



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# OFFICIAL REPORT

## (Hansard)

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<i>Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister</i>	Mr Jeffrey Donaldson
	Mr Gerry Kelly





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# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Monday 20 April 2009

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

*Members observed two minutes' silence.*

## MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

### Cross-Sector Advisory Forum

**Mr Speaker:** I have received notice from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) that the First Minister wishes to make a statement regarding the cross-sector advisory forum.

**The First Minister (Mr P Robinson):** I wish to make a statement on the establishment of the cross-sector advisory forum, which is another stage in the Executive's efforts to limit the impact of the global economic downturn.

The terms of reference of the forum have been placed in the Assembly Library, and a full list of its participants is attached to the statement that has been provided to Members.

Though the impact and scale of the global economic downturn was foreseen by very few economists or Governments across the world just eighteen months ago, through our prioritisation of the economy in the Budget and the Programme for Government, we in the Executive have positioned ourselves well to seek to deal with the present difficulties. Furthermore, last December, we announced an additional series of measures and actions to help to alleviate hardship and assist the economy.

This statement is but a further demonstration of our determination to take whatever actions are open to us to combat the economic difficulties. It is also a recognition that no single group of people has all the answers, but, by harnessing the wisdom and knowledge of those most affected by the current economic situation, we can navigate our way through the present difficulties.

Members will be aware that, as the current economic crisis unfolded through the summer and into the winter months of 2008, the deputy First Minister and I held a series of meetings with banks, energy companies, energy regulators, the voluntary and community sector,

trade unions and business leaders. Our aim was to understand the local impact of the developing credit crunch and the escalation in basic commodity prices, such as food, oil and other energy sources. Then, as now, our overall aim was to do all that we can to mitigate the worst effects of the economic downturn on the people and businesses of Northern Ireland.

That goal is a massive but inescapable challenge. We have already had some success, which I attribute to a combination of factors. First, we have a devolved Administration that is fully focused on meeting local needs and solving local problems. We have an Executive that can and have used local resources and talents to bring real benefits to local people. Secondly, we have been able to manage our public expenditure to bring real financial relief to local people; for example, through the measures that we already introduced on water charges and domestic rates. Thirdly, we have listened to local people. The information, advice and ideas that the deputy First Minister and I have been able to gather from our meetings with local groups and people have been instrumental in allowing the Executive to craft our response to the crisis.

However, we believe that we must go further. To develop and build on that dialogue, we established an economic task force under the title of the cross-sector advisory forum. As Members will be aware, the first meeting of the forum was held in the Long Gallery at Stormont on 6 April 2009. At that inaugural meeting, the agenda was quite open. Our main aims were to introduce members; reach a shared understanding of our terms of reference; gather views on the enduring problems of the economic downturn; identify key strategies and actions for addressing those problems; and map out our forward work programme and work streams.

The main business of the first meeting was to hear members' views. A wide range of issues and proposals was discussed, and we will make the agreed minutes of the group publicly available. I can confirm that there was a general welcome to the formation of the group and a consensus that it will provide a useful vehicle through which to map out our best response to the current economic difficulties.

Perhaps understandably there was also some caution and concern that the forum should not simply turn into a talking shop. Let us make it clear: the deputy First Minister and I are determined that that should not be allowed to happen. We are interested in tangible outcomes, not merely words.

The forum comprises 30 members and has a current complement of five Ministers. To ensure that the future work programme is manageable and grounded in practical considerations, it was agreed that it would be useful to establish subgroups to take forward distinctive strands of work. The following seven broad areas have

been identified: infrastructure, planning and procurement; skills, training and education; hardship, poverty, debt and energy; jobs, innovation, tourism, manufacturing and employment; agriculture; banking, finance and lending; and housing and property. However, we are also keen to avoid duplication of other work, particularly that of the Economic Development Forum (EDF), and we are considering how best to take forward the work of the subgroups.

We intend to convene the next meeting of the full forum before the summer recess. However, before that, the subgroups will have met and agreed their individual terms of reference and the key issues that they intend to explore within the scope of their remits.

The cross-sector advisory forum represents a great opportunity to join up government, business, utilities, banks and community groups in the common cause of helping the people and businesses of Northern Ireland to come through the present economic turmoil. From here on, it is my firm intention that we will talk less about crisis and much more about recovery.

There was consensus at the first meeting of the forum about the need to bring forward practical measures to reinforce our social-welfare response to support people who are dealing with unemployment, debt and cost-of-living pressures. However, beyond that, we also need a clear resolve to grasp opportunities to support and sustain our indigenous talents and skills, which will be essential in allowing us to maximise and grow a diverse, vibrant and prosperous economy in the future. The forum discussion sent out a very clear signal that we need to prepare for the future by continuing to invest in infrastructure, training and skills. We need to support indigenous industry and business; we need to make the most of the advantages that we have in our natural and built environment; and we need to be agile and seize opportunities for tourism and retail that flow from the weakness of sterling.

We have encouraged the forum to challenge us, and I am confident that it has and will continue to do so. The group will provide a useful platform on which the various sectoral interests can talk, not only to government but to each other. It is our hope that the forum will become an effective vehicle for improving communication between the various interests on which our economy is built.

As the scale of the global economic challenge emerged, we did all that we could to ensure that we did not talk ourselves into a depression by talking down the economy and dampening business confidence, while always remaining realistic. This is now the time to recognise that Northern Ireland will emerge from the current economic problems and get back to growth and prosperity. The establishment of the cross-sector advisory forum underscores our conviction that we are

not helpless in the face of the economic challenges before us. It will not only be a critical friend to challenge us in what we are doing or failing to do but will work constructively with government to bring forward proposals for remedial actions. It will allow us to test that we are not only doing things right but are doing the right things to bring forward economic recovery.

As we navigate our way out of the present economic difficulties and chart our course for the future, we will, of course, keep the Assembly and the Committee informed of the work of the forum. I believe that its creation is a clear recognition of the value that we place on working together in partnership with stakeholders so that we can use devolution to help the entire community.

**The Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mr Kennedy):** I welcome the First Minister's statement. What role, if any, do the First Minister and deputy First Minister envisage for the proper scrutiny of the cross-sector advisory forum, and will the First Minister give an undertaking that my Committee will have a role in respect of the work of the forum?

I will now speak on a party political basis as a representative of the Ulster Unionist Party. The First Minister outlined the Executive members currently on the cross-sector advisory forum. It appears that the Ministers who attend the forum are members of the two largest parties in the Executive. Does the First Minister accept that it is important and desirable to ensure that the forum includes representatives from all the parties that form the Executive and not just the two largest parties?

Finally, given that the Chancellor has indicated that he will be looking for additional efficiency savings of up to £10 billion — that would have big implications for devolved Administrations, including Northern Ireland — has the First Minister any sense yet of whether it will or should be necessary for the current Programme for Government to be adjusted accordingly?

