) average length of stay of patients admitted through each Accident and Emergency department, in each Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 22342/11-15)

Mr Poots: The admission rate and average length of stay of patients admitted to each emergency care department in the most recent year for which information is available is shown in the table below:

HSC Trust / Hospital	2011/12		
	New & Unplanned Review Attendances	Admission Rate	Average Length of Stay
Belfast City*	24,623	23%	8.1
Mater	42,845	21%	6.0
Royal Victoria	81,094	18%	6.7
RBHSC	32,478	10%	3.1
Belfast HSC Trust	181,118	20%	6.4
Antrim Area	71,175	24%	5.7
Whiteabbey	8,614	0%	0.0
Mid Ulster	6,133	0%	328.5
Causeway	43,080	14%	7.0
Northern HSCT	129,002	18%	6.1
Ulster	77,757	27%	5.7
Ards	9,076	1%	13.4
Bangor	12,240	0%	10.2
Lagan Valley	27,280	12%	6.5
Downe	20,142	13%	5.2
South Eastern HSCT	146,495	19%	5.7
Craigavon Area	71,645	24%	4.5
Daisy Hill	37,927	17%	4.4
South Tyrone	18,751	0%	10.6
Armagh / Mullinure	7,793	0%	0.0
Southern HSCT	136,116	18%	4.5
Altnagelvin Area	53,045	23%	5.6
Erne	27,662	18%	5.3
Tyrone County	15,258	2%	0.4
Western HSCT	95,965	18%	5.4
Northern Ireland	688,696	19%	5.8

Source: EC1 Departmental Return & Hospital Inpatient System

* Belfast City emergency care department closed on a temporary basis due to a shortage of senior staff on 1st November 2011. As a result of this the admission rate for Belfast City refers only to emergency admissions and new and unplanned review attendances up to and including October 2011.

Bowel Cancer Screening

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people aged 60 and over were screened for bowel cancer in (i) 2011; and (ii) 2012; and what percentage in each year were shown to be positive. (AQW 22343/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Northern Ireland Bowel Cancer Screening Programme was launched in April 2010 and rolled out across all five HSC Trust areas from January 2012. The programme was initially for those eligible aged 60-69 but was extended to include people up to the age of 71 from April 2012.

	2011	2012*
Number of people completing a screening test (of those invited during relevant year)	34,134	54,512
Number of people with a positive screening result (i.e. blood in bowel motion)	929	1,490
% with a positive screening result	2.7%	2.7%

* Individuals are given up to 6 months to respond from the date of the invite and screening kit being issued. The data provided above for 2012 is therefore incomplete as some screening episodes have not yet been closed.

Cancer Outcomes

In 2011 and 2012, 62 and 108 screen detected cancers respectively were diagnosed. These figures do not directly correlate to the data above. For example some individuals with their cancer diagnosed in 2011 may have undertaken the screening process in 2010 and some individuals invited in 2012 will not yet have completed the screening pathway and have a final outcome.

Fractures: Waiting Times

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people aged 65 and over, who suffered a single or multiple fracture in 2012, had to wait in excess of six months for treatment.

(AQW 22344/11-15)

Mr Poots: Patients, of any age, who have sustained a fracture, are not placed on a waiting list as this is classified as unscheduled care. Therefore no patients in 2012 waited in excess of six months for treatment.

If a patient has had a previous fracture and then requires elective surgery at a later date as a result of complications of that injury, this is then defined as being within elective orthopaedic surgery, not a fracture.

Ulster Hospital: Accident and Emergency Department

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of people who have attended the Accident and Emergency Unit at the Ulster Hospital, in each of the last 5 years; and what proportion, in each year, were not (i) treated; or (ii) discharged within (a) 4 hours; and (b) 12 hours.

(AQW 22380/11-15)

Mr Poots: It is assumed that this question refers to the proportion of patients attending the Ulster hospital Accident and Emergency department that did not meet (a) the 4 hour component; and (b) the 12 hour components of the Ministerial target for emergency care waiting times, in each of the last 5 years. The emergency care waiting time is calculated as the total time spent in an emergency care department from arrival until admission, transfer or discharge.

Information on waiting times at emergency care departments is published on a quarterly basis and is available to view or download from: http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/hospital-stats/emergency_care-3.htm

Information is also available to view or download in an Excel format at the following link for each emergency care department and month, since April 2007: http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/ec1_data_mar_13.xls

Care Homes

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given the increase in the population of older people, how a reduction in the number of older people's care homes can be rationalised.

(AQW 22388/11-15)

Mr Poots: Following on from my statement to the Assembly, any decisions to close older peoples' residential homes will be on a case by case basis and will have to take account of the relevant considerations locally such as the availability of replacement services and the care needs of residents.

I want to ensure that older people receive the best care possible, within available resources, and in an environment that meets their care needs best. The majority of people want to be supported so that they can stay at home for as long as possible. Planning for change is essential, if independent living is to be promoted and people are to be treated with the dignity and respect they deserve.

These kinds of changes provide an opportunity for the HSC to redistribute financial and other resources to a range of alternative forms of care provision that facilitate independent living and will help to meet an increased volume of care requirements associated with growth pressures of an ageing population within a constrained resource environment.

Positron Emission Tomography Scans

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 21670/11-15, whether the Royal Victoria Hospital is currently accepting referrals for Positron Emission Tomography scans.

(AQW 22404/11-15)

Mr Poots: Positron emission tomography (PET-CT) is a key diagnostic and treatment management tool for patients with cancer, and ensuring short waiting times for cancer treatment depends on timely access to this scanner. Taking into account NICE guidance and the Royal College of Radiologists' position, there is evidence that that current usage of PET-CT for dementia patients in Northern Ireland is significantly higher than would be expected for our population size.

Referrals for dementia patients to the PET-CT scanner, located within the Royal Victoria Hospital Belfast, have been suspended pending a review of the clinical pathway for dementia which will address the appropriate use of PET-CT for patients in diagnosing and managing this condition. New guidance on criteria for acceptance of referrals will be issued shortly by the Health and Social Care Board.

Residential Homes: Western Health and Social Care Trust

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether there are any plans to close residential care homes in the Western Health and Social Care Trust area.

(AQW 22442/11-15)

Mr Poots: You will be aware by now that I have suspended the process whereby individual Trusts consult on the closure statutory elderly residential care homes in their area I have asked the HSC Board to lead on a new process for consulting and implementing change. I expect the HSC Board to work closely with the Trusts to coordinate a regional approach on residential care homes, with Trusts having more time to engage with individuals, families, community and staff. Consultation on change will still be necessary, but the pace of change will be clearly defined and is likely to be over a longer period of time.

The Western HSC Trust had submitted its proposals regarding the closure of four statutory residential care homes at a meeting of its Board on 6 May 2013.

Paediatric Cardiac Surgery

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the regulatory authority and the relevant regulations that apply to paediatric cardiac surgery; and the regulatory authority and the relevant regulations that would apply to paediatric cardiac surgery should all surgery be moved to Dublin.

(AQW 22481/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) has a statutory duty of quality in respect of its commissioning role. In commissioning services the HSCB will draw up a commissioning specification that all providers must adhere to. In addition specifically with regard to paediatric congenital cardiac surgery and Interventional cardiology services all units providing this service submit outcomes data to the Central Cardiac Audit Database (CCAD), a system used to collect information for the National Heart Disease Audits and provide audit feedback that is used to monitor and plan how to improve the day-to-day quality of care for patients with cardiovascular conditions.

In addition all doctors performing paediatric cardiac surgery in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland are regulated respectively by the General Medical Council in the UK and the Medical Council in the Republic of Ireland.

Private Care Home Vacancies

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of residential vacancies in each private care home, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 22514/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information on the number of residential vacancies in each private care home is not centrally available.

The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) holds information on all registered health and social care services in Northern Ireland including nursing homes, residential care homes and domiciliary care agencies.

A list of residential services can be accessed through the 'Residential Care Homes' file, at the web address below. This contains all registered services in Northern Ireland detailing maximum approved places for each service.

http://www.rqia.org.uk/what_we_do/registration__inspection_and_reviews/service_provider_directory.cfm

Fluoridation

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he has brought proposals to the Executive on the addition of fluoride to the water supply.

(AQW 22545/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am still considering my position on fluoridation of the water supply in Northern Ireland and continue to consult with Executive colleagues on the matter before I come to a decision.

I have not formally brought proposals to the Executive on this matter.

If a proposal to fluoridate the water supplies is made, the appropriate evidence from reputable scientific and medical sources will be considered, and we are required under The Water and Sewerage Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 to consult and ascertain public opinion. Should such a consultation proceed, we would welcome the views of all interested parties, at that time.

Nurses: Mileage Allowance

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the allowance paid to nurses for mileage, as well as any lump sums available for general use of vehicles, is being changed; and to outline the reason for any change.
(AQW 22649/11-15)

Mr Poots: From 1 July 2013 the current Agenda for Change mileage allowances for infrequent (called 'standard') or frequent (called 'regular') users and fixed lump sum payment for frequent users, will be replaced by rates based on information in the AA guides on motoring costs.

Under these new arrangements the rates will allow for increases in fuel costs and all the costs of keeping a car on the road, including petrol, repairs, insurance and road tax. The same rate will apply for frequent users and regular users and lump sum payments will no longer be payable.

The new system will be simpler and easier to use. It will apply a consistent reimbursement rate to all Agenda for Change staff regardless of the number of business miles travelled and it will have built in bi-annual reviews, to ensure that payments continue to cover any costs that staff incur.

NHS mileage arrangements had not been reviewed since 2000. This new National Agenda for Change Agreement was negotiated with the Main National Health Service Trade Unions including the RCN. The process included two comprehensive consultations. The partnership responses indicated a strong preference for a single rate of reimbursement and use of the AA guides as the reference for the costs of business motoring.

This is a National Agreement and consequently, it will be introduced here in parity with the rest of the UK.

Department of Justice

Legislative Changes: Legal Loopholes

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether there have been any legislative changes following the McDermott brothers case to ensure that the legal loopholes, which restricted the judiciary, cannot be used to permit offenders to reside in the same community as their victims.
(AQW 22010/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): In terms of legislative change I have extended the period available for a Supervision and Treatment Order (STO) from two to three years. That change was not on the basis of any legal loophole but was made to widen court powers and in support of a request made by the sentencing judge.

In the context of the new mental capacity legislation I am also reviewing current law with a view to additional provisions in relation to criminal justice. I am, for example, proposing to enhance the options available to the courts in cases where defendants are unfit to be tried to provide a wider range of options for the court.

Courts have, and already deploy, additional powers in cases such as these where residence requirements can be applied. It is, for example, open to the court to use a sexual offences prevention order (SOPO) to place conditions on residence where it is deemed necessary in the interest of protecting the public from serious sexual harm. A SOPO with residence requirements and a STO were applied in the McDermott brothers' case.

I am also very alert to the needs and requirements of victims and communities to have their voices heard. In January of this year I introduced Community Impact Statements in line with my published commitment in our annual Victim & Witness Action Plan. The purpose of these statements is to let the court know about the impact of the crime on a community, after someone has been convicted of a particular crime and before they are sentenced. Community impact statements are to be used in a targeted manner, for critical incidents that have had a significant impact on a community (as an indirect victim) and have damaged public confidence.

Prison Service

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 18759/11-15, what action he intends to take to increase the availability of Northern Ireland Prison Service posts that are suitable for people with disabilities, specifically in relation to prison officers who have become disabled.
(AQW 22036/11-15)

Mr Ford: In line with Equal Opportunity Legislation, the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) when recruiting staff ensures that all eligible persons have equal opportunity for employment on the basis of their ability, qualifications and aptitude for the work. Appointments are made on merit without regard to disability.

As previously stated in AQW/21278/11-15 if a member of staff becomes disabled then NIPS is legally obliged, in accordance with the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, to consider whether a reasonable adjustment can be made to their current duties. If, due to the nature of the disability, this cannot be accommodated then alternative duties, including a possible change in location, may be considered within the constraints of the business need to enable staff to remain in post or return to work. Such considerations are subject to suitable work being available.

Prison Service

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 17561/11-15, whether the Northern Ireland Prison Service plans to employ more civil servants and if so, to detail the grade and salary scale.

(AQW 22038/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) plans to employ civil servants in a range of both Prison and General Service grades. In the current financial year NIPS will be making appointments to the following grades as set out in the table below:

Grade to be Recruited	Salary Range Advertised
Director of Rehabilitation	£63,360 - £77,500
Psychology Assistant	£23,336 - £26,086
Custody Prison Officer (Custody Officer)	£18,000 - £23,000
Prisoner Custody Officer (PCO)	£8.89 per hour

Prisoner Release

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice how many prisoners have been released, time served, in 2012 and had been serving a sentence for (i) a terrorism related offence; (ii) a sexual offence; and (iii) other offences from (a) Maghaberry; (b) Magilligan; and (c) Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre and Prison.

(AQW 22061/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below shows the number of prisoners released, time served, between 1 January 2012 and 31 December 2012 in each establishment and by specified offences.

	Terrorist related offences	Sexual offences	Other offences
Maghaberry	5	41	1825
Hydebank Wood	0	7	596
Magilligan	1	67	624

Prison Service: Gross Misconduct Training

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 21137/11-15 (i) why training has not been provided to Governors and Northern Ireland Civil Service staff who are responsible for processing cases of gross misconduct; (ii) why the advice of the Labour Relations Agency was not followed; (iii) for his assessment of whether this deficiency is satisfactory; and (iv) whether the Northern Ireland Prison Service has been monitoring the operation of its disciplinary and grievance procedures as part of the Equal Opportunities Monitoring Guidelines.

(AQW 22067/11-15)

Mr Ford: I refer the Member to my response to AQW 20698/11-15 regarding training for staff. There is no statutory requirement to train staff or management on the Code of Conduct and Discipline. However, in line with good practice, the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) intends to introduce formal training for those who use and operate the procedures when the new Code of Conduct is introduced.

I would confirm that NIPS compiles equity monitoring information in relation to disciplinary and grievance cases as part of the Equal Opportunities Monitoring Guidelines.

Prison Service: Code of Conduct and Discipline

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 21327/11-15, aside from the regulatory functions of the Code of Conduct and Discipline, to detail (i) the contributory factors that the Northern Ireland Prison Service takes into consideration when deciding not to discipline staff, at senior grades, who have breached the Code of Conduct and Discipline whilst junior

staff have been disciplined as a result of the same investigation; and (ii) whether discipline should be applied consistently and fairly across all grades.

(AQW 22104/11-15)

Mr Ford: I refer the Member to my responses to AQW 20303/11-15 and AQW 21317/11-15 and confirm that each disciplinary case is considered on an individual basis and appropriate sanctions applied irrespective of grade.

This ensures consistency in the application of disciplinary sanctions in accordance with the current Code of Conduct and Discipline.

High Court Case Reference McCL8697

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to High Court case reference McCL8697, whether Legal Aid was granted to either the plaintiff or the respondent; and to provide a breakdown of costs including those expended on senior counsel.

(AQW 22110/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission based on the information provided is unable to identify any record of legal aid being granted in this case.

Prison Service: Voluntary Exit Retirement Scheme

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 21143/11-15, to detail the minimum period of service required for eligibility for the voluntary exit retirement scheme in relation to staff that are late joiners to the Northern Ireland Prison Service.

(AQW 22111/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service launched the Voluntary Early Retirement Scheme on 8 November 2011 and invited applications from those staff aged 50 or over on that date in surplus grades. Length of service was not taken into consideration. Benefits paid under the Civil Service Compensation Scheme (NI) are determined by length of service.

Prison Service Staff: Environmental Allowance

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice whether he has considered applying the Environmental Allowance to Northern Ireland Prison Service employees in light of the ongoing security threats against them.

(AQW 22142/11-15)

Mr Ford: I have considered a request by the Prison Officers' Association (NI) to pay an Environmental Allowance to those uniformed grades working in the Northern Ireland Prison Service who have been appointed since 2002. I have concluded that as the salary scales are higher than comparable prison grades in the rest of the United Kingdom, this reflects the situation in Northern Ireland. Consequently the introduction of an Environmental Allowance would not be appropriate.

Prison Service

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 17725/11-15, to detail (i) the date on which the officer was appointed to a prison hospital or healthcare facility; and (ii) the date that each of the nursing officers concerned, including the deceased nurse, entered the Northern Ireland Prison Service.

(AQW 22184/11-15)

Mr Ford: The information requested has been withheld. This is to protect the identity of the individuals concerned as disclosure would be contrary to the Data Protection Act 1998.

Legal Aid Payments

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail how he plans to address the issue of Mr Raymond Brownlee, in relation to sentencing for false imprisonment, threats to kill and wounding, which cannot proceed as no counsel will take on this case due to changes in Legal Aid payments; and whether Mr Brownlee can seek counsel from outside Northern Ireland.

(AQW 22186/11-15)

Mr Ford: On 20 March 2013, the High Court delivered a judgment in favour of Mr Raymond Brownlee arising from Judicial Review proceedings taken by him against the Department of Justice in relation to his legal representation under criminal legal aid. The Department lodged an appeal against this judgment on 26 April 2013 which has yet to be heard by the Appeal Court. While proceedings remain ongoing, it would not be appropriate for me to make any comment on this matter.

Mr Brownlee could seek counsel from outside Northern Ireland. However, before counsel from outside this jurisdiction could represent him they would have to meet the requirements set down by the Bar Council of Northern Ireland.

Strategic Steering Group

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Justice how many issues have been referred from both Prison Service and healthcare staff to the Strategic Steering Group for resolution; and the outcome of each deliberation.

(AQW 22215/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Strategic Steering Group which the Member is referring to has not met for approximately three years and therefore has not deliberated over any issues.

Prisoners: Access by Security Service Personnel

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Justice to outline under what circumstances Security Service personnel have access to prisoners; and whether the prisoner's approval to meet them is required.

(AQW 22216/11-15)

Mr Ford: The legislation is outlined below in Rule 69 part 1A and part 1B from The Prison and Young Offenders Centres Rules (Northern Ireland)

(1A) A member of the Serious Organised Crime Agency's staff

designated under section 43 of the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005, an officer of Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, or a member of the Security Service may, on production of an authorisation issued by or on behalf of a person specified in paragraph (1B), interview any prisoner willing to see him.

(1B) Those persons are –

- (a) the Director General of the Serious Organised Crime Agency;
- (b) the Commissioners of Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs;
- (c) the Director General of the Security Service.

Legal Services Commission

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice why the 2009/10 pay scales are still in place for staff in the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission.

(AQW 22255/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission (NILSC) is a discrete bargaining unit for pay purposes with pay remits approved through the Department of Justice and the Department of Finance and Personnel. The NILSC presently has 3 pay remits outstanding covering the periods 2010/11, 2011/12 and 2012/13. The last agreed pay settlement for NILSC covered the period 2006/07 to 2008/09; no agreement was

reached in 2009/10 pay settlement negotiations and in July 2011 the NILSC imposed a 2.6% pay award for that period which, at the time, resulted in the introduction of LSC specific pay scales from August 2009. My officials will continue to work with the NILSC to address the outstanding issues and to ensure that, when completed, any agreed Pay Strategy is passed to DFP for financial approval.

Legal Services Commission

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice why the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission has not submitted a pay remit bid and accompanying business case in respect of pay remit years 2010/11, 2011/12 and 2012/13.

(AQW 22256/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission does not presently have an agreed Pay Strategy. The NILSC also has a number of outstanding Pay Remits covering the periods 2010/11, 2011/12 and 2012/13. The last agreed pay settlement for this arms length body covered the period 2006/07 to 2008/09; no agreement was reached in 2009/10 pay settlement negotiations and in July 2011 a 2.6% pay award was made for that period. The NILSC submitted a Pay Strategy Business Case to the Department of Justice on 22 January 2013 for consideration. At that time a number of resolved between the NILSC and my officials. My officials will continue to work with the NILSC to address the outstanding issues and to ensure that, when completed, any agreed Pay Strategy is passed to DFP for financial approval. It is only at this stage that an approved business case and supporting DFP pay remit templates would be completed.

Legal Services Commission

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice what pay progression there has been for staff in the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission over the last three years; and to outline the reasons for this position.

(AQW 22257/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission (NILSC) presently has three pay remits outstanding covering the periods 2010/11, 2011/2012 and 2012/13 (with the pay progression element for its 2009/10 pay settlement also outstanding).

Staff last received a pay increase in 2010, when a unilateral 2.6% pay award was made. This pay award did not include an element for pay progression.

My officials will continue to work with the NILSC to address the outstanding issues and to ensure that, when completed, any agreed Pay Strategy is passed to DFP for financial approval.

Policing Board: Injury on Duty Review Working Group

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) whether his Department has been invited by the Northern Ireland Policing Board to appoint a departmental official to sit on the board's Injury on Duty Review Working Group; and (ii) whether the invitation has been accepted.

(AQW 22383/11-15)

Mr Ford: I can confirm that my Department has been invited to sit on the Policing Board's Working Group and the invitation has been accepted.

Community Safety Action Plan

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Justice (i) when the Community Safety Action Plan will be published; (ii) what period the plan will cover; and (iii) whether it will result in the continuity of programme funding from Policing and Community Safety Partnerships.

(AQW 22610/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Community Safety Strategy Action Plans were published in February 2013, setting out the priority actions from 2012/13 to 2014/15 to deliver on each strand of the Community Safety Strategy.

Action plans are available at www.dojni.gov.uk. Click on "publications" – "publications - categories" – "Policing and Community Safety" – then "Community Safety Strategy Action Plan".

Just over £5.1m is being provided jointly by my Department and the Policing Board to fund the Policing and Community Safety Partnerships in 2013/14.

The purpose of this funding is to support the PCSPs in the implementation of their local action plans, which are required to contribute to the delivery of the Community Safety Strategy Action Plans by improving community safety through tackling crime and anti-social behaviour, and supporting community confidence in policing by working in partnership with communities to ensure local accountability.

Decisions on how PCSP Action Plan funding is accessed and allocated are the responsibility of each PCSP, on the basis of consultation, community engagement and research carried out to identify local priorities.

Department for Regional Development

Roads Service: Removal of Flags and Signs

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 923/10, how many illegally erected flags and road signs Roads Service removed in (i) 2010/11; and (ii) 2011/12.

(AQW 22011/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): Details of the number of illegally erected flags and road signs removed by my Department's Roads Service are provided in the table below:

	Number of illegally erected flags removed	Number of illegally erected signs removed *
Financial Year 2010/11	116	1425
Financial Year 2011/12	24	982

* Signs were either attached to or placed on Roads Service property.

Roads Service has signed up to the multi-agency protocol on the display of flags in public areas, which was launched by Government on 4 April 2005. The protocol recognises an effective resolution to the flags issue is more likely to be achieved through the co-operation of local communities. It will require widespread community support for the partnership established by the protocol to be effective.

A6 Road Project

Mr Ó hOisín asked the Minister for Regional Development when the procurement process for the A6 road scheme will commence.

(AQW 22074/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has recently received the Inspector's Report on the proposed A6 Londonderry to Dungiven dualling scheme and I intend to publish a statement on the way forward in due course, after issues arising from the report have been fully examined and resolved.

The Direction Order and Environmental Notice to Proceed for the Randalstown to Castledawson scheme were confirmed in March 2011. The scheme can be brought forward for procurement in a relatively short timescale, when funding is confirmed.

Whilst the A5 project remains on the Roads Service Major Works Programme, it is important that other schemes, such as the A6, which may be in a position to be progressed ahead of the A5, are given full consideration by the Executive. I therefore intend to bring forward proposals to the Executive detailing other options such as, moving forward on procurement of other possible schemes.

Translink: Meetings

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development how many meetings were held by Translink managers at which his Department was represented in the last twelve months; and the grade of departmental staff in attendance.

(AQW 22125/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Officials have liaised with Translink and I can advise you that my Department has been represented at Senior Civil Service level over the past twelve months at a number of high level meetings which are detailed in the table below. In addition, four briefing sessions have taken place during this period, between the Transport NI Chief Executive and Translink Group Chief Executive to discuss current issues.

Meeting Title	Number of Meetings Held
Ministerial Performance Review	1
Tri-annual Accountability	3
Sponsor Division Monitoring	9
Public Transport Partnership Board	3
Belfast Transport Hub Sponsor Group	3

This does not include membership of specific capital project meetings occasionally attended by Departmental staff. Finally, my officials at various different levels within the Department attend numerous meetings with Translink on a wide range of operational issues.

NI Water: Meetings

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development how many meetings were held by NI Water managers at which his Department was represented in the last twelve months; and the grade of departmental staff in attendance.

(AQW 22129/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Over the twelve month period 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013 my officials, at SCS level, held a range of regular governance monitoring and review meetings with Northern Ireland Water's senior managers. These are detailed in the table below. In addition, eight briefing sessions have taken place during this period, between the Board, Chief Executive and senior officials of Northern Ireland Water and the Minister; and there have been 13 meetings with Board members and the Chief Executive at Permanent Secretary level.

Finally, officials at all levels within my Department engage with NIW managers on a wide range of business and operational issues. These meetings are not included in the table.

Meeting Title	Number of Meetings Held (1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013)
Quarterly Shareholder Meetings	4
Ground Clearing Pre Quarterly Shareholder Meetings	4
Post Quarterly Shareholder Meetings (with Company Secretary)	4
NIW Internal Audit Team	6
NIW Governance Team	6
NIW Business Improvement Team	6
Meeting with NIW Capital Team	7
NIW Finance and Regulation Team	8

Meeting Title	Number of Meetings Held (1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013)
Output Review Group	3
Water Stakeholders Steering Group	2
Meetings to discuss Performance Delivery Efficiency Unit recommendations on flooding	8
Price Control Process meetings	10

Sewage and Waste Water Problems: Millisle

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what interim solutions will be put in place to tackle sewage and waste water problems in Millisle, pending further capital works.

(AQW 22131/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that a £2.2 million capital project is included in its PC13 Business Plan covering the period April 2013 to March 2015 to deliver improved bathing waters and reduce the risk of out of sewer flooding in Millisle. Subject to obtaining statutory approvals and completion of lands acquisition, NIW proposes to commence work in Spring 2014.

In the interim, NIW has increased its operation and maintenance activities within the existing network, and will continue to monitor the performance of the sewerage system in Millisle in order to reduce the risk of sewer blockages and out-of-sewer flooding.