**The First Minister:** I thank the Chairman for his interest in the work of the cross-sector advisory forum. The minutes of the forum meeting will be made available to the Committee, and it can judge for itself what role it might wish to have in interrogating the deputy First Minister and me or any of the other Ministers. We will be happy to keep the Committee informed of the work of the forum and its subgroups.

The Member referred to the forum's current membership. At the last Executive meeting, the deputy First Minister and I made it clear to our Executive colleagues that we wanted them all to participate in the work of the forum. During the forum's first meeting, it became fairly clear that the Minister responsible for

skills would play an important part in the further considerations of the forum. However, during that meeting, there was a growing belief that the way to move forward is to create subgroups that can deal with various sectoral interests and bring reports to the whole forum. Again, that will give each Minister a role to play in relation to the various interests that exist, which might include skills and training issues, agriculture issues, or other departmental matters.

12.15 pm

The Chancellor will make a statement on Wednesday. Until he makes that statement and until we have assessed it by reading the small print, it is difficult for anybody to know exactly what impact it will have on Northern Ireland. However, if the Prime Minister intends to go back on his word that we will receive a CSR settlement that is entirely ours and will allow us, as a fledgling devolved Administration, to plan ahead for three years, or if he goes back on his indication that any savings that are made by this devolved Administration will stay here and he decides, based on the Barnett formula, to draw money away from Northern Ireland, we will be required to look at the Budget, and there will be Budget consequences. If, as the whispers from the Treasury suggest, about £150 million will come out of the Northern Ireland Budget, that will have an impact on spending.

**Mr Moutray:** I thank the First Minister for his statement. Does the First Minister care to comment on the SDLP's proposals for saving money?

**The First Minister:** I welcome the fact that the SDLP has taken an interest in efficiencies and matters relating to the Budget. It has always had the opportunity to bring forward proposals in the Executive, as it is part of the four-party mandatory coalition. The fact that the SDLP brought its proposals to the public's attention, as opposed to bringing them to the Executive, might indicate the mindset in that party — one might even think that there was an election in the offing.

It is important that all parties, not only the SDLP, look at how we can best use the resources that are available to us. To be frank, having looked at the SDLP's proposals, I see that a significant number of the better ones are proposals that my party has made in the past, proposals that have been considered by the Executive or proposals for capital spend that have been outlined already — in the Varney report, for instance.

Some of the SDLP's proposals are inaccurate and some are grossly exaggerated, but at least the SDLP is looking at efficiencies and recognising that, given that we have a finite Budget, choices must be made. The important feature of the SDLP's proposals is that that party recognised for the first time something that has been shown fairly consistently in Executive meetings,

which is that it is not simply a case of telling people what one would like to spend money on and outlining what additional funds could be used in various areas. The SDLP's paper is significant in that it identified that, if more money is to be spent in some areas in order to inflate the economy, the resources for that must be found elsewhere. The whole House needs to start examining its priorities.

Incidentally, contrary to what is said in the SDLP's statement, the SDLP did not vote against the Budget — the House accepted, and is tied to, the Budget unanimously. The Budget settlement is based on the priority in the Programme for Government to focus on the economy. Rightly and at the right time, we decided that, front and centre, the economy is our number one priority.

**Mr McElduff:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh ráiteas an Aire.

I thank the First Minister for his statement and welcome the Executive's efforts to mitigate the worst effects of the economic downturn, particularly on local businesses. Procurement rules do not seem to be sufficiently friendly to local small and medium-sized enterprises. Could one of the subgroups look specifically at how to free up and create opportunities for local businesses to succeed in the tendering and procurement race?

**The First Minister:** That can neatly be dealt with by the subgroup concerned with jobs, employment and other similar issues. There will obviously be constraints on the number of people whom we can have on the cross-sector advisory forum. That number is currently 30, but a considerable number of other groups believe that it would be useful if they, too, had membership.

The subgroups are a good way for those additional people to be used in their sectoral interests. I am sure that, if there are sectoral interests in respect of small firms, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment will be very happy to incorporate those into the terms of reference of the group that deals with employment issues, as, indeed, I am sure, will the Minister for Employment and Learning, who has a particular responsibility for skills and training issues.

**Mrs D Kelly:** I welcome the First Minister's statement, although I must correct him: he said that all parties voted for the Budget, when, at one stage, he accused the SDLP of almost bringing the House down by not supporting the Budget. Therefore, there are some inaccuracies in his comments.

In December, the First Minister and the deputy First Minister said that they would bring forward some proposals. However, we now have proposals for further meetings rather than for actions, which is very disappointing. During their recent visit to Brussels, did they reach any agreement on a relaxation of the state-aid



rules as a possible way of helping the business community? Will there be relaxation on any of the manoeuvres or help that may be given?

**The First Minister:** First, let me clear up the issue of the Budget. I have a copy of the Hansard report of the Budget debate, which I am happy to share with the SDLP if its own records are not complete. I introduced the Budget to the Assembly on 11 February 2008, and it is stated that the question was put and agreed to and that it was resolved with cross-community support that the Budget Bill be passed without any division. The SDLP should know the difference between the Programme for Government and the Budget; it voted against the Programme for Government, but it voted for the Budget.

It would have been very surprising if we had come out of the first meeting of the cross-sector advisory forum with the answers to our economic ills. I do not believe that anyone who was there expected actions to flow from the group's first get-together. In order for the deputy First Minister and me to make recommendations to colleagues and to ensure that those feed through the system, the subgroups have to give much consideration to issues, make proposals and recommendations and tender advice. There has not been action as a direct result of our first meeting other than to work out our work plan, but that will hardly have surprised anyone.

The deputy First Minister and I visited Brussels recently. We raised the matter of state aid in relation to specific projects whereby the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) has been faced with state-aid issues, and we will continue to do that. During our visit, we were encouraged by the very keen interest that President Barroso and other commissioners have taken in Northern Ireland. Indeed, they were willing to put forward a task force to make recommendations on how best we might equip ourselves to compete for European funding, rather than continuing as a region that automatically receives such funding.

**Mr Speaker:** It is important that Members keep their questions related to the statement as far as possible; we have drifted slightly.

**Mrs Long:** I hope that Mr Speaker accepts that there must be clarity about the issues that have been raised. The Budget resolution, which is the key vote on how the money is to be disbursed, was opposed by a number of Members. The Budget Bill was not opposed, because that would have prevented the money from being drawn down. That clarification must be made for the record.

With respect to the cross-sector advisory forum, we welcome the statement that the First Minister has made. No one disagrees with his assertion that promoting the economy should be at the front and centre of what the Executive do and of the Programme for Government

and the Budget. However, once more, the devil is in the detail. Surely, in the changed context that we are now in, the how and the what of prioritisation must be reassessed. I want to know whether the Executive have had any discussion with the members of the forum with regard to whether the Programme for Government needs to be revisited. In the debate in the public domain, many senior businesspeople argue that it does, not to remove the economy from the top spot but to look at how economic progress can be achieved.

**The First Minister:** It is necessary for me to go back and try again. Members use terms without thinking exactly what they mean. The Programme for Government already has the economy of Northern Ireland as its top priority. There is no need to change the priorities in the Programme for Government. From time to time, there will be a need to finesse the Budget. When I was Finance Minister, I indicated during the Budget debate that we were quite happy to do that. Indeed, we do it four times a year in the monitoring rounds. In particular, last December, we recognised that we had to hold a special monitoring round to deal with the crisis. The Finance Minister is working on the statement that he will make in relation to the next monitoring round. From time to time the Budget will be redefined, as necessary. However, to do that, we must free up funding to make allocations. Such funding can come only from two sources: underspend within Departments on capital or resources or reprioritisation by the Executive.

Is there any Member who believes that there should be a reduction in the Department that his or her Minister heads? Not a single hand has gone up. Faced with that, there is a — *[Interruption]*. There is only one problem: the Alliance Party has no Minister. *[Laughter]*.

We cannot spend money that we have not got. Each Member must take a hard decision, but they cannot say that money must come out of Government Departments that their Ministers are not a part of. The situation requires the Government as a whole to deal with the issues, and it requires money to be freed up from all Government Departments.

**Mr Spratt:** The First Minister said that he was keen to avoid duplication of work with other forums that are already working in these areas. Will he indicate how such duplication will be avoided?

**The First Minister:** The particular purpose of the cross-sector advisory forum is to deal with the economic crisis that we face. The forum, therefore, has a lifespan sufficient to deal with the duration of the crisis. Its remit is to deal with the crisis itself. It is not a committee for the long haul. It is not intended to take over the role of any other committee, advisory group or body. It has a specific purpose and time reference.

On that basis, everyone recognises that their participation is based on that principle.

12.30 pm

**Mr M McLaughlin:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Could I welcome today's statement by the First Minister and deputy First Minister, could I also, on behalf of my party, very strongly endorse the comment contained within the statement that we are not helpless in the face of the economic challenges?

My question is, how will the cross-sector advisory group's work be taken forward? We know for how long the group will exist, but how often does the Minister envisage that it will meet?

**The First Minister:** I agree entirely with the Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel — we are not helpless, and we must start, from this moment on, I think, to talk about recovery rather than crisis.

I have listened to some economists, some of whom are employed by banks, and they would depress Job if they were allowed to get on with it. It is vital that we start talking our economy up and recognise the great benefits that we have in Northern Ireland — even in a downturn, we have a low-cost economy in comparison with those of most other European countries. That should give us an advantage in getting out there and selling Northern Ireland to the business community.

At the meeting, a decision was made — I think by consensus — that the work of the cross-sector advisory forum should be taken forward through subgroups. The seven subgroups that I outlined in my statement will meet, will largely work up their own remits, and will bring forward recommendations to the parent body, if I may call it that. I think that more useful work on certain matters can be done in a sectoral format; for example, issues that relate to a particular subject matter can be dealt with, rather than through the very wide spread of matters that are discussed at the cross-sector advisory forum. The forum will get reports from each of those subgroups, and we hope that between now and the beginning of the summer, the subgroups will have met and they will have been able to report back to the forum.

**Mr I McCrea:** I welcome the First Minister's statement, as well as his previous comments on the need for recovery to bring us out of the current economic downturn. I welcome his commitment to that.

The Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister has just left; however, he asked about the implications of the UK Government's Budget. Can the First Minister give us an indication of his feelings about the Conservative Party's proposals and what impact those would have on spending in Northern Ireland?

**The First Minister:** The Conservatives have been quite open in saying that they do not believe that the Labour Government are taxing enough or cutting back on public expenditure enough. The answer is fairly clear and is on the public record: more tax and less public expenditure. That would mean shaving off a number of the programmes that exist, a reduction in the Health Service, and a reduction in our educational facilities. Those are the Tory Party's proposals and, of course, those of its colleagues in this House.

**Mr Elliott:** The First Minister highlighted in his statement a number of issues on which the forum wants to see movement and progress; for example, investment in infrastructure, training and skills, and support for local indigenous industry and businesses. All those are good intentions. However, can the First Minister outline when it will be practical to see any delivery of those issues on the ground?

**The First Minister:** I am not sure when the next questions for oral answer for the Minister for Employment and Learning will be. However, I am sure that the Member will want to ask his colleague when there will be action on the ground in the area of skills and training. I seem to have more confidence in the Minister than does the Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone. I believe that the Minister is working hard, and he is actively bringing forward proposals to the Executive to deal with those issues. All Ministers are focused on dealing with the departmental responsibilities that they have in the context of the economic downturn. I have every confidence that the Minister for Employment and Learning will not let Mr Elliott down.

**Mr O'Loan:** I also welcome the statement and the creation of the advisory forum; I regret only that it was not established sooner. I note the First Minister's reference to many discussions with the banks, energy companies, energy regulators, the voluntary and community sector, trade unions and business leaders, and their formalisation in the advisory forum. I welcome what he said about meaningful discussions leading to action as a result of the meetings of the advisory forum.

Does the First Minister see the striving for consensus leading to action that will carry through into the political arena? I welcome his positive comments about the SDLP proposals. More broadly, will he assure the Assembly that he will take a positive and constructive approach and spirit to all the political parties' intellectual energies in addressing what he referred to as the current crisis and to the longer-term task of the Assembly to revitalise the economy?

**The First Minister:** It is worth pointing out that the cross-sector advisory forum was set up as a result of the discussions about which Mr O'Loan spoke. A number of people whom we met said that it would be

valuable to have such a group during the crisis. We took that on board and responded directly to it.

Mr O'Loan spoke about using the political intellect of other parties. The SDLP is an Executive party. Although some of its Members seem to forget that from time to time, no doubt, the Minister for Social Development reminds her party that it is represented on the Executive. At all times, the SDLP can bring proposals to, and assist, the Executive.

The deputy First Minister shares my views about wider consultation with political parties. When, as First Minister and deputy First Minister, we faced the challenge of the murders that were carried out by dissident republicans, we had a difficult decision to take on whether we should be in Northern Ireland or whether we should go to the United States to continue our business there. On that occasion, we held a meeting of the party leaders. The party leaders gave us full support; they were positive and wanted to ensure that we had a united front at such a time of crisis.

The deputy First Minister agrees that those kinds of meetings are valuable. Perhaps we can continue those meetings as we face another crisis — the financial crisis — and something useful can come out of them. It is not part of my make-up to want to disagree or to have people disagree with me. I want to find a wider consensus on how we move forward, if that can be found.

Proposals are put before the Executive at meeting after meeting after meeting, and the greater the consensus that we can get on those proposals, the better. If unanimity can be achieved when the proposals come to the House, Northern Ireland will be seen as being stronger in the wider community.

**Ms Anderson:** Go raibh maith agat. I welcome the First Minister's statement. How were members of the advisory forum chosen? Despite what the First Minister said about constraints on the number of members on the forum, will he and the deputy First Minister consider the inclusion of representatives from the social economy, not only in the sectoral format but in the plenary format? They would make a valuable contribution to such a forum.