Sewage and Waste Water Problems: Millisle

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the interim solutions being put in place to tackle sewage and waste water treatment problems in Millisle in advance of major capital works.

(AQW 22132/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would refer the member to my answer to AQW 22131/11-15.

Bus Shelters in Rural Areas

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the budget allocation for the supply and maintenance of bus shelters in rural areas.

(AQW 22192/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department does not have a specific budget allocation for the supply of bus shelters in rural areas and therefore any requests for additional shelters would have to compete for funding against other road improvement schemes. Unfortunately in the current climate where there are considerable pressures on budgets, these requests would attract a low priority in comparison to other schemes, which address specific road safety concerns.

The Member may be aware that my Department currently has a contract with Adshel for the provision and maintenance of bus shelters across Northern Ireland which runs until the end of 2015. This contract, which was approved whilst Peter Robinson was Minister for Regional Development, has delivered over 1,350 new bus shelters since 2001, at no cost to my Department, however although it currently does not make provision for any new shelters, Adshel continues to fund the maintenance of all existing bus shelters during the remaining contract period.

In order to ensure the future provision of bus shelters, my Department is currently working towards the establishment of new contractual arrangements, which are to be in place for 2015. Any requests for bus shelters received in the intervening period that cannot be accommodated will be given priority when the new contract is in place.

The Member may also be aware that District Councils and Translink are also permitted to provide and fund additional bus shelters.

Roads Service: Removal of Illegal Road Signs

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development how many illegal road signs have been removed by Roads Service, in each of the last two years.

(AQW 22237/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of the number of illegally erected road signs removed by my Department's Roads Service are shown in the table below:

Year	Number of illegally erected signs removed *
2010/11	1425
2011/12	982

* Signs were either attached to, or placed on Roads Service property.

Translink/NI Transport Holding Company

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the full extent of the cash reserves held by Translink/NI Transport Holding Company.
(AQW 22241/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The 2012/13 Annual Accounts are not yet finalized, and therefore I would refer you to the latest set of audited accounts that have been laid in the assembly library and are made available to the public. The NI Transport Holding Company consolidated balance sheet on page 68 provides a detailed breakdown of the assets and liabilities of the group for the financial year ended 25 March 2012.

Translink/NI Transport Holding Company

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he approved the size of the cash reserves held by Translink/NI Transport Holding Company.
(AQW 22242/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Although I appoint the NITHC/Translink board, it is established as a commercial organization and has ultimate responsibility for production of their own accounts. The Directors are required to consider, as part of the review of going concern, cash resources available to pay debts falling due.

I can confirm that on an annual basis Translink seek approval from my Department for the main elements of their Corporate Plan including their projected financial position and share with us going concern deliberations. The corporate plan sets out the broad financial plans and key performance measures for a three year period. I refer you to page 57 of the 2011/12 Annual Report and Accounts which is the latest set of audited accounts available. This sets out the financial key performance indicators of turnover and pro forma profit before tax which Translink are measured against.

Translink/NI Transport Holding Company

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Regional Development, in light of the cash reserves held by Translink/NI Transport Holding Company, whether he will be reviewing any further sums of public money going towards the company's operating costs.
(AQW 22243/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: In relation to the corporate plan for 2013/14 and 2014/15 I have agreed the position with Translink that over the three year period from 2012/13 to 2014/15, the group will break even. This will require Translink to utilise their profit in 2012/13 to balance their projected losses in subsequent years. This approach is based on the assumption of a certain level of funding from the department including in year funding. The pro-active use of reserves is justifiable in current circumstances as it mitigates the need for further fare increases and subsidised services over this period.

Translink/NI Transport Holding Company

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the investment portfolio which Translink/NI Transport Holding Company is guaranteed by the profits it has made over the last five years.
(AQW 22244/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Officials have liaised with Translink who has confirmed that Translink's Group Property Asset Management Plan records the following investment properties:

- | | |
|---|---|
| ■ Abbey Trading Centre | ■ 58/60 Duncrue Street (warehouse/office) |
| ■ Railway Street, Ballymena (warehouse) | ■ Great Northern (multi-storey car park) |
| ■ Bow Street, Lisburn (retail unit) | ■ Hi Park (multi-storey car park/retail) |
| ■ Donegall Quay (multi-storey car park) | |

Translink has also confirmed that there has been no change to this portfolio in the past 5 years.

Under section 48 of the Transport Act NITHC has been established as a commercial organisation with statutory power to manage its assets and generate revenues as if it were a company engaged in a commercial enterprise. To that end the group is permitted to hold an investment portfolio and generate income from that portfolio. In light of the budgetary constraints under which the group is currently operating, any profits generated through their investment portfolio will assist in mitigating the need for fare increases and subsidising services. As was also noted in the response to AQW 22242/11-15 Translink are required to work to specific targets as agreed in the corporate planning process, these are detailed in page 57 of the group's Annual Report and Accounts for 2011/12.

Terrorist Commemorations: Newry and Armagh

Mr Irwin asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the occasions on which he has instructed his Department to remove terrorist commemorations on departmental controlled or associated property in the Newry and Armagh constituency. (AQW 22287/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's policy, which has been approved by previous Ministers, is that it does not endorse, or support, the unauthorised use of departmental property for any purpose. The Department must also take into account the safety of those who are asked to undertake the removal and the risk of escalating the problem.

Given these circumstances, I, like my predecessors Mr Conor Murphy, Mr Gregory Campbell and Mr Peter Robinson, have not instructed my officials to remove terrorist commemorations on departmental controlled or associated property in the Newry and Armagh constituency, or in any other parliamentary constituency.

I should further advise that unauthorised memorials on the property of the Department's arms-length bodies are matters for the Boards of those organisations.

Traffic Wardens

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of traffic wardens working in each constituency. (AQW 22292/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The information requested by the Member is not available in the form requested as my Department does provide or manage parking enforcement on a constituency basis.

Coleraine Railway Station: Staff Shortages

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development what action his Department is taking to address staff shortages at Coleraine Railway Station following the introduction of a new hourly timetable. (AQW 22350/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can advise you that there are currently no vacancies/staff shortages at Coleraine Railway Station. Since the introduction of the hourly frequency train service and re-opening of the Londonderry line, we have identified the requirement for an additional three on-train conductors to be based in Coleraine; these posts are currently in the process of being filled.

Roads Maintenance

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Regional Development how much has been spent on roads maintenance in each of the last two years, broken down by mile of road. (AQW 22390/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's structural maintenance expenditure per mile of road, in the last two financial years for which information is available, was approximately £5,500 during 2010/11 and £7,500 during 2011/12. These figures exclude expenditure by the two Design Build Finance and Operate (DBFO) companies, who maintain the majority of the motorway and some of the trunk road network.

Structural maintenance is the collective term used for activities which maintain the integrity of the road and footway structure. These include resurfacing and reconstruction, surface dressing, patching and structural drainage.

Road Markings: Repainting

Mr Lynch asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) how often road surface markings are repainted; and (ii) the criteria for identifying when markings need repainted. (AQW 22467/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service carries out regular inspections of all public roads and footways to ensure that essential response maintenance is identified and completed as necessary. The frequency of these inspections depends on the type of road and the volume of vehicular and pedestrian traffic. Town centres and major traffic routes are inspected monthly, while all other roads and footways are inspected at either two or four monthly intervals. During these inspections, all defects, including defective signs and road markings, are noted.

Where the condition of road markings falls below the required standards, they are renewed as soon as possible. However, they are not replaced within a routine/specific time frame rather when they have faded by approximately 30–40%, according to their specific importance. For example, regulatory road markings, such as stop markings, no entry markings and markings on high traffic roads, that is, those with over 5,000 vehicles per day, are replaced within shorter timescales.

Railways: Derry to Coleraine Line

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Regional Development whether his Department has considered taking any action to increase the regularity of the trains on the Derry to Coleraine railway line, during working days from 9am to 5pm to assist commuters. (AQW 22549/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can advise you that it is not currently possible to increase the frequency of the services between Londonderry and Coleraine due to the single line nature of track between Coleraine-Castlerock and Londonderry. Only one train is permitted to operate at any time between Castlerock-Londonderry-Castlerock.

However on completion of Phase II of the Londonderry line upgrade (due 2015), which includes the installation of a passing loop, an hourly frequency can be achieved. This will then facilitate additional services to Londonderry from Coleraine at 09.43, 11.43, 13.43, 15.43 and 17.43.

There will also be trains departing from Londonderry to Coleraine at 08.33, 10.33, 12.33, 14.33 and 16.33 as part of the hourly service introduction.

Railways: Derry to Coleraine Line

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Regional Development what rail service is in place between Derry and Coleraine on a daily basis during normal working hours.

(AQW 22556/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can advise you that Translink currently operate 18 services per day (Monday to Friday). The original proposal had been to operate 8 return trips (16 services) per day (Monday to Friday) however, following public consultation, customers and key stakeholders informed Translink they had a preference for the first train to arrive into Waterside Station before 09:00. In order to achieve this the number of trips have been increased to 9 return trips per day.

The number of services that can be provided are limited by the single track nature of this line. Further service increase will be possible on completion of Phase II of the Coleraine-Londonderry upgrade in 2015 which includes the addition of a new passing loop. This will allow for a train every hour from Londonderry to Coleraine.

Translink also operate 16 services on Saturdays and 12 services on Sundays between Londonderry and Coleraine.

Department for Social Development

Employment and Support Allowance: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many people in North Down claimed Employment Support Allowance in each of the last five years.

(AQW 22127/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): The number of claimants in receipt of Employment and Support Allowance in the North Down Local Government District is detailed in the table below. As Employment and Support Allowance was introduced in October 2008, figures for 2008 are not available.

Period ending	No of claimants
20 Nov 2009	410
3 Dec 2010	660
2 Nov 2011	930
30 Nov 2012	1,580

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Newbuild Apartments in Coleraine

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development how many unfinished 1 and 2 bed apartments there are in the Coleraine Borough Council area.

(AQW 22137/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In relation to social housing new build, the Housing Executive has advised that there are no uncompleted social housing schemes within the Coleraine Borough Council area. My Department does not hold any statistics in relation to unfinished private sector properties.

Community Foundation

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Social Development what is the current total of the Community Foundation.

(AQW 22162/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The fund, formally known as the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust Fund, is operated by the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland who advise that it is worth £10m as at April 2013.

Housing Associations Funding

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how much funding his Department has given to each Housing Association in each of the last three financial years.

(AQW 22203/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has provided the table attached which details the amount of funding that they paid to each Housing Association in each of the last three financial years. It should be noted that these figures refer to the amount of cash that was paid to each Housing Association, which differs from figures reported in the Department's and the Housing Executive's accounts which measure Resource Spend.

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority

Housing Association	2010/11			2011/12			2012/13		
	HAG	Adaptations	Total	HAG	Adaptations	Total	HAG	Adaptations	Total
	£			£			£		
Abbeyfield	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	806.66	806.66	0.00	0.00	0.00
Alpha	848,546.00	47,327.71	895,873.71	197,304.10	75,912.56	273,216.66	0.00	48,974.38	48,974.38
Apex	31,241,136.00	182,014.65	31,423,150.65	30,848,673.24	53,036.22	30,901,709.46	20,043,940.00	80.68	20,044,020.68
Ark	551,487.00	20,343.68	571,830.68	283,679.00	4,014.99	287,693.99	216,295.00	2,329.09	218,624.09
Ballynafeigh	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Belfast Community	1,556,891.00	82,936.86	1,639,827.86	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Clanmil	7,360,010.00	270,370.59	7,630,380.59	13,671,717.81	54,485.76	13,726,203.57	10,707,580.83	63,173.92	10,770,754.75
Connswater	3,799,176.00	46,668.15	3,845,844.15	3,939,554.00	13,010.41	3,952,564.41	2,782,645.00	49,408.21	2,832,053.21
Craigowen	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Dungannon	42,331.00	0.00	42,331.00	46,516.00	4,622.70	51,138.70	0.00	0.00	0.00
Filor	0.00	63,971.65	63,971.65	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Flax	1,211,962.00	18,628.29	1,230,590.29	58,162.00	26,039.71	84,201.71	508,079.00	11,063.69	519,142.69
Fold	12,790,238.64	148,107.60	12,938,346.24	2,022,360.00	92,736.14	2,115,096.14	21,419,729.46	236,094.81	21,655,824.27
Gosford	0.00	181,847.56	181,847.56	0.00	16,473.00	16,473.00	0.00	3,197.70	3,197.70
Grove	637,876.00	9,826.89	647,702.89	414,568.00	17,525.88	432,093.88	33,741.00	4,824.53	38,565.53
Habinteg	922,154.83	149,235.56	1,071,390.39	207,112.00	64,364.66	271,476.66	919,631.00	235,750.61	1,155,381.61
Harmony Homes	386,669.00	6,121.39	392,790.39	50,531.00	0.00	50,531.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Hearth	89,656.69	0.00	89,656.69	261,902.00	2,762.22	264,664.22	246,402.00	2,698.95	249,100.95
Helm	14,648,077.45	416,857.19	15,064,934.64	10,755,965.52	206,294.87	10,962,260.39	2,063,505.00	12,161.47	2,075,666.47
Newington	889,616.00	52,109.49	941,725.49	2,447,275.00	8,611.36	2,455,886.36	1,794,888.00	13,901.81	1,808,789.81
Oaklee	15,107,497.67	315,651.68	15,423,149.35	11,067,202.00	170,544.48	11,237,746.48	7,542,112.00	72,737.63	7,614,849.63
Open Door	311,414.00	3,265.62	314,679.62	311,414.00	15,297.64	326,711.64	266,926.00	4,670.14	271,596.14
Rural	1,027,523.00	34,974.95	1,062,497.95	32,732.00	0.00	32,732.00	123,288.00	26,097.03	149,385.03
SHAC	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
South Ulster	4,246,458.00	77,390.01	4,323,848.01	2,326,111.00	13,274.54	2,339,385.54	1,214,524.00	11,782.48	1,226,306.48
St. Matthews	166,682.00	49,593.97	216,275.97	0.00	6,661.48	6,661.48	0.00	6,552.27	6,552.27
Triangle	2,850,545.00	0.00	2,850,545.00	1,254,811.00	32,801.07	1,287,612.07	2,672,040.00	21,541.88	2,693,581.88
Trinity	2,976,412.38	137,260.27	3,113,672.65	1,331,628.26	130,778.77	1,462,407.03	1,958,368.00	107,513.06	2,065,881.06
Ulidia	8,909,301.73	41,359.92	8,950,661.65	5,715,184.86	8,858.94	5,724,043.80	1,133,832.00	9,948.32	1,143,780.32
Wesley	522,732.00	15,814.57	538,546.57	0.00	13,111.68	13,111.68	196,024.00	10,855.11	206,879.11
Total	113,094,393.39	2,371,678.25	115,466,071.64	87,244,402.79	1,032,025.74	88,276,428.53	75,843,550.29	955,357.77	76,798,908.06

Employment and Support Allowance

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Social Development what is the average cost of an Employment Support Allowance (i) assessment; and (ii) appeal.