**The First Minister:** Members were chosen by their own organisations, with the exception of four members, two of whom were recommended by the deputy First Minister and two of whom were recommended by me.

I do not have a hard-and-fast view on the size of the membership; it is only the consideration of dealing with large groups that places a constraint on its size. One of the subgroups that we have set up deals with issues of hardship, debt and community issues. There is no reason why OFMDFM cannot agree that any group that has an interest in those issues should be on

the subgroup without necessarily being a member of the broader forum.

However, there is a strong third sector in the forum, with representatives from community organisations and credit unions. Throughout the meeting, they spoke so strongly that it became clear that a subgroup had to be set up to deal with those general issues.

**Mr Hamilton:** The First Minister's statement referred to the prioritisation of the economy in the Budget and the Programme for Government. Will the First Minister tell the House what he thinks about proposals that some Members have made to re-prioritise and rewrite both documents because of the black hole that they believe exists in public finances?

**The First Minister:** I do not know anyone who has an IQ that strays into double figures who would suggest that a Programme for Government that prioritises the economy should be changed. The Executive have taken the correct decision. It is clear that that decision is the correct course along which to continue. The Budget — just like that of any other Government, anywhere in the world — can be changed as time goes on and as, on the one hand, pressures occur, and, on the other hand, there is underspend. That is what happens.

It is abundantly clear that there is no black hole in public finances. We managed to get through the previous financial year despite being told then that there was a black hole. When people talk about a "black hole", they are referring to pressures. All Governments face pressures. For example, the Executive will face considerable pressure if, on Wednesday 22 April 2009, the Chancellor takes a decision that will impact on Northern Ireland to the extent that I have outlined already. That does not mean that there is a black hole; it means that we must take decisions to deal with additional pressure.

Undoubtedly, the Minister of Finance and Personnel will come to the House and make a proposal on how to deal with that pressure. There is, however, no hole in our spending plans. When I was Minister of Finance and Personnel, I used to point out repeatedly that the level of underspend in Departments is always considerable, so much so that the Ulster Unionist Member who talked about a black hole is the same person who told us that we should increase our overcommitment in the Budget. Therefore, he wanted us to have more expenditure than we had revenue to pay for at a time when we had to try to reduce our overcommitment. Am I not glad that I did not listen to that voice at that time and that we continued to reduce our overcommitment? Otherwise, we would have been in a perilous position at present.

**Mr Shannon:** I thank the First Minister for his statement and his positive responses. He said that we



must not talk ourselves into a depression. Some Members in the Chamber are already of that mind. He also mentioned marking up the positives with practical and sustainable measures to help. Will he set out specifically the steps that the Executive have already taken to deal with the economic crisis?

**The First Minister:** It would take me quite a long time to do that in any detail. The House will be well aware that not only did the Executive put the economy at the centre of our priorities, but that since our first Budget, we have taken decisions to reduce household bills with regard to the amount of money that people must pay towards their regional rate. We froze the regional rate, not for one or two years, but for all three years of the Budget. We kept, in real terms — as inflation then was — the level of the business regional rate; we capped the industrial rate, and we were even prepared to take on Europe to ensure that.

In the wider economy, we brought forward proposals in the December monitoring round for a winter fuel payment to be made to people who are in greatest difficulty. Proposals were made for farming. We attempted to increase the amount of funding that is available for capital spend; last year, £1.4 billion was made available, and we expect that figure to increase during the current financial year. That gives an incentive to the construction industry, which, in my view, has been hit hardest by the economic downturn.

We took a decision to not proceed with water charging, which is something that would have hit everyone's pockets, including those of the most vulnerable in our community. The Executive also proposed to reduce — and eventually phase out — prescription costs. Moreover, DETI introduced a range of proposals on debt advisory services, and so on, all of which were designed to help during the economic crisis.

12.45 pm

I could outline a list three times that length — if I am encouraged to do so, I have it here. However, everybody knows that the Executive have been on the ball. That is not a party-political comment; all Ministers are striving, in their Departments, to make best use of available resources in order to assist during the economic downturn.

**Mr Weir:** I thank the First Minister for his statement. Indigenous businesses and, particularly, foreign direct investment (FDI) have a role to play during the economic recovery. Will the First Minister outline the potential for foreign investment in Northern Ireland during our present economic difficulties?

**The First Minister:** In times of economic hardship, companies often withdraw to their base. Those that want to expand often do so in their home territory rather than outside it. However, during our recent trip to the United States, the deputy First Minister and I

were pleased that Universal Studios proposes to use the Paint Hall in the Titanic Quarter to make a film. Another investment in Northern Ireland will be announced soon, and there is considerable hope of a significant jobs announcement before too long.

Therefore, even in the context of the perceived economic doom and gloom, people are bringing business to Northern Ireland. The cost of establishing business in the key areas of financial services, business services, IT and the creative industries is much cheaper in Northern Ireland than in other European capitals. That gives us an edge, and those high-value jobs are precisely what the economy needs, because they assist and boost our gross value added (GVA) and GDP. Those jobs are earmarked for growth in the economy. Even if we must endure a difficult period, we are developing the skills to do such jobs, and will be well placed, during the full recovery, to take advantage of it.

I believe that we met our job-creation targets for the financial year that has just ended. However, it will become increasingly difficult to do so again. We must accept that Invest Northern Ireland and DETI have a difficult job ahead of them, and the House should do everything it can to make Northern Ireland a more attractive place to come to, rather than playing things down and bemoaning the achievements that have been made.

**Dr Farry:** I thank the First Minister for his statement. Although there is a consensus in society that the Executive were right to prioritise the economy in the Programme for Government, does the First Minister recognise the range of views — including those of the business sector and economists — on the different ways to prioritise the economy? How will he respond if the forum requests that the Programme for Government be revised?

For example, in light of the First Minister's comment that foreign direct investment is not as viable as before, do resources need to be moved from selective financial assistance towards skills, particularly because we cannot always compete on low costs in the future? Furthermore, although I appreciate that the First Minister finds economists depressing, why are they not represented on the forum? Several skilled economists from the banks and universities could contribute. Although they might highlight some difficult truths, we sometimes need to hear those harsh realities.

**The First Minister:** All economists are not saying the same thing — they never do. One chooses an economist and receives the desired view.

The Member makes a valuable point about whether it is beneficial to have an economist, or economists, on the forum or giving advice to it. Of course, there are a number of economists within the officialdom of the Executive; we are not bereft of their advice.

I recognise that there are different ways to prioritise the economy within the general scope of growing the economy. That does not change the Programme for Government; it changes the actions that might be taken by Departments or on Budget spend. However, if one takes even the SDLP proposal — its Members will forgive me for mentioning it because they, at least, have a proposal to be discussed — even at its fullest, if one were to believe it as they have outlined it, that proposal would only mean a 1% change in the overall Budget for Northern Ireland. *[Interruption.]* I think there is some double-accounting on the part of the SDLP, which it needs to take into consideration.

There are valuable elements in the SDLP's overall proposal, but many of them are already taken into account by Government.

Most Government business has to continue. Every Department has fixed costs, about which it can do nothing. Therefore, what can be changed is very much on the periphery and is very much down to the drive and determination of Ministers in those areas. Although the Member said that there will be difficulties with foreign direct investment at present, that should not reduce our ambition to bring FDI to Northern Ireland. It should not reduce the enthusiasm of Invest Northern Ireland to go out and sell the Province as a place for people to come to. Far from reducing spend in those areas, we have to continue to pay the necessary price to ensure that Northern Ireland is before business leaders. The benefits of the decisions that they might make today, or tomorrow, may not be realised in Northern Ireland for years to come.

In relation to the Budget, we are happy to consider proposals. The economic crisis that we are facing is a standing item on the agenda of every Executive meeting. Therefore, any proposal brought forward by any Minister at any Executive meeting can be considered in relation to a re-prioritisation of spend.

**Mr Poots:** This morning, I note that one party has moved away from suggesting that the economy should not be a number one priority. I trust that other parties will join them. Do any of those who sit on the cross-sectoral group advise that the economy should not be the first priority?

**The First Minister:** It would be ludicrous for any of them to suggest, in the middle of an economic downturn, that we should do anything other than focus on the economy — it is essential that we do so. It is worth pointing out that this Assembly has a Budget to spend that is greater than that of any Assembly before. Not only were there natural increases, but two packages of funding supplemented the Budget — the last of which was to the value of £900 million. That is a massive boost, and one that would certainly not be offered today were one to go to the Chancellor.

The additional funding that is available has assisted us in the circumstances in which we are placed. We would not have been able to deal with issues such as water charging otherwise. If there are people in this House who believe that we need more money for public expenditure, and that we should increase rates and introduce water charging, let them stand up and say so.

It is no good people whinging in the background, saying that we need more money for this purpose or that purpose, unless they can identify where they will get the funding from. That is why I welcomed the SDLP's proposal. For the first time, in my view, the SDLP stopped simply asking for more money for this, that and the other, and identified the need to find those funds from elsewhere. I do not agree that all the money referred to in that proposal is available to be used for funding, but there is some measure of benefit in that debate taking place, and all the political parties putting forward their proposals. Let us see where that takes us.



## MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

### Social Security Agency — Strategic Business Review

**Mr Speaker:** I have received notice from the Minister for Social Development that she wishes to make a statement on the Social Security Agency's strategic business review.

**The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie):** In the debate on social security offices on 9 March 2009, when the Social Security Agency's strategic business review proposals were out for public consultation, I undertook to return to the House quickly on the matter. I want Members to see that I have listened to their concerns and actively sought to address them. I also said on several occasions that I had serious concerns of my own. I am pleased to say that I am now in a position to outline the actions that I am minded to take in order to address the key concerns that were raised during the public consultation's first phase.

First, however, I wish to reiterate what I said previously about the strategic business review proposals. Despite being relatively modest in ambition in comparison with what has already been done in Great Britain, the review has been the subject of much misinformed commentary over the past few months. Whatever else Members may have heard, the review's proposals are designed to modernise and safeguard service delivery in order to benefit customers in the local office network. That is the straightforward and simple objective. It is about improving the service for people who rely on the Social Security Agency for support, not about cutting jobs. Indeed, only recently, I set about recruiting 150 additional staff, and if we need more, we shall recruit more.

Let me restate the facts: there will be no loss of front line services for any local office or town; no offices will close; and no staff will lose their jobs. I have said, however, that the agency cannot stand still. Change is essential in order to ensure the viability of the local office network in providing a quality service.

I will now deal with the concerns that have been raised, the first of which involves staff. Despite the fact that the proposals are focused on the service provided to customers and the fact that reasonable travel provisions are already enshrined in many staff members' employment contracts, Members highlighted to me a range of potential impacts on staff who will have to travel to new work locations. Members will recall that I made it clear that I would not accept solutions that would result in large numbers of staff — some on low pay, some with caring responsibilities — having to move lengthy distances to a new place of work. That remains the case.

I am aware that the prospect of relocation is a cause of great concern for some staff. Therefore, in the next phase of consultation, I will propose a range of measures that will go a long way to addressing staff concerns. In addition to those that are already proposed, there will be two new processing centres in Lurgan and Ballymena. That measure should deal with any staff concerns in those areas. I am still evaluating the best arrangements for the centres in Strabane and Kilkeel. Substantial retraining of staff will take place, thus enabling many employees to remain in their current location and handle other work. That will mean that many staff, previously earmarked to move to a new location under the original Social Security Agency proposals, will no longer have to move.

For those who will still be expected to move, the Social Security Agency will link smaller offices with specific processing centres in order to limit travelling distances.

That clustering is aimed at ensuring, where possible, that staff who need to move have a choice of processing locations. It will depend on, for example, their home address and which office they are nearest to.

*1.00 pm*

In the minority of cases in which staff will be required to change location, I have issued a directive that travel distance will be minimised. That will apply in all but the most exceptional cases. Therefore, fears about people being required to travel long distances to their work — for example, from Enniskillen to Derry — no longer have any foundation whatsoever.

In addition, I propose to put a mechanism in place whereby the personal circumstances of all individual staff can be considered before any final decisions are taken on work locations. My officials will engage with NIPSA on the arrangements to be adopted, and there will be time for everyone concerned to find the best solutions at local level.

All in all, those are important measures that address the concerns of staff, and I hope that Members will support them. The net result is that the vast majority of staff will now remain in their current town of employment, whereas under the original proposals, the majority of local office staff would have been required to change location.

I now address the specific concerns that Members raised with respect to the impact of the change on customers — let us not forget about the people who the agency and its staff are actually there to serve. Most of the concerns about customers related to the introduction of enhanced telephony arrangements for calls to the local office network.

I am pleased to inform the House that the first phase of consultation has identified only limited section 75

impacts, and those will be addressed thoroughly through the revised proposals. As I have always said, the new telephone and appointments arrangements will be in addition to the face-to-face options that exist today. Customers who need or prefer, for whatever reason, not to use the telephone will still be able to call into their local office as they have always done. The choice is theirs. However, overall customer accessibility will be improved greatly by enhanced telephony and appointments services.

I assure Members that customers who call into any local office will not then be directed to a telephone. However, the agency's local office network already receives two million calls every year from customers, so people will no doubt welcome an improvement in that service. Some Members have argued that the changes are untried and untested; however, they already operate successfully in other parts of the agency. Members who have called on me to abandon the entire strategic business review would, it seems, have me throw out the baby with the bath water.