(AQW 22204/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I am unable to provide an average cost of administering the Work Capability Assessment process (which determines entitlement to Employment and Support Allowance) and appeal process within the Employment and Support Allowance Centre as these are integral but not specific activities within the entire claims process.

This process involves medical assessment provided by an independent provider and the associated charges are designated commercially sensitive information, in accordance with the provisions of the contract.

Departmental Underspend: DSD

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development to detail his Department's underspend for the 2012-13 financial year; and for a breakdown of the areas from which these monies came.

(AQW 22210/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Department is currently compiling its 2012-13 provisional outturn figures for submission to the Department of Finance & Personnel by the middle of May. Final expenditure figures will be published in the Annual Report & Accounts and laid before the Assembly in July.

Universal Credit Pilot Trials in Britain

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development, in light of the delays put on the universal credit pilot trials in Britain, whether he is seeking any flexibilities to ensure that a flawed system is not introduced locally.

(AQW 22212/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I announced, in my Assembly statement of 22 October 2012, that following successful negotiations with Lord Freud I had secured payment flexibilities for Northern Ireland and that Universal Credit would not launch in Northern Ireland until April 2014. This approach reflects the needs of Northern Ireland people whilst also enabling the IT systems and processes to be rigorously tested by the Department of Work & Pensions before Universal Credit goes live in Northern Ireland.

Universal Credit commenced in Great Britain at the end of April 2013, and my officials are currently engaged with the Department of Work & Pensions to ensure that Northern Ireland learns from the experiences in Great Britain and that this learning is reflected in my plans for the launch of Universal Credit in Northern Ireland in April 2014.

Warm Homes Scheme

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the warm homes scheme.

(AQW 22213/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Warm Homes Scheme contracts with the two Scheme Managers have been extended by another year to June 2014. In the financial year to the end of March 2013 the Warm Homes budget spend was just over £16 million. This delivered heating and insulation measures to 9,904 households.

Welfare Reform Bill

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development what actions he has taken in the last 12 months to secure flexibility and protection from the expectant changes in the Welfare Reform Bill.

(AQW 22214/11-15)

Mr McCausland: During the past 12 months I have been working hard to achieve flexibility and protection from the expectant changes in the Welfare Reform Bill for the people of Northern Ireland.

I have recognised the challenges brought about by the payment arrangement proposals under Universal Credit and, following detailed discussions with Lord Freud, I announced in my Assembly statement of 22 October 2012 that I had secured flexible payment arrangements to protect the most vulnerable claimants.

My officials continue to work with Department for Work and Pensions colleagues to ensure circumstances particular to Northern Ireland claimants are reflected in the design of the Personal Independence Payment. In reassessment cases, if a claimant has not replied to the invitation letter, a home visit will be made. This does not happen in Great Britain.

In terms of Housing, I am keen to ensure appropriate housing services are put in place for households impacted by the Coalition Government's Welfare Reforms, that is why I asked the Housing Executive and housing association movement to bring forward their action plans that will ensure a range of support measures are put in place to mitigate and support those affected.

I have consulted upon and am currently in the final stages of developing a new system of discretionary support which is intended to extend the scope of any such systems and which will include a system of loans and grants.

I continue to work with Executive colleagues and Department for Work and Pensions Ministers to ensure that in implementing Welfare Reform in Northern Ireland we take account of local circumstances and take action where possible to protect those most in need.

Child Maintenance

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development, following the recent Child Maintenance Population Report, what steps are being taken to ensure that more parents with caring responsibilities are aware that they will not lose child maintenance should they choose to apply for and receive other benefits.

(AQW 22266/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There are some key issues which Child Maintenance Service (CMS) has identified from the report and already begun to take action on. The report identified that the majority of parents interviewed did not know that their benefit income will not be affected by the receipt of child maintenance. It is important to address this gap in knowledge, as even small amounts of child maintenance could make a difference to the number of children in poverty.

We have taken steps to ensure that all customers who contact the Child Maintenance Choices Service are advised if they are on benefits, that their benefit income will not be affected by the receipt of Child Maintenance.

In addition, CMS is working with colleagues in the Social Security Agency to identify and contact lone parents, on benefit, to advise them that any benefits they receive or apply for will not be affected by the receipt of Child Maintenance.

Through our stakeholder engagement programme, we will communicate this message to the Voluntary and Community Sector in Northern Ireland and by liaising with the Northern Ireland Advice Consortium on the provision of information to their customers who have a child maintenance interest.

Town Improvements Funding

Ms McGahan asked the Minister for Social Development what funding his Department provides for town improvements.

(AQW 22272/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department provides funding for a range of regeneration initiatives to improve town and city centres which include: Urban Development Grants; Environmental Improvement / Public Realm / Revitalisation schemes and Comprehensive Development schemes. In recent years this has averaged out at £18m per annum.

My Department has also been progressing Business Improvement District legislation for Northern Ireland, which provides a statutory basis for businesses to self fund improvements in their town centres through the collection of a levy within a defined area.

Properties Excluded from Schemes in Ballymena, Ballymoney and Moyle Council Areas

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of properties in the (i) Ballymena; (ii) Ballymoney; and (iii) Moyle Council areas that have not been included in schemes because the existing or previous tenant did not give their consent.

(AQW 22275/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised me that over the last three years (2010/11 to 2012/13) the number of properties in Ballymena, Ballymoney and Moyle Council areas which were originally included in planned schemes but were subsequently taken out of those schemes because of tenants' refusals is as follows: -

- Ballymena Council Area – 252 properties
(148 for heating schemes; 81 for kitchen schemes; 23 for smoke alarms)
- Ballymoney Council Area – 71 properties
(39 for heating schemes; 1 for kitchen scheme ; 3 for External Cyclical Maintenance; 28 for smoke alarms)
- Moyle Council Area – 67 properties
(31 for heating schemes; 23 kitchen schemes; 11 for smoke alarms; 2 for Multi Element Improvement scheme.)

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Housing Executive Properties, North Down: Cavity Walls

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the (i) number; and (ii) location of the Housing Executive properties in North Down that do not have cavity walls.

(AQW 22296/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested as the Housing Executive does not routinely record data by Parliamentary Constituency. The Housing Executive has the following properties within its Bangor District Office area that do not have cavity walls: -

- 10 aluminium bungalows at Bloomfield Place (on main Bloomfield Road)

- 207 no fines dwellings in Loughview, Holywood
- 129 no fines dwellings in Whitehill Estate, Bangor.

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Welfare Reform: IT Systems

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development on which date will the reforms to the IT system be complete in order to be compatible with the changes flowing from the Welfare Reform Bill.

(AQW 22377/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Welfare Reform Bill (NI) 2012 has not yet completed its Assembly Consideration Stage at this time and therefore the changes flowing from this have not yet been finalised. Consequently the reforms to the various IT systems which are used to pay social security benefits in Northern Ireland and the dates on which these will be complete are not yet known.

If the Welfare Reform Bill becomes law it is anticipated that the majority of changes will be implemented between Autumn 2013 and Spring 2014 and the reforms to the supporting IT systems will need to be completed by this time. My officials are continuing to work closely with Department for Work and Pensions officials to ensure the needs of Northern Ireland are reflected in any changes to the IT systems.

Bangor Town Centre Regeneration: Theatre

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development what discussions he has had with the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure on the establishment of a theatre in Bangor as part of the town centre regeneration.

(AQW 22446/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department recently announced that DSD has stepped in to take forward the Queen's Parade development scheme as set out in the Bangor Town Centre Masterplan. This scheme is at a very early stage of development it is too early to enter into discussions with The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. Discussions with interested stakeholders on the development plans will take place at the appropriate time.

Double Glazing

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development what support his Department offers to homeowners who wish to install double glazing.

(AQW 22453/11-15)

Mr McCausland: If the lack of double glazing in an owner occupied property represents an imminent or significant risk to the health of the occupier, financial assistance may be available through a home repairs assistance grant or a renovation grant administered by the Housing Executive. These grants however, are awarded on a discretionary basis, are subject to limited funding, and are only available in exceptional circumstances under specific criteria.

My Department is at present carrying out a review of the support for repair and improvement in the private housing sector. The responses from the public consultation are currently being considered and a series of proposals will be published when this consideration concludes.

Royal Exchange

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development to detail any discussions he has held with developers on the establishment of a Community and Business Opportunity Plan for the proposed Royal Exchange development.

(AQW 22488/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I have not held any discussions with the developers of the Royal Exchange Scheme regarding the establishment of a Community and Business Opportunity Plan.

A Community and Business Opportunity Plan for Royal Exchange will be put in place at the appropriate time, which would be around 2 years prior to the start of construction. There is presently no date for the commencement of construction.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Libel Action of O'Loan-v-Given and UTV

Mr Allister asked the Assembly Commission whether any part of the damages and costs awarded in the recent libel action of O'Loan-v-Given and UTV will be paid by its insurers, and, if so, to specify the amount and the basis upon which the contribution will be made.

(AQW 22015/11-15)

Mr Weir (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Assembly Commission's Combined Employer's and Public Liability insurance policy contains cover in respect of defamation. The recent action of O'Loan v Givan and UTV Media was settled prior to hearing. The action was indemnified under the provisions of the policy. The Assembly Commission is advised that the parties have agreed that the only information to be made public was the statement read in court. Therefore, it would not be appropriate to specify the amount of the settlement to be met by the Commission's insurers.

Defamation Proceedings

Mr Allister asked the Assembly Commission whether its insurers have met claims for damages and costs arising out of defamation proceedings against MLAs to date; and to specify each occasion.

(AQW 22016/11-15)

Mr Weir (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): At present, no claims for damages or costs arising out of defamation proceedings have been met by the Assembly Commission's insurers. You will be aware of the recent case of O'Loan v Givan and UTV Media. A settlement was made in this case under the personal injury section of the Commission's combined Employer's and Public Liability insurance policy. The final settlement figure (to include costs) has still to be advised by the Commission's insurers.

Legal Proceedings Underwritten by Insurance

Mr Allister asked the Assembly Commission to provide a full list of the type of legal proceedings which are underwritten by insurance held by the Commission on behalf of MLAs, and to outline whether it applies equally to the initiation and defence of proceedings and what conditions or restrictions apply.

(AQW 22021/11-15)

Mr Weir (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Assembly Commission retains insurance cover against a variety of risks. The main elements of this cover relate to Employer's and Public Liability. The Commission also holds travel insurance (for example, for Committee visits). In addition to employees of the Assembly Commission, the policy in respect of Employer's Liability also covers Members. It also provides cover to Members in their role as employers. Similarly, the Public Liability policy provides cover for Members' constituency office(s).

In respect of Employer's and Public Liability, the cover is provided by way of a relatively standard commercial policy. Therefore, a number of aspects of cover are included in the policy document even though the Assembly is not a commercial entity and is unlikely to utilise the full range of cover offered by the policy. The policy covers the following main risks which represent the types of legal proceedings that could be envisaged under the policy:

- (a) Legal liability for bodily injury to an employee arising from the employee's employment including liability to an employee transferred under a Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) (TUPE) arrangement;
- (b) Legal costs arising from a);
- (c) Payment of damages for unsatisfied court judgements – where a court in EU has awarded damages to an employee for bodily injury arising from the employee's employment and the court-awarded damages remain unpaid for six months;
- (d) Compensation for an employee's court attendance at the request of the insurer (related to potential Employer's liability);
- (e) Compensation for damages and legal costs arising from a claim by an employee under the Data Protection Act 1998;
- (f) Legal liability for personal injury to any person who is not an employee;
- (g) Legal liability for property damage;
- (h) Legal costs arising from f) and g);
- (i) Compensation for an employee's court attendance at the request of the insurer (related to potential Public liability);
- (j) Legal liability under the Defective Premises (Northern Ireland) Order 1975;
- (k) Contingent motor cover in respect of personal injury or property damage arising from the use of a motor vehicle (NB – this is NOT motor insurance);

The term bodily injury is defined in the policy to include, inter alia, death, disease or illness whereas personal injury is defined to include bodily injury and a range of injuries that can be broadly described as injury to freedom (for example, false arrest or false imprisonment) or injury to reputation (for example, libel or slander).