Many Members also raised concerns with me that the proposals were not aligned to the Bain Review or would have an adverse impact on local councils. They are wrong. The Bain Review endorses an approach to public-sector jobs that favours dispersal to a number of key hub locations to ensure critical mass of staff. I have also looked at the new council structures that are set out under the review of public administration (RPA), which sees the current 26-district-council model replaced by an 11-council model. The changes that I outlined today ensure that the strategic business review proposals are future-proofed in every way. Each of the nominated first-tier locations will have a processing centre, and so will every one of the 11 RPA council areas.

I am not aware of any other public-sector organisation that has demonstrated such a strong fit with the Executive's strategic decisions, and I look forward to seeing others follow that lead.

The next concern is around the timing of any changes — an important consideration in the context of the economic downturn. I am only too aware of the changed economic circumstances that now prevail. I recognise the need to ensure that the Social Security Agency continues to provide a good service to an ever-growing number of customers in these difficult times.

I have previously said that I would not accept disproportionate organisational disruption at this time, and that remains the case. Therefore, I intend to proceed gradually; before committing to changes across the North, I need to be satisfied that those changes will deliver the service improvement that we all want to see.

First, I intend to pilot the proposed changes in the agency's north district, to come into effect in April

2010, coinciding with the completion of the major new jobs and benefits office that is due to open in Ballymena. That will allow all of the proposed changes to be carefully tested and evaluated in a controlled manner, with any lessons learned being applied to any further rollout. That means that informed decisions can be made on the detail of the proposed changes to other districts. I recognise that this is a complex issue, and it is important to get it right.

The strategic business review will end after the consultation in respect of the equality impact assessment and my revised proposals. Change will be taken forward as part of a new initiative called customer first, which, as its name suggests, will place the customer at the heart of our work to improve the delivery of benefits at a local level.

Although much of the consultation debate to date has focused on the concerns of staff — concerns that I have now clearly addressed — I will ensure that the new initiative puts the needs of the customer to the fore. I hope that the proposals that I have outlined will gain the support of the majority of Members in the House.

As Minister, I have listened carefully to the public consultation and to the points that have been raised in the House, and I will continue to listen. My officials are currently finalising the details around the actions that I have set out, and will shortly publish that detail in the equality impact assessment document for further consultation. I have directed my officials to make arrangements to brief members of the Social Development Committee on the detail of my proposals, and to commence further consultation with agency staff and their trade union representatives.

The measures that I have outlined positively address the main concerns raised in public consultation. They represent very substantial change from the original Social Security Agency proposals, while ensuring that we can still maintain and improve the quality of service provided by the agency.

I ask those who have insisted that I abandon the strategic business review in its entirety to think again. We are a Government, and it is our job to do what is best for our people while remaining sensitive to the impacts of our decisions. If devolution is to make a difference, we must not keep avoiding difficult or challenging decisions. We must not buckle or panic just because we may be subjected to vigorous lobbying by vested interests. We must listen, but we must also act.

At a time when much of the private sector, and indeed the voluntary and community sectors, is hanging on, trying to survive, we have a duty to make sure that the public sector continues to improve its performance.

That is what I am advancing today, and I commend the proposals to the House.

**The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development (Mr Simpson):** The Social Development Committee considered the strategic business review of the Social Security Agency in November 2008 and again in January 2009.

In order to inform its understanding, the Committee heard evidence from NIPSA, and it visited a jobs and benefits office and the Belfast benefit delivery centre. As the House is aware, the Committee has voiced considerable concerns about the strategic business review and the impact that it will have on customers and staff. The Committee will, therefore, consider the Minister's revised — and, I think, welcome — proposals on limiting relocation distances for staff, the addition of new processing centres, and extended pilot schemes that are based around the Ballymena jobs and benefits office.

Is the Minister in a position to be able to indicate to the House what impact her revised proposals will have on the relocation of back-office staff? What percentage of such staff will be subject to relocation, and can she give some details about limits on relocation distances?

**The Minister for Social Development:** I thank the Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development for his comments and question.

At all times during this process, I was very concerned about the distances that staff would have to travel, and I articulated those concerns on the Floor of this House and in other places.

Each member of staff in job processing who has to be relocated will have their case evaluated and assessed fully by senior Social Security Agency staff, and their particular concerns will be taken on board. Within their cluster of Social Security Agency or jobs and benefits offices, they will be able to select or elect the office nearest to them in which they wish to work.

Another important consideration is that, as well as announcing two further processing centres, I indicated that there will be substantial staff retraining, enabling many to stay in their current locations and to be able to handle other work. That will mean that many staff who were designated previously for a new location under the Social Security Agency proposals will no longer have to move. That will be a substantial increase on the previous number, as I advised the Member earlier this morning.

**Mr Brady:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The Minister has touched on this particular point in her answers to Mr Simpson. She talked about substantial staff retraining, which will enable many to stay in their current location and to be able to handle other work. Can the Minister give some indication as to what that

other work might be? For example, Newry has been designated to deal with income support, so I am just wondering what that other work is.

In addition, can the Minister confirm that the pilot scheme in the south district that was supposed to start in October 2009 has been put back until 2010? It appears that the north district — and Ballymena in particular — will be the location for the pilot scheme. Go raibh maith agat.

**The Minister for Social Development:** The pilot scheme will be run in the north region, and its time limit has not yet been determined. However, its outworkings will be used to determine future arrangements. It is also worth pointing out that about 80% of staff will not be moving at all and that the vast majority of the other 20% will be moving fewer than 15 additional miles in any one direction.

1.15 pm

**Mr Armstrong:** I thank the Minister for her statement, and I welcome her commitment to keep the situation under review. However, given rising levels of unemployment, will the Minister commit to securing more front line services to benefits agencies across Northern Ireland? Has the Minister deployed the 150 additional staff to the areas of greatest need? There have been many job losses in Mid Ulster.

**The Minister for Social Development:** I thank Mr Armstrong for his question. As I have stated on various occasions in the House, we set about recruiting 150 additional staff in response to the economic downturn. An assessment was carried out of where the need lay for additional staff, taking into account the greatest levels of signing on and of benefit uptake, as one equates with the other. As I pointed out earlier, if we need more staff as a result of greater job losses in the wider private sector, we will recruit more staff.

**Mr McCarthy:** I thank the Minister for her statement. She said that she listened to many people, but, obviously, she did not listen to everyone. I am not a member of the Committee for Social Development, but, as I understand it, the Committee asked the Minister to hold fire with the business review, pending the outcome of the economic downturn that we are experiencing, which is resulting in so many more unfortunate people having to sign on. The Minister has not listened to the Committee, nor has she listened to other people who spoke about holding fire. That said, I welcome her statement that there will be no forced travel for the majority of staff —

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

**Mr McCarthy:** I am doing my best. It is important that there is no forced use of the telephone, because, as I said, many more people are now going into benefits



offices. It is easy for the Minister to say it in the House, but will she give an assurance that people will have access to face-to-face discussions when they go into benefits offices? Some people will be going to benefits offices for the first time who do not want to be there, but they have to be there and they need to be able to talk to people face to face to get through the process.