The types of proceeding noted above relate to the Employer's and Public liabilities aspects of the policy. In addition, the standard wording of the policy covers matters such as Product Recall, Crisis Containment and Clean-Up Costs that are unrelated to the Assembly's activities.

It is highly unlikely that the Employer's or Public liability element of the policy would be used to initiate proceedings as these are defensive elements of the policy that are intended to mitigate the Commission's risks (legal or otherwise). To clarify, the personal injury provisions do not include cover to initiate proceedings in respect of "... injurious falsehood, libel, slander, defamation of character...".

In common with most insurance products, the policy contains General Conditions and Provisions relating to matters such as disclosure of information, adopting reasonable precautions, limits of liability, etc. In addition, there are additional conditions and provisions relating to specific sections of the policy.

Libel, Slander and Defamation Insurance

Mr Lunn asked the Assembly Commission whether insurance cover for MLAs in respect of Libel, Slander and Defamation is subject to an excess for each claim.

(AQW 22320/11-15)

Mr Weir (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): Cover in respect of Libel, Slander and Defamation is provided under the Combined Employer's and Public Liability Insurance policy. Each element of this policy is considered by the insurers prior to renewal to consider limits of indemnity and appropriate excesses, depending on a number of factors including client's claims history. This element of the policy has been assigned an excess of £25,000 for 2013/14.

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

Department for Social Development

In Bound Volume 83, page WA 289, please replace AQW 20899/11-15 with:

Housing Executive Waiting List

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the average number of people who were on the Housing Executive waiting list in North Down, in each of the last five years; and how many of these people were classed as priority. (AQW 20899/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): The information is not available in the format requested as the Housing Executive does not routinely collate data by Parliamentary Constituency. However, the Housing Executive has provided details of the waiting list, including the numbers in Housing Stress, in its Bangor District Office for the last five financial years and the current year (at 1 March 2013) as set out in the table below:

Position at:-	Total Applicants	Applicants in Housing Stress (30 points or more)
31 March 2008	1913	1011
31 March 2009	1930	1006
31 March 2010	1885	958
31 March 2011	1884	960
31 March 2012	2197	1081
1 March 2013	2406	1194

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In Bound Volume 83, page WA 411, please replace AQW 21287/11-15 with:

Housing Waiting List in North Down

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Social Development how many people are on the housing waiting list in North Down, broken down by electoral ward. (AQW 21287/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): The information is not available in the format requested as the Housing Executive does not routinely collate data by Electoral Ward. However, the Housing Executive has provided details of the waiting list, including the numbers in Housing Stress, in its Bangor District Office for the last five financial years and the current year (at 1 March 2013) as set out in the table below:

Position at:-	Total Applicants	Applicants in Housing Stress (30 points or more)
31 March 2008	1913	1011
31 March 2009	1930	1006
31 March 2010	1885	958
31 March 2011	1884	960
31 March 2012	2197	1081
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Journal of Proceedings

Minutes of Proceedings

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 15 April 2013

The Assembly met at noon, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Public Petitions

2.1 Public Petition – Stop the closure of Crossmaglen Jobs and Benefits Office

Ms Megan Fearon was granted leave, in accordance with Standing Order 22, to present a Public Petition relating to the closure of Crossmaglen Jobs and Benefits Office.

3. Assembly Business

3.1 Motion - Suspension of Standing Orders 10(2) to 10(4)

Proposed:

That Standing Orders 10(2) to 10(4) be suspended for 15 April 2013.

*Mr P Weir
Ms C Ruane
Mr P Ramsey
Mr R Swann
Mr S Dickson*

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** with cross-community support *nemine contradicente*.

3.2 Motion – Committee Membership

Proposed:

That Mr Jimmy Spratt replace Mr Paul Givan as a member of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and that Ms Paula Bradley replace Mr Jonathan Craig as a member of the Committee on Standards and Privileges.

*Mr P Weir
Lord Morrow*

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

3.3 Motion – Committee Membership

Proposed:

That Mr Ian Milne be appointed as a member of the Committee for the Environment; that Mr Chris Hazzard replace Mr Mitchel McLaughlin as a member of the Public Accounts Committee; that Mr Declan McAleer be appointed as a member of the Committee on Standards and Privileges; and that Mr Ian Milne replace Mr Chris Hazzard as a member of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development.

*Ms C Ruane
Mr G Kelly*

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

3.4 Election of a Deputy Speaker

The Speaker outlined the procedure for the election of a Deputy Speaker under Standing Order 5.

Mr Martin McGuinness nominated Mr Mitchel McLaughlin as a Deputy Speaker.

Ms Caitríona Ruane seconded the nomination. Mr McLaughlin indicated his agreement to accepting the nomination.

Mr John McCallister nominated Mr Basil McCrea as a Deputy Speaker.

Mr Jim Allister seconded the nomination. Mr McCrea indicated his agreement to accepting the nomination.

Debate ensued.

The Question being put that Mr Mitchel McLaughlin be a Deputy Speaker, the Motion was **carried** with cross-community support (Division 1).

3.5 Nomination to act as Principal Deputy Speaker

The Speaker advised that the procedure for the nomination of a Deputy Speaker to act as Principal Deputy Speaker would be conducted in accordance with Standing Order 5A.

Mr Martin McGuinness nominated Mr Mitchel McLaughlin to act as Principal Deputy Speaker. Mr McLaughlin indicated his agreement to accepting the nomination.

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, that Mr McLaughlin be Principal Deputy Speaker, the Nomination was **approved** with cross-community support (Division 2).

4. Executive Committee Business

4.1 First Stage – Tobacco Retailers Bill (NIA 19/11-15)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Mr Edwin Poots, introduced a Bill to make provision for a register of tobacco retailers; to make provision for dealing with the persistent commission of tobacco offences; to confer additional powers of enforcement in relation to offences under Articles 3 and 4 of the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1978; and for connected purposes.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

4.2 Motion: The Pneumoconiosis, etc., (Workers' Compensation) (Payment of Claims) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013

Proposed:

That the Pneumoconiosis, etc., (Workers' Compensation) (Payment of Claims) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 be affirmed.

Minister for Social Development

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

4.3 Motion: The Mesothelioma Lump Sum Payments (Conditions and Amounts) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013

Proposed:

That the Mesothelioma Lump Sum Payments (Conditions and Amounts) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 be approved.

Minister for Social Development

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

5. Committee Business

5.1 Motion: Suicide Prevention

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes with concern the significant rise in suicide rates in Northern Ireland over the last fifteen years; and calls on the Executive to prioritise suicide prevention strategies.

Chairperson, Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

The debate was suspended for Question Time.

6. Question Time

6.1 Agriculture and Rural Development

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Mrs Michelle O'Neill.

6.2 Culture, Arts and Leisure

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Ms Carál Ní Chuilín.

7. Committee Business (Cont'd)

7.1 Motion: Suicide Prevention

Debate resumed on the Motion.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

7.2 Motion: Report on the Inquiry into Topical Questions

Proposed:

That this Assembly approves the report of the Committee on Procedures on its inquiry into Topical Questions.

Chairperson, Committee on Procedures

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

8. Private Members' Business

8.1 Motion – Integrated Education

Proposed:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Education to acknowledge the expressed wish of parents to see their children educated in an integrated setting; to honour his Department's obligation to encourage and facilitate integrated education where demand exists; to make integration of controlled and maintained schools a specific objective of area planning; and to work, in particular with the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education and the Integrated Education Fund, to ease the process of the transformation of existing schools to integrated status.

Mr T Lunn

Mr C Lyttle

The Speaker took the Chair.

8.2 Amendment 1

Leave out all after 'educated' and insert:

'in accordance with their wishes, including in an integrated setting; urges the Minister to guarantee parity of esteem for all sectors with the establishment of sectoral bodies to support parental choice; and further calls on the Minister to encourage all sectoral bodies to promote the development of a single shared education system based upon equality of treatment for all.'

Proposed:

Mr M Storey
Miss M McIlveen
Mr J Craig
Mrs B Hale

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Amendment was **carried** (Division 3).

The Question being put, the Motion, as amended, was **carried** without division.

9. Adjournment**Proposed:**

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 6.16pm.

Mr William Hay

The Speaker

15 April 2013

Northern Ireland Assembly

15 April 2013

Divisions

Division No. 1

Election of a Deputy Speaker

Question put, That Mr Mitchel McLaughlin act as a Deputy Speaker.

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 80

Noes: 15

AYES

Nationalist:

Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McDevitt, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Unionist:

Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.

Other:

Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy.

Tellers for the Ayes: Ms Fearon and Mr McMullan.

NOES

Unionist:

Mr Allister, Mr Beggs, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Elliott, Mr Gardiner, Mr Hussey, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr B McCrea, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Swann.

Other:

Mr Agnew.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Allister and Mr McCallister.

Total votes	95	Total Ayes	80	[84.2%]
Nationalist Vote	38	Nationalist Ayes	38	[100.0%]
Unionist Votes	49	Unionist Ayes	35	[71.4%]
Other Votes	8	Other Ayes	7	[87.5%]

The Motion was **carried** by cross-community vote.

Northern Ireland Assembly

15 April 2013

Divisions

Division No. 2

Nomination of a Principal Deputy Speaker

Question put, That Mr Mitchel McLaughlin act as Principal Deputy Speaker.

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 70

Noes: 28

AYES

Nationalist:

Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr Brady, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mr G Kelly, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Unionist:

Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.

Other:

Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy.

Tellers for the Ayes: Ms Fearon and Mr McMullan.

NOES

Nationalist:

Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mrs D Kelly, Mr McDevitt, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr A Maginness, Mr P Ramsey, Mr Rogers.

Unionist:

Mr Allister, Mr Beggs, Mr Copeland, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Elliott, Mr Gardiner, Mr Hussey, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr B McCrea, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Swann.

Other:

Mr Agnew.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Rogers and Mr Swann.

Total votes	98	Total Ayes	70	[71.4%]
Nationalist Vote	39	Nationalist Ayes	27	[69.2%%]
Unionist Votes	50	Unionist Ayes	35	[70.0%]
Other Votes	9	Other Ayes	8	[88.9%]

The Nomination was **approved** by cross-community vote.

Northern Ireland Assembly

15 April 2013

Divisions

Division No. 3

Motion: Integrated Education – Amendment

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'educated' and insert:

'in accordance with their wishes, including in an integrated setting; urges the Minister to guarantee parity of esteem for all sectors with the establishment of sectoral bodies to support parental choice; and further calls on the Minister to encourage all sectoral bodies to promote the development of a single shared education system based upon equality of treatment for all.'

Proposed:

Mr M Storey

Miss M McIlveen

Mr J Craig

Mrs B Hale

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 71

Noes: 23

AYES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Ms Brown, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Elliott, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Ms McCorley, Mr I McCrea, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr M McGuinness, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKay, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Ms S Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Craig and Mrs Hale.

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dallat, Mr Dickson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs D Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr McCarthy, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mrs McKevitt, Mr A Maginness, Mr P Ramsey, Mr Rogers.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Dickson and Ms Lo.

The Amendment was made.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 10 April - 15 April 2013

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

For Information Only:

S. R. 2013/97 The Parking Places on Roads (Lurgan) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DRD).

S. R. 2013/98 The Parking Places (Disabled Persons' Vehicles) (Amendment No. 3) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DRD).

S. R. 2013/99 The Traffic Weight Restriction (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DRD).

S. R. 2013/100 The Waiting Restrictions (Londonderry) (Amendment No. 2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DRD).

S. R. 2013/101 The Road Races (Drumhorc Hill Climb) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DRD).

Draft S. R. 2013 The Forestry (Felling of Trees) (Calculation of the Area of Land) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DARD).

7. Written Ministerial Statements

8. Consultation Documents

Severance Arrangements for Councillors and draft Local Government (Severance Payments for Councillors) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DOE).

Proposed Scheme Design for the Local Government Pension Scheme (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DOE).

9. Departmental Publications

10. Agency Publications

11. Westminster Publications

12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 16 April 2013

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 Explosions at the Boston Marathon

Mr Alex Attwood made a statement, under Standing Order 24, in relation to the Explosions at the Boston Marathon. Other Members were also called to speak on the matter.

3. Executive Committee Business

3.1 Motion: The draft CRC Energy Efficiency Scheme Order 2013

Proposed:

That the draft CRC Energy Efficiency Scheme Order 2013 be approved.

Minister of the Environment

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

3.2 Motion: The Parental Leave (EU Directive) (Maternity and Parental Leave) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013

Proposed:

That the Parental Leave (EU Directive) (Maternity and Parental Leave) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 be approved.

Minister for Employment and Learning

The sitting was suspended at 11.26am because of disorder in the public gallery. It resumed at 11.28am and debate continued on the motion.

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

4. Private Members' Business

4.1 Further Consideration Stage: Civil Service (Special Advisers) Bill (NIA 12/11-15)

The Further Consideration Stage of the Civil Service (Special Advisers) Bill (NIA 12/11-15) stood on the Order Paper in the name of Mr Jim Allister.

The Further Consideration Stage was **not moved**.

The sitting was suspended at 11.42pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) in the Chair.

5. Question Time

5.1 Education

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Education, Mr John O'Dowd.

5.2 Employment and Learning

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Employment and Learning, Dr Stephen Farry.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

6. Adjournment

Mr Tom Elliot spoke to his topic regarding Security Preparations for the G8 Summit in County Fermanagh.

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 3.53pm.

Mr William Hay

The Speaker

16 April 2013

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 16 April 2013

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly
2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly
Tobacco Retailers Bill (as Introduced) (NIA Bill 19/11-15)
3. Orders in Council
4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly
Sickness Absence in the Northern Ireland Public Sector (NIAO)
5. Assembly Reports
6. Statutory Rules
7. Written Ministerial Statements
Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service: Further Allegations (DHSSPS)
8. Consultation Documents
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 April 2013

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
Marine Bill NIA Bill 5/11-15	21.02.12	05.03.12	06.07.12	05.07.12				
Superannuation Bill NIA Bill 6/11-15	12.03.12	26.03.12	28.09.12	26.09.12	22.10.12	06.11.12	19.11.12	10.01.13
Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill NIA Bill 7/11-15	12.06.12	25.06.12	26.10.12	24.10.12	20.11.12	03.12.12	11.12.12	18.01.13
Business Improvement Districts Bill NIA Bill 9/11-15	25.06.12	17.09.12	13.12.12	13.12.12	21.01.13	29.01.13	11.02.13	21.03.13
Criminal Justice Bill NIA Bill 10/11-15	25.06.12	03.07.12	14.12.12	13.12.12	19.02.13 & 25.02.13	12.03.13	08.04.13	
Charities Bill NIA Bill 11/11-15	02.07.12	11.09.12	23.10.12	23.10.12	20.11.12	03.12.12	11.12.12	18.01.13
Welfare Reform Bill NIA Bill 13/11-15	01.10.12	09.10.12	19.02.13	14.02.13				
Education Bill NIA Bill 14/11-15	02.10.12	15.10.12	08.04.13	08.04.13				

Title & Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
/Air Passenger Duty (Setting of Rate) Bill NIA Bill 15/11-15	08.10.12	16.10.12	N/A	N/A	22.10.12	05.11.12	06.11.12	11.12.12
Water and Sewerage Services (Amendment) Bill NIA Bill 16/11-15	19.11.12	27.11.12	29.01.12	23.01.13	12.02.13	25.02.13	05.03.13	
Planning Bill NIA Bill 17/11-15	14.01.13	22.01.13	07.06.13					
/Budget Bill NIA Bill 18/11-15	11.02.13	12.02.13	N/A	N/A	18.02.13	19.02.13	25.02.13	14.03.13
Tobacco Retailers Bill NIA Bill 19/11-15	15.04.13							

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
Civil Service (Special Advisers) Bill NIA Bill 12/11-15	02.07.12	25.09.12	15.02.13	13.02.13	19.03.13			

/ Bill progressing by accelerated passage

** Please note that any bills that received Royal Assent in the previous session have been removed from the table.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 22 April 2013

The Assembly met at noon, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Public Petition

2.1 Public Petition – Campaign to keep open the University of Ulster Day Nurseries

Mr Pat Ramsey was granted leave, in accordance with Standing Order 22, to present a Public Petition relating to a campaign to keep open the University of Ulster Day Nurseries.

3. Executive Assembly Business

3.1 Motion – The Draft Renewables Obligation (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013

Proposed:

That the draft Renewables Obligation (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 be approved.

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

4. Private Members' Business

4.1 Motion: Repeal of the Exception for Teachers in the Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes that the exception in fair employment law allowing discrimination on the grounds of religious belief when appointing teachers is now over 35 years old; further notes that the same exemption, uniquely written into European anti-discrimination employment law (Directive 2000/78/EC), suggests that it is designed to further "the reconciliation of historical divisions"; the Equality Commission recommendation for its withdrawal in 2004, in respect of secondary school appointments, and earlier in its entirety, has not been put into effect, nor has any proposed monitoring been introduced; the Department of Education's Equal Opportunities Policy for Teachers (TNC 2009/2) now prohibits controlled schools from so discriminating; and calls on the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to repeal the exception to ensure equal opportunity and that school teaching staff reflect our religious and ethnic diversity.

*Mr D Kinahan
Mrs J Dobson*

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

4.2 Motion: Special Needs Provision

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes with concern the lack of provision for individuals with severe learning difficulties leaving Special Needs education at 19 years of age; and calls on the Minister for Employment and Learning to expand the provision of support staff and develop the assistance needed to encourage the uptake of further education and training, thereby allowing more engagement with society.

*Mr P Weir
Lord Morrow*

Debate ensued.

The sitting was suspended at 2.22pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.30pm, with the Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) in the Chair.

5. Question Time

5.1 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Questions were put to, and answered by, the First Minister, Rt Hon Peter Robinson. The junior Minister, Mr Jonathan Bell, also answered a number of questions.

5.2 Environment

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of the Environment, Mr Alex Attwood.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr McLaughlin) took the Chair.

6. Executive Committee Business

6.1 Statement – Local Government Reform: Transfer of Functions to New Councils

The Minister of the Environment, Mr Alex Attwood, made a statement regarding Local Government Reform: Transfer of Functions to New Councils, following which he replied to questions.

7. Private Members' Business (Cont'd)

7.1 Motion: Special Needs Provision

Debate resumed on the Motion.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

8. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 4.51pm.

**Mr William Hay
The Speaker**

22 April 2013

Northern Ireland Assembly

**Papers Presented to the Assembly on
17 April - 22 April 2013**

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

Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme (Amendment) Scheme (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DFP).

Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme (Amendment No. 2) Scheme (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DFP).

The Armagh Observatory and Planetarium Annual Report and Accounts for 2011-2012 Year Ended 31 March 2012 (DCAL).

5. Assembly Reports

Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules to the Assembly and the appropriate Committees 12 April 2013
NIA 107/11–15R.

6. Statutory Rules

S. R. 2013/103 The Plant Health (Amendment No. 2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DARD).

S. R. 2013/105 The Road Races (North West 200) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DRD).

S. R. 2013/106 The Road Races (Spamout Hill Climb) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DRD).

S. R. 2013/108 The Health and Safety (Sharp Instruments in Healthcare) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DETI).

S. R. 2013/109 The Whole of Government Accounts (Designation of Bodies) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DFP).

7. Written Ministerial Statements

8. Consultation Documents

Department for Business Innovation & Skills: Implementation of the WEEE Recast Directive 2012/19/EU and Changes to the UK WEEE System (DOE).

9. Departmental Publications

10. Agency Publications

11. Westminster Publications

12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 23 April 2013

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 Second Stage: Tobacco Retailers Bill (NIA 19/11-15)

The Minister of Health Social Services and Public Safety, Mr Edwin Poots, moved the Second Stage of the Tobacco Retailers Bill (NIA 19/11-15).

Debate ensued.

The Tobacco Retailers Bill (NIA 19/11-15) passed Second Stage without division.

3. Private Members' Business

3.1 Motion - Economic Initiatives and Sustainable Employment

Proposed:

That this Assembly calls on the Executive to target resources towards economic initiatives and sustainable employment to ensure a reduction in the numbers of young people, apprentices, graduates and skilled workers who are emigrating to seek employment opportunities elsewhere.

*Mr C Boylan
Mr M McLaughlin
Mr B McElduff*

Debate ensued.

The sitting was suspended at 12.32pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr McLaughlin) in the Chair.

4. Question Time

4.1 Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Mrs Arlene Foster.

4.2 Finance and Personnel

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Sammy Wilson.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

5. Private Members' Business (Cont'd)

5.1 Motion - Economic Initiatives and Sustainable Employment

Debate resumed on the Motion.

The question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

6. Adjournment

Ms Pam Brown spoke to her topic regarding the Opening of the Sexual Assault Referral Centre at Antrim Area Hospital.

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 4.37pm.

Mr William Hay

The Speaker

23 April 2013

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 23 April 2013

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

For Information Only:

Draft S. R. 2013 The Pollution Prevention and Control (Industrial Emissions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DOE).

7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
Review of Planning Fees and Funding April 2013 (DOE).
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 23 April 2013

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
Marine Bill NIA Bill 5/11-15	21.02.12	05.03.12	06.07.12	05.07.12				
Superannuation Bill NIA Bill 6/11-15	12.03.12	26.03.12	28.09.12	26.09.12	22.10.12	06.11.12	19.11.12	10.01.13
Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill NIA Bill 7/11-15	12.06.12	25.06.12	26.10.12	24.10.12	20.11.12	03.12.12	11.12.12	18.01.13
Business Improvement Districts Bill NIA Bill 9/11-15	25.06.12	17.09.12	13.12.12	13.12.12	21.01.13	29.01.13	11.02.13	21.03.13
Criminal Justice Bill NIA Bill 10/11-15	25.06.12	03.07.12	14.12.12	13.12.12	19.02.13 & 25.02.13	12.03.13	08.04.13	
Charities Bill NIA Bill 11/11-15	02.07.12	11.09.12	23.10.12	23.10.12	20.11.12	03.12.12	11.12.12	18.01.13
Welfare Reform Bill NIA Bill 13/11-15	01.10.12	09.10.12	19.02.13	14.02.13				
Education Bill NIA Bill 14/11-15	02.10.12	15.10.12	08.04.13	08.04.13				

Title & Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
/Air Passenger Duty (Setting of Rate) Bill NIA Bill 15/11-15	08.10.12	16.10.12	N/A	N/A	22.10.12	05.11.12	06.11.12	11.12.12
Water and Sewerage Services (Amendment) Bill NIA Bill 16/11-15	19.11.12	27.11.12	29.01.12	23.01.13	12.02.13	25.02.13	05.03.13	
Planning Bill NIA Bill 17/11-15	14.01.13	22.01.13	07.06.13					
/Budget Bill NIA Bill 18/11-15	11.02.13	12.02.13	N/A	N/A	18.02.13	19.02.13	25.02.13	14.03.13
Tobacco Retailers Bill NIA Bill 19/11-15	15.04.13	23.04.13	06.06.13					

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
Civil Service (Special Advisers) Bill NIA Bill 12/11-15	02.07.12	25.09.12	15.02.13	13.02.13	19.03.13			

/ Bill progressing by accelerated passage

** Please note that any bills that received Royal Assent in the previous session have been removed from the table.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 29 April 2013

The Assembly met at noon, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Speaker's Business

2.1 Royal Assent

The Speaker advised Members that Royal Assent had been signified on 25 April 2013 to the Water and Sewerage Services (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2013 and the Criminal Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2013.

3. Private Members' Business

3.1 Motion: 400 Year Historical Legacy

Proposed:

That this Assembly recognises the significant historical legacy that the last 400 years have given to Northern Ireland and in particular to Londonderry and the North West Region, with the 400th anniversary of the building of the City Walls, and the granting of charters in 1613 for the City of Londonderry and the town of Limavady; and hopes that there will be significantly increased tourism and additional employment opportunities resulting from a spectacular and momentous year.

*Mr G Campbell
Mr G Robinson*

3.2 Amendment 1

Proposed:

Leave out 'town of Limavady' and substitute:

'towns of Coleraine and Limavady'

Mr D McClarty

The Amendment was withdrawn.

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

3.3 Motion: Marriage Equality at the Constitutional Convention

A valid Petition of Concern was presented in relation to this motion under Standing Order 28, on Friday 26 April 2013 (Appendix 1).

Proposed:

That this Assembly recognises the importance of the Constitutional Convention; notes the participation of parties from the Assembly; welcomes the 79 per cent majority vote at the Constitutional Convention in favour of marriage equality; and calls on the Executive to bring forward the necessary legislation to allow for same sex marriage.

*Ms C Ruane
Ms B McGahan
Mr B McElduff*

3.4 Amendment 1

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'equality;' and insert:

'states its support for the extension of civil marriage provisions in Northern Ireland to same sex couples, provided that robust legislative measures permit faith groups to define, articulate and practise religious marriage as they determine; and calls for respectful dialogue on this issue between all members of society.'

*Mr D Ford
Mr S Dickson
Dr S Farry
Mr C Lyttle*

Debate ensued.

The debate was suspended for Question Time.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

4. Question Time

4.1 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.

4.2 Justice

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Justice, Mr David Ford.

5. Private Members' Business (Cont'd)

5.1 Motion: Marriage Equality at the Constitutional Convention

Debate resumed on the Motion.

The Question being put, the Amendment **fell** (Division 1).

The Question being put, the Motion was **negatived** on a cross-community vote (Division 2).

6. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 4.14pm.