**The Minister for Social Development:** I think that Members sometimes do not listen to what we say in the House. For the benefit of Mr McCarthy and other Members, I will say again that there will be a full opportunity for front line services and for potential claimants and existing claimants to have face-to-face contact with an employee of the Social Security Agency.

Telephony and appointments services are additional, but I remind Members that the appointments system is very beneficial. I do not want claimants who have difficulties having to go into a social security office or a jobs and benefits office and join a long queue. It does not happen in doctors' surgeries, in solicitors' offices, or in other places where people procure professional services. It may happen in other offices, but it will not happen in the Social Security Agency. Both types of services will be available to potential claimants. We all know that they suffer from a great deal of stress, they are in receipt of low incomes, and they need to provide for their loved ones, their children and their families. I have a great deal of concern for those people.

**Mr Craig:** I thank the Minister for her statement and welcome her announcement about trying to look after staff who do not want to move from their existing positions. Will she outline what will happen if an individual's personal circumstances prevent them from moving from their job location?

More importantly, I see that the Department will be carrying out a pilot scheme in the agency's north district. For how long will that pilot scheme take place, and can it be over a protracted period, allowing all of the issues to be ironed out before Province-wide implementation takes place?

**The Minister for Social Development:** I thank Mr Craig for his question, and I will answer the second part first. The pilot scheme will be operational from April 2010 in the north district, and no time limit has been set for how long it will run.

As regards Mr Craig's original question: in my statement, and in my answer to Mr Simpson, I have said that I fully understand and acknowledge staff concerns on travel and the personal circumstances that many staff — particularly women — are faced with in relation to being in receipt of low income and having caring responsibilities. Each member of staff will have an opportunity to meet with a senior member of staff and have their particular circumstances fully evaluated

and assessed. Furthermore, if staff are in a cluster arrangement, they will be able to elect, or select, the location nearest to them where they can work. Moreover, the Department is providing training and retraining for staff in certain benefit disciplines, which will ensure that many who were supposed to have had to travel — or leave their original locations — will now remain there, as retraining will be provided on the spot.

**Mr F McCann:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I also thank the Minister for her statement. In her statement, the Minister said:

“we must not buckle or panic just because we may be subjected to vigorous lobbying by vested interests.”

Does the Minister agree that those vested interests include staff, who are concerned about whether they will have a job at the end of the process, and the trade unions, who seriously dispute her Department's assertion that job losses will not be a part of the process? Will the Minister tell the House whether any jobs will go as part of the strategic business review? Her Department is proactively recruiting in respect of hundreds of outstanding vacancies across the agency. Will the Minister tell the House whether those vacancies will disappear as a result of this process?

**The Minister for Social Development:** Again, I have to question whether Members are listening: but, of course, Mr McCann entered in the middle of my statement —

**Mr A Maginness:** Mr McCann does not listen.  
[Laughter.]

**The Minister for Social Development:** I reiterate for the benefit of Mr McCann and Members that there will be no job losses and no office closures. The Department will continue to provide the services it has provided up to now. That is because our primary, and most important, concern is the delivery of services to our current and future customers.

**Mr F McCann:** The Minister has answered only one part of my question. I also asked about the current vacancies and whether her Department is proactively.  
— [Interruption.]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. As I have said in the House continually, I am not going to sit in judgement on whether a Minister answers, or does not answer, a question.

**Mr Paisley Jnr:** I hope that I have more luck than the previous Member. I thank the Minister for her statement today. As the Minister knows from discussions we have had and debates in the House, a decision to close any social security office in the Province would be regarded very dimly in any constituency in which it occurs. Indeed, in my own constituency it would be viewed as being against the spirit of the Bain Report, if not against the letter of the law. Furthermore, it would

be viewed as gross bad faith, not only by local employees, but by the Minister's constituency party there, and I am sure she would accept that.

Will the Minister put some flesh on the bones of her statement in which she has indicated that two new processing centres will be opened — one in Lurgan, and one in Ballymena in my own constituency? Will the Minister indicate how many new jobs will actually be located in my constituency and how many of them will be on a part-time and full-time basis?

As the Minister already indicated in other answers, the creation of part-time jobs is very beneficial for women employees, in particular, in the Civil Service. The creation of full-time jobs would help to address the imbalance in that workforce where, believe it or not, the most discriminated section in the community as regards Civil Service jobs at that level are Protestant male workers. How does the Minister intend to address that imbalance with this employment opportunity?

**The Minister for Social Development:** I thank Mr Paisley Jnr for his statement.

The Department assessed and evaluated responses to the consultation process, which informed the possible outcome of the equality impact assessment. As a result of the economic downturn, we decided to recruit 150 additional Social Security Agency staff across the Northern Ireland network to reflect the areas of most acute need. If more staff are required, they will be recruited in offices in which there is a particular need, because the most important priority is to ensure, and maintain, the delivery of a first-class service to those most in need.

If the Member permits, I will write to him in respect of the actual numbers.

**Mr Beggs:** The Minister is aware from the consultation of concern about the relocation of jobs from offices in Larne, Carrickfergus and Newtownabbey. She mentioned clustering — will the Minister outline in more detail how that will affect existing employees in Larne, Carrickfergus and Newtownabbey who, potentially, face moving? Will those jobs move gradually, or ultimately migrate, to Ballymena?

I am also interested in the answer to the previous question because in my East Antrim constituency, which has some of the lowest levels of Civil Service employment, there is great concern that jobs are migrating to Belfast or Ballymena.

**The Minister for Social Development:** Mr Beggs referred to Newtownabbey, which is not part of the north region. No decisions will be taken in respect of Newtownabbey until we determine the outcome of the pilot exercise in the north area.

**Mr Beggs:** What about Larne and Carrickfergus?

**The Minister for Social Development:** I was not aware that Larne and Carrickfergus were part of the Member's question. However, if they were, Larne and Carrickfergus are also part of the greater Belfast area, and they will be considered further down the line. No decision will be taken about them until the outcome of the pilot is known, the assessment is determined and the benefits, if any, are evaluated.

**Mr A Maginness:** I thank the Minister for her statement, which represents good news for staff and customers. In fact, it is like a belated Easter egg for all of us in the Chamber.

**Mr Paisley Jnr:** It is sent in the spirit of recovery.

**Mr A Maginness:** Oh, right. However, I was surprised by Mr McCann's reaction. He reminded me of a spoilt child who received his Easter egg, but did not like the colour of its wrapping paper.

In any event, this is the difference between direct rule and devolution. Remember that this strategic business plan was conceived under direct rule, is being delivered in devolution and has been changed substantially, which is to be welcomed. Will the Minister reassure the House and the public — amid wild speculation and rumours of up to 500 job losses — that jobs will not be lost but increased?

**Mr Paisley Jnr:** She was not listening — get out the Q-tips. *[Laughter.]*

1.30 pm

**The Minister for Social Development:** I agree with Mr Maginness. *[Interruption.]* I have to say that I did not get an Easter egg, but that is neither here nor there. *[Laughter.]*

There was indeed talk of job losses, much of which was ill-informed. Some of it was ill-intentioned and scaremongering. No loss of employment will result from the strategic business review. No jobs will be lost, and no offices will close. The review was never about job reductions: it was always about service improvement. The strategic business review affects only the local office network, which makes up about one quarter of the SSA workforce. It is all about improving services for the people who use them. Therefore, we are not planning any redundancies or job losses as a result of the strategic business review. However, the agency will, of course, have to meet overall efficiency targets that are set by the Executive.

**Mr Gardiner:** I thank the Minister for her statement. Can she guarantee that her proposals will be in operation by 2011, when the 26 councils will be reduced to 11?

**The Minister for Social Development:** There have been some very interesting questions today. As part of my response to the economic downturn and reflecting

its pernicious impact, I decided that the proposals — it must be remembered that they are still proposals — will be piloted in the north district, which, by and large, covers the northern part of Northern Ireland.

No date has been given for the length of time that that pilot scheme will run, so it could take some considerable time. However, we want to assess the benefits of that pilot scheme to evaluate whether it should be rolled out across the rest of Northern Ireland. I cannot guarantee that the proposals will be implemented in time for the rest of the review of public administration, but I can tell the Member that there will be a processing centre in every one of the new council areas and probably more than one in some.

**Mr P Ramsey:** I welcome the statement from the Minister, particularly the key “customer first” theme. That important theme ran through representations that I received from staff representatives in my Foyle constituency, particularly in relation to the Foyle office and services in the west and the south-west. I am sure that the Minister’s reassuring and constructive statement will be well received there.

Will the Minister reiterate that members of staff will not be expected to drive long distances between Omagh, Enniskillen and Derry, as that would have a detrimental impact on caring duties, the environment and congestion? Will she assure us that the location of centralised services will be taken into account in relation to future trends in benefit entitlements, so that staff in one location will not be made redundant while the number of staff in another location is being significantly increased?

**The Minister for Social Development:** I thank Mr Ramsey for his question. He asked about travel arrangements. On several occasions, I expressed my particular concern that staff should not be required to travel long distances to a new place of work. I know that Pat Ramsey was very concerned about that matter, particularly as it may affect people in Derry and in the west. His concerns are well understood, and I am pleased to tell him that I listened to the very strong case that he made. I assure him that no member of staff will be required to travel distances such as the distance from Enniskillen to Derry, Derry to Omagh, or vice versa. I think that Members will realise that I have listened to all concerns and have addressed them with a measure of generosity.

Mr Pat Ramsey also raised the issue of redundancies and staff losses. There will not be any redundancies or staff losses. I also assure the House that those who need face-to-face service at a local social security office will continue to receive it in the future.

Many of the jobs are in and many more will be amalgamated into benefits offices, so I will continue to work in close partnership with the Minister for

Employment and Learning to deliver the best possible service and outcomes for customers, who include some of the most disadvantaged and deprived people in Northern Ireland.

**Mrs M Bradley:** I welcome the Minister’s answer on customers. She has dealt with that matter very well. How useful was the public consultation exercise in helping the Minister to modify the previous proposals for social security arrangements?

**The Minister for Social Development:** The public consultation exercise was useful, because it reflected and confirmed my concerns about aspects of the original proposals, particularly on staff relocation and upheaval. Furthermore, it has allowed me to focus on those matters and to devise appropriate solutions.

Mrs Bradley will be aware that some Members wanted me to abandon the entire public consultation exercise, even when we were halfway through it. Those Members may not have wanted me to take on board what the public were saying. I hope that they now realise that it was absolutely right to allow the people to have their say, because what they said has been clearly reflected in the revised proposals.

**Mr O’Loan:** We are hearing about improvements to services and about a strategic vision for the implementation of the Bain Report’s recommendations for the location of public-sector jobs. Moreover, the Minister is sensitive to the genuine concerns that staff expressed. I welcome Ballymena’s designation as a processing centre, and I encourage everyone in the northern district to co-operate in the pilot scheme. What effect does the Minister envisage this series of proposals having on morale in the service?

**The Minister for Social Development:** I hope that the proposals will significantly enhance staff morale. I make no secret of the fact that I have met many members of staff throughout the Social Security Agency network. I listened to their concerns, and, in order to reflect the needs of staff members, particularly those who were concerned about having to travel long distances, the impact of the economic downturn, the need for retraining and the heavy workloads with which they must deal as a consequence of that training, I have substantially changed the proposals that were originally prescribed under the strategic business review. I hope that my proposals will go a considerable way to enhancing staff morale and that all members of staff will support and endorse them.

The bottom line is that devolution is making a difference, and I gave an undertaking to listen to staff and customer concerns. Remember that there are two players about whom we must be concerned in this relationship: we must ensure that members of staff enjoy the best possible circumstances in which to work and that existing, and potential, customers have easy



access to the best possible service, given that they are especially beleaguered at this time.

**Mrs D Kelly:** I, too, welcome the Minister's statement, particularly the news that a new processing centre will be based in Lurgan. Will the Minister be reviewing telephone call-handling arrangements, because sometimes it takes a long time for customers to get through? If there is to be increased telephone usage, customers' waiting times must be minimised by ensuring that enough members of staff are on hand to deal with the call-handling element of the business.

**The Minister for Social Development:** I take on board Mrs Kelly's comments. It is hoped that we will have sufficient staff to deal with all areas of the business, particularly those in which customers are feeling the greatest pinch. That is important.

The telephony service and the appointment system are additional provisions to the existing front line service, which will continue. Much misinformation has been flapping around about the telephony service, and, considering some of the quarters from which that misinformation is coming, it is, perhaps, ill-intentioned. However, the enhanced telephony service and appointment system will be additional to the existing options. Therefore, I assure my colleague Mrs Kelly that it will still be possible for people to go into a social security office without an appointment and be seen by a member of staff. She can take comfort and confidence from the fact that staff who are dealing with the employment support allowance are receiving many telephone calls — more calls, in fact, than was projected and anticipated. As a consequence of that, I was able to recruit more staff and invest more staff resources in that area to deal with that heavy and enhanced workload. Everything will be addressed in the most appropriate and sensitive manner.

## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

### Childcare Strategy

**Mr Speaker:** The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes in which to propose and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes. One amendment has been selected and published on the Marshalled List. The proposer of the amendment will have 10 minutes in which to propose and five minutes to make a winding-up speech.

**Ms J McCann:** I beg to move

That this Assembly expresses its concern at the lack of availability of affordable, quality childcare; and calls on the Executive to implement a coherent and properly resourced childcare strategy.

Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to move the motion. Sinn Féin will support the amendment, because its insertion will not change the thrust of the motion.

Childcare is an important issue for everyone in society, particularly for families. Ireland still trails other EU countries in the accessibility and affordability of childcare. There is a lack of flexible and age-appropriate childcare provision