Mr William Hay

The Speaker

29 April 2013

Appendix 1

Northern Ireland Assembly

The undersigned Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly presented a Petition of Concern, in accordance with Standing Order 28, on Friday 26 April 2013 in relation to the following motion:

Marriage Equality at the Constitutional Convention

That this Assembly recognises the importance of the Constitutional Convention; notes the participation of parties from the Assembly; welcomes the 79 per cent majority vote at the Constitutional Convention in favour of marriage equality; and calls on the Executive to bring forward the necessary legislation to allow for same sex marriage.

- | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| ■ Mr Sydney Anderson | ■ Mr William Humphrey |
| ■ Ms Paula Bradley | ■ Mr William Irwin |
| ■ Ms Pam Brown | ■ Mr Ian McCrea |
| ■ Mr Thomas Buchanan | ■ Mr David McIlveen |
| ■ Mr Gregory Campbell | ■ Miss Michelle McIlveen |
| ■ Mr Trevor Clarke | ■ Mr Adrian McQuillan |
| ■ Mr Jonathan Craig | ■ The Lord Morrow |
| ■ Mr Sammy Douglas | ■ Mr Stephen Moutray |
| ■ Mr Gordon Dunne | ■ Mr Robin Newton |
| ■ Mr Alex Easton | ■ Mr George Robinson |
| ■ Mr Paul Frew | ■ Mr Alastair Ross |
| ■ Mr Paul Girvan | ■ Mr Jimmy Spratt |
| ■ Mr Paul Givan | ■ Mr Mervyn Storey |
| ■ Mrs Brenda Hale | ■ Mr Peter Weir |
| ■ Mr Simon Hamilton | ■ Mr Jim Wells |
| ■ Mr David Hilditch | |

Northern Ireland Assembly

29 April 2013

Divisions

Division No. 1

Motion: Marriage Equality at the Constitutional Convention - Amendment 1

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'equality;' and insert:

'states its support for the extension of civil marriage provisions in Northern Ireland to same sex couples, provided that robust legislative measures permit faith groups to define, articulate and practise religious marriage as they determine; and calls for respectful dialogue on this issue between all members of society.'

Mr D Ford

Mr S Dickson

Dr S Farry

Mr C Lyttle

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 46

Noes: 51

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Copeland, Mr Dickson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr McCallister, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr B McCrea, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Dickson and Mr Lyttle.

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr Lunn, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Clarke and Mr McQuillan.

The following Members voted in both Lobbies and are therefore not counted in the result: Mrs Cochrane, Mr McCarthy

The Amendment **fell**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

29 April 2013

Divisions

Division No. 2

Motion - Marriage Equality at the Constitutional Convention

Proposed:

That this Assembly recognises the importance of the Constitutional Convention; notes the participation of parties from the Assembly; welcomes the 79 per cent majority vote at the Constitutional Convention in favour of marriage equality; and calls on the Executive to bring forward the necessary legislation to allow for same sex marriage.

Ms C Ruane

Ms B McGahan

Mr B McElduff

Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 42

Noes: 53

AYES

Nationalist:

Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Unionist:

Mr Copeland, Mr McCallister, Mr B McCrea.

Other:

Mr Agnew, Ms Lo.

Tellers for the Ayes: Ms McGahan and Ms Ruane.

NOES

Unionist:

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Other:

Mrs Cochrane, Mr Lunn, Mr McCarthy.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Clarke and Mr McQuillan.

Total votes	95	Total Ayes	42	[44.2%]
Nationalist Vote	37	Nationalist Ayes	37	[100.0%]
Unionist Votes	53	Unionist Ayes	3	[5.7%]
Other Votes	5	Other Ayes	2	[40.0%]

The following Members voted in both Lobbies and are therefore not counted in the result: Mr Dickson, Mr Ford, Mr Lyttle.

The Motion was **negatived** on a cross-community vote.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 24 April - 29 April 2013

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

Arts Council of Northern Ireland Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2012 (DCAL).

A Corporate Governance Inspection of the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland April 2013 (DOJ).

Memorandum of Understanding between the Department for Employment and Learning and the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation April 2013 (DEL).

5. Assembly Reports

Report on Assembly Committees' Priorities for European Scrutiny 2013 (OFMDFM) (NIA 108/11-15).

Invest NI: A Performance Review (PAC) (NIA 109/11-15).

6. Statutory Rules

S. R. 2013/104 (C. 6) The Transport (2011 Act) (Commencement No. 1) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DRD).

S. R. 2013/107 Agriculture (Student fees) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DARD).

S. R. 2013/114 Appointment of Consultants (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DHSSPS).

For Information Only:

S. R. 2013/111 The Waiting Restrictions (Enniskillen) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DRD).

S. R. 2013/112 The Parking and Waiting Restrictions (Armagh) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DRD).

S. R. 2013/113 The Road Races (Mourne Rally) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DRD).

7. Written Ministerial Statements

8. Consultation Documents

Proposal for the Train Driving Licences and Certificates (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DRD).

Proposal for the Railways (Safety Management) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DRD).

9. Departmental Publications

10. Agency Publications

11. Westminster Publications

12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 30 April 2013

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 - North South Ministerial Council meeting in Institutional Format

The deputy First Minister, Mr Martin McGuinness, made a statement regarding the North South Ministerial Council meeting in Institutional sectoral format, held on 29 April 2013, following which he replied to questions.

2.2 Statement - North South Ministerial Council meeting in Transport Sectoral Format: Road Safety Issues

The Minister of the Environment, Mr Alex Attwood, made a statement regarding the North South Ministerial Council meeting in Transport sectoral format: Road Safety Issues, held on 17 April 2013, following which he replied to questions.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

2.3 Statement - North South Ministerial Council meeting in Transport Sectoral Format: Roads and Transport Issues

The Minister for Regional Development, Mr Danny Kennedy, made a statement regarding the North South Ministerial Council meeting in Transport sectoral format: Roads and Transport Issues, held on 17 April 2013, following which he replied to questions.

The sitting was suspended at 12.27pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr McLaughlin) 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.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

4. Executive Committee Business

4.1 Consideration Stage: Marine Bill (NIA 5/11-15)

The Minister of the Environment moved the Consideration Stage of the Marine Bill.

20 amendments were tabled to the Bill.

The Speaker took the Chair.

Clauses

After debate, Amendment 1 inserting a new clause before Clause 1 was **made** without division, and it was **agreed** that the new clause stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 2 inserting a new clause before Clause 1 was **not moved**.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 1 stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 3 inserting a new clause after Clause 1 was **made** without division, and it was **agreed** that the new clause stand part of the Bill.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clauses 2 and 3 stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 4 to Clause 4 was **made** without division.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 4 as amended stand part of the Bill.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clauses 5 to 7 stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 5 to Clause 8 was **made** without division.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 8 as amended stand part of the Bill.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clauses 9 to 11 stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 6 to Clause 12 was **made** without division.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 12 as amended stand part of the Bill.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clauses 13 to 17 stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 7 to Clause 18 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 8 to Clause 18 was **made** without division.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 18 as amended stand part of the Bill.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 19 stand part of the Bill.

After debate Amendment 9 to Clause 20 was **not moved**.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clauses 20 and 21 stand part of the Bill.

As Amendment 9 was not moved, Amendment 10 was not called.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 22 stand part of the Bill.

As Amendment 9 was not moved, Amendment 11 was not called.

After debate, Amendment 12 to Clause 23 was **made** without division.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 23 as amended stand part of the Bill.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clauses 24 to 31 stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 13 to Clause 32 was **negatived** without division.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 32 stand part of the Bill.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clauses 33 to 35 stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 14 to Clause 36 was **made** without division.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 36 as amended stand part of the Bill.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 37 stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 15 to Clause 38 was **made** without division.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 38 as amended stand part of the Bill.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clauses 39 and 40 stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 16 to Clause 41 was **made** without division.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 41 as amended stand part of the Bill.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clauses 42 to 46 stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 17 to Clause 47 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 18 to Clause 47 was **made** without division.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 47 as amended stand part of the Bill.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 48 stand part of the Bill.

Schedules

After debate, Amendment 19 to Schedule 1 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 20 to Schedule 1 was **made** without division.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Schedule 1 as amended stand part of the Bill.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Schedule 2 stand part of the Bill.

The question being put, the Long Title was **agreed** without division.

Bill NIA 5/11-15 stood referred to the Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

5. Adjournment

Mr Oliver McMullan spoke to his topic regarding Special Needs services and provision in Larne.

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 8.35pm.

Mr William Hay

The Speaker

30 April 2013

Marine Bill

Marshalled List of Amendments

Consideration Stage

Tuesday 30 April

Amendments tabled up to 9.30am Thursday, 25 April 2013 and selected for debate

The Bill will be considered in the following order-

Clauses, Schedules and Long Title

Amendment 1 [Made]

New Clause

Before clause 1 insert -

‘PART A1

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable Development

A1.—(1) Nothing in this Act affects the duty of the Department under section 25 of the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006 to exercise its functions in accordance with that section.

(2) Accordingly, the Department must in exercising its functions under this Act—

- (a) act in the way it considers best calculated to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development in Northern Ireland, except to the extent that it considers that any such action is not reasonably practicable in all the circumstances of the case; and
- (b) have regard to any strategy or guidance relating to sustainable development issued by the Department.’

Ms Anna Lo

Amendment 2 [Not Moved]

New Clause

Before clause 1 insert -

‘PART 1

THE MARINE MANAGEMENT ORGANISATION

The Marine Management Organisation

A1.—(1) There shall be a body corporate known as the Marine Management Organisation (“MMO”).

(2) The MMO shall consist of no fewer than 10 and no more than 12 members appointed by the Minister.

(3) The marine functions and associated powers exercised by the bodies listed in subsection (4) shall instead be exercisable by the MMO.

(4) Those bodies are—

- (a) the Department;
- (b) the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development;
- (c) the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure;
- (d) the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment;
- (e) the Department for Regional Development;
- (f) the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute;
- (g) the Northern Ireland Environment Agency

(5) For the purposes of this section a “marine function” is any function which relates to, or whose exercise is capable of affecting, the whole or any part of the Northern Ireland inshore region.

(6) It is the duty of the MMO to secure that the MMO’s functions are so exercised that the carrying on of activities by persons in the MMO’s area is managed, regulated or controlled—

- (a) with the objective of making a contribution to the achievement of sustainable development,
- (b) taking account of all relevant facts and matters, and
- (c) in a manner which is consistent and co-ordinated.

Any reference in this Act to the MMO’s “general objective” is a reference to the duty imposed on the MMO by this subsection.

(7) In pursuit of its general objective, the MMO may take any action which it considers necessary or expedient for the purpose of furthering any social, economic or environmental purposes.

- (8) The Department may give the MMO guidance with respect to the exercise of any of the MMO's functions.
- (9) The MMO must have regard to any guidance given to it under this Act by the Department.
- (10) Before giving any such guidance, the Department must consult—
- the MMO, and
 - such other bodies or persons as the Department considers appropriate.
- (11) The Department shall publish any guidance given to the MMO under this subsection.
- (12) The Department may give the MMO general or specific directions with respect to the exercise of any of the MMO's functions.
- (13) Before giving directions under this section, the Department must consult the MMO.
- (14) Consultation under subsection (13) is not required if the Department considers that there is an emergency.
- (15) The MMO must comply with any directions given to it under this section.
- (16) The giving of any directions under this section must be publicised in such manner as the Department considers appropriate for the purpose of bringing the matters to which the directions relate to the attention of persons likely to be affected by them.
- (17) Copies of any directions given under this section are to be made available by the MMO to members of the public on payment of such reasonable fee as the MMO may determine.
- (18) The MMO shall use its best endeavours to meet such objectives as the Department may from time to time set with regard to the quality and effectiveness of its performance.
- (19) For each financial year, the MMO must prepare an annual report on how it has discharged its functions during the year.
- The MMO must send the report to the Department as soon as possible after the end of the year to which it relates.
 - The Department must lay a copy of the report before the Assembly.
 - In this subsection "financial year" means—
- the period that begins with the day on which the MMO is established, and ends with the next 31st March;
 - each subsequent period of 12 months ending with 31st March.
- (20) The Department may by order make such supplemental, incidental or consequential provisions as appear to the Department to be appropriate as a result of subsections (1) and (2).'

Ms Anna Lo
Mr Stewart Dickson
Mr Christopher Lyttle
Mr Kieran McCarthy

Amendment 3 [Made]

New Clause

After clause 1 insert -

'Arrangements to promote co-ordination of functions in Northern Ireland inshore region

1A.—(1) The Department may enter into arrangements with a relevant public authority designed to promote the effective co-ordination of the exercise by the parties to the arrangements of their respective functions in the Northern Ireland inshore region.

(2) The Department shall keep arrangements made under this section under review.

(3) The Department shall—

- within one year of the date on which this Act receives Royal Assent publish details of any arrangements made under this section; and
- within three years of the date on which this Act receives Royal Assent lay before the Assembly a report on the effectiveness of any arrangements made under this section.

(4) For the purposes of this section "the relevant public authorities" are—

- the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development;
- the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure;
- the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment;
- the Department for Regional Development;
- the Agri-food and Biosciences Institute;
- the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission.'

Minister of the Environment

Amendment 4 [Made]

Clause 4, Page 3, Line 37

At end insert '—

- publish notice of the withdrawal of the marine plan on the Department's website; and
- '

Minister of the Environment

Amendment 5 [Made]**Clause 8**, Page 6, Line 40

Leave out '6' and insert '12'

*Minister of the Environment***Clause 8** [Question that clause 8 as amended stand part agreed]*The Member listed below gives notice of his intention to oppose the question that Clause 8 stand part of the Bill.**Mr Steven Agnew***Amendment 6** [Made]**Clause 12**, Page 9, Line 16

Leave out from 'may' to end of the line and insert 'must have regard to any economic, cultural or social consequences of designating that area and, so far as possible, to—

- (a) the extent to which any of the following activities are likely to be prohibited or significantly restricted within that area if it is designated—
 - (i) any licensable marine activity (within the meaning of Part 4 of the 2009 Act);
 - (ii) fishing for or taking animals or plants from the sea;
- (b) the likely impact on the environment within that area if that area is not designated;
- (c) the likely impact on the environment elsewhere in the Northern Ireland inshore region as a result of any activity mentioned in paragraph (a) being displaced from that area if it is designated.

*Minister of the Environment***Amendment 7** [Made]**Clause 18**, Page 12, Line 24

At end insert -

'(5A) In subsection (3)(a) the reference to "the conservation or improvement of the marine environment" includes the preservation, maintenance and re-establishment of a sufficient diversity and area of habitat for wild birds in Northern Ireland in implementation of Article 3 of the Wild Birds Directive (including by means of the upkeep, management and creation of such habitat, as appropriate), having regard to the requirements of Article 2 of that Directive.'

*Minister of the Environment***Amendment 8** [Made]**Clause 18**, Page 12, Line 42

At end insert -

'"the Wild Birds Directive" means Directive 2009/147/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on the conservation of wild birds.'

*Minister of the Environment***Amendment 9** [Not Moved]**Clause 20**, Page 14, Line 32

At end insert -

'(8A) Where the authority has given notice under subsection (5), it should only proceed with the act if it is satisfied that—

- (a) there is no other means of proceeding with the act which would create a substantially lower risk of hindering the achievement of conservation objectives stated for the MCZ,
- (b) the benefit to the public of proceeding with the act clearly outweighs the risk of damage to the environment that will be created by proceeding with it, and
- (c) where possible, the authority will undertake, or make arrangements for the undertaking of, measures of equivalent environmental benefit to the damage which the act will or is likely to have in or on the MCZ.

(8B) The reference in subsection (8A)(a) to other means of proceeding with an act includes a reference to proceeding with it—

- (a) in another manner, or
- (b) at another location.'

*Mr Steven Agnew***Amendment 10** [Not Called]**Clause 22**, Page 16, Line 22

Leave out 'section' and insert 'sections 20(8A)(c) and'

*Mr Steven Agnew***Amendment 11** [Not Called]**Clause 23**, Page 16, Line 32

After 'section 20(2)' insert ', or the duty imposed by section 20(8A).'

*Mr Steven Agnew***Amendment 12** [Made]**Clause 23**, Page 16, Line 37

Leave out paragraphs (a) and (b) and insert -

- '(a) the Department must request from the public authority an explanation for the failure; and
- (b) the public authority must provide the Department with such an explanation in writing within the period of 28 days from the date of the request under paragraph (a) or such longer period as the Department may allow.'

Minister of the Environment

Amendment 13 [Negatived]**Clause 32**, Page 22, Line 35

After 'fishing' insert 'at a distance of not less than 6 and not more than 12 nautical miles from the seashore'

*Mr Steven Agnew***Amendment 14** [Made]**Clause 36**, Page 24, Line 35

At end insert -

- '() Articles 4, 6, 7, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 15A of the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985;
- () regulations 34, 36 and 38 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995;
- () any byelaws made by virtue of regulations 23 or 31 of those Regulations;
- () Article 46 of the Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002;'

*Minister of the Environment***Amendment 15** [Made]**Clause 38**, Page 26, Line 21

At end insert -

'(5) In regulation 31 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 (byelaws for protection of European marine site) for paragraphs (1) and (2) substitute—

"(1) The Department may make byelaws for the protection of a European marine site under section 24 of the Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013 (byelaws for protection of marine conservation zones).

(2) The provisions of Part 3 of that Act relating to byelaws under section 24 apply, with the following modifications, in relation to byelaws made by virtue of paragraph (1) of this regulation—

- (a) any reference to an MCZ is to be read as a reference to a European marine site;
- (b) in section 24(1) the reference to furthering the conservation objectives of an MCZ is to be read as a reference to protecting a European marine site;
- (c) the reference in section 24(3)(c) to hindering the conservation objectives stated for an MCZ is to be read as a reference to damaging a European marine site."

(6) Regulation 66 of those Regulations shall cease to have effect in relation to byelaws under Article 21 of the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (Northern Ireland) Order 1985.'

*Minister of the Environment***Amendment 16** [Made]**Clause 41**, Page 29, Line 13

Leave out paragraph (b)

*Minister of the Environment***Amendment 17** [Made]**Clause 47**, Page 31, Line 2

Leave out from beginning to 'come' in line 4 and insert 'This Act comes'

*Minister of the Environment***Amendment 18** [Made]**Clause 47**, Page 31, Line 6

Leave out subsection (3)

*Minister of the Environment***Amendment 19** [Made]**Schedule 1**, Page 36, Line 35

At end insert -

- '() report on the proposal within the period of 6 months from the date of that person's appointment, or such longer period as the Department may approve;'

*Minister of the Environment***Amendment 20** [Made]**Schedule 1**, Page 37, Line 23

At end insert -

'Action taken by the Department before commencement

16.—(1) This paragraph applies to any action taken by the Department before commencement which, after commencement, could have been taken in accordance with a provision of paragraphs 1 to 10.

(2) For the purposes of this Act, it is immaterial that the action was taken before rather than after commencement; and any reference in this Schedule to an action taken under or for the purposes of any provision of paragraphs 1 to 10 is to be read accordingly.

(3) In this paragraph "commencement" means the coming into operation of this Act.'

Minister of the Environment

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 30 April 2013

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

S. R. 2013/115 The Goods Vehicles (Community Licence) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DOE).

For Information Only:

7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
9. Departmental Publications
10. Agency Publications
11. Westminster Publications
12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly Legislation:

Stages in Consideration of Public Bills

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Royal Assent.

Proceedings as at 30 April 2013

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
Marine Bill NIA Bill 5/11-15	21.02.12	05.03.12	06.07.12	05.07.12	30.04.13			
Superannuation Bill NIA Bill 6/11-15	12.03.12	26.03.12	28.09.12	26.09.12	22.10.12	06.11.12	19.11.12	10.01.13
Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill NIA Bill 7/11-15	12.06.12	25.06.12	26.10.12	24.10.12	20.11.12	03.12.12	11.12.12	18.01.13
Business Improvement Districts Bill NIA Bill 9/11-15	25.06.12	17.09.12	13.12.12	13.12.12	21.01.13	29.01.13	11.02.13	21.03.13
Criminal Justice Bill NIA Bill 10/11-15	25.06.12	03.07.12	14.12.12	13.12.12	19.02.13 & 25.02.13	12.03.13	08.04.13	25.04.13
Charities Bill NIA Bill 11/11-15	02.07.12	11.09.12	23.10.12	23.10.12	20.11.12	03.12.12	11.12.12	18.01.13
Welfare Reform Bill NIA Bill 13/11-15	01.10.12	09.10.12	19.02.13	14.02.13				
Education Bill NIA Bill 14/11-15	02.10.12	15.10.12	08.04.13	08.04.13				

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Water and Sewerage Services (Amendment) Bill NIA Bill 16/11-15	19.11.12	27.11.12	29.01.12	23.01.13	12.02.13	25.02.13	05.03.13	25.04.13
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/Budget Bill NIA Bill 18/11-15	11.02.13	12.02.13	N/A	N/A	18.02.13	19.02.13	25.02.13	14.03.13
Tobacco Retailers Bill NIA Bill 19/11-15	15.04.13	23.04.13	06.06.13					

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
Civil Service (Special Advisers) Bill NIA Bill 12/11-15	02.07.12	25.09.12	15.02.13	13.02.13	19.03.13			

/ Bill progressing by accelerated passage

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Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 7 May 2013

The Assembly met at 10.30am, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Assembly Business

2.1 Motion – Committee Membership

Proposed:

That Mr David McIlveen replace Mr Sammy Douglas as a member of the Public Accounts Committee; that Mr Sammy Douglas replace Mr Sydney Anderson as a member of the Committee for Social Development; that Mr Sydney Anderson replace Mr Alastair Ross as a member of the Committee for the Environment; and that Mr Sydney Anderson replace Mr David McIlveen as a member of the Committee on Standards and Privileges.

*Mr P Weir
Lord Morrow*

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

3. Executive Committee Business

3.1 Statement – Residential Care for Older People

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Mr Edwin Poots, made a statement regarding Residential Care for Older People, following which he replied to questions.

3.2 Motion - The draft Forestry (Felling of Trees) (Calculation of the Area of Land) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013

Proposed:

That the draft Forestry (Felling of Trees) (Calculation of the Area of Land) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 be approved.

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

4. Private Members' Business

4.1 Motion - New Primary School for Inner South Belfast

Proposed:

That this Assembly recognises the need to address underachievement in protestant working class areas; acknowledges the vital role of primary school in a child's early education; and calls on the Minister of Education to bring forward plans for a new primary school for inner South Belfast, as a matter of urgency.

*Mr J Spratt
Mr M Storey
Mrs B Hale*

4.2 Amendment 1

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'address' and insert:

'educational underachievement in all working class communities; acknowledges the vital role of primary school in a child's education; and calls on the Minister of Education and the Belfast Education and Library Board to bring forward plans for a new primary school for inner South Belfast, as a matter of urgency.'

*Mr C Hazzard
Mr P Sheehan
Ms M Boyle*

Debate ensued.

The sitting was suspended at 12.33pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Speaker in the Chair.

5. Question Time

5.1 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Questions were put to, and answered by, the deputy First Minister, Mr Martin McGuinness. The junior Minister, Ms Jennifer McCann, also answered a number of questions.

5.2 Agriculture and Rural Development

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Mrs Michelle O'Neill.

5.3 Culture, Arts and Leisure

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Ms Carál Ní Chuilín.

5.4 Education

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Education, Mr John O'Dowd.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

6. Private Members' Business (Cont'd)

6.1 Motion - New Primary School for Inner South Belfast

Debate resumed on the Motion.

The Question being put, the Amendment was **made** without division.

The Question being put, the Motion, as amended, was **carried** without division.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr McLaughlin) took the Chair.

6.2 Motion - Preferred Option Document on Paediatric Cardiac Surgery

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes the publication of the Preferred Option Document by the Paediatric Congenital Cardiac Services Working Group and the related Children's Heartbeat Trust Report; calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to reject the recommendation of a Dublin only service for the future commissioning of regional Paediatric Cardiac Surgery and Interventional Cardiology; and to select a model which retains primary provision, and the ability to operate on emergency admissions, in Belfast.

*Mr R Beggs
Mr S Gardiner
Mr R Swann*

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

7. Adjournment

Dr Alasdair McDonnell spoke to his topic regarding the over subscription of Primary School places in South Belfast.

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 6.42pm.

**Mr William Hay
The Speaker**

7 May 2013

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 1 May – 7 May 2013

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly

Water and Sewerage Services (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2013 Chapter 6.

Criminal Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2013 Chapter 7.

2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly

Marine Bill [as amended at consideration stage] (NIA Bill 5/11-15).

3. Orders in Council

4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly

Planning and Water Appeals Commissions Retention and Disposal Schedule (DCAL).

Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission Retention and Disposal Schedule (DCAL).

5. Assembly Reports

6. Statutory Rules

S. R. 2013/102 The Attorney General's Human Rights Guidance (Protection of Life) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DOJ).

S. R. 2013/117 The Northern Ireland Poultry Health Assurance Scheme (Fees) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DARD).

S. R. 2013/119 Prohibition of the Sale of Rod Caught Salmon Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DCAL).

S. R. 2013/120 The Student Fees (Amounts) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DEL).

S. R. 2013/122 The Animals and Animal Products (Examination for Residues and Maximum Residue Limits) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DARD).

For Information Only:

S. R. 2013/116 The Renewables Obligation (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DETI).

S. R. 2013/121 The Parking and Waiting restrictions (Ballymena) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DRD).

S. R. 2013/123 The Loading Bays on Roads (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DRD).

S. R. 2013/124 The Waiting Restrictions (Cookstown) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DRD).

7. Written Ministerial Statements

8. Consultation Documents

Provisional Recommendations Local Government District Electoral Areas for Northern Ireland May 2013 (District Electoral Areas Commissioner).

A draft Strategy for Marine Protected Areas in the Northern Ireland Inshore Region (DOE).

Environmental Policy Division Consultation Document Policy Options for a Bill to Introduce Recycling Targets (DOE).

9. Departmental Publications

An Inspection of Community Supervision by the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (DOJ).

Prison Service Pay Review Body - Ninth Report on Northern Ireland 2013 (DOJ).

10. Agency Publications

11. Westminster Publications

Justice and Security Act 2013 Chapter 18.

Groceries Code Adjudicator Act 2013 Chapter 19.

Succession to the Crown Act 2013 Chapter 20.

Public Service Pensions Act 2013 Chapter 25.

Growth and Infrastructure Act 2013 Chapter 27.

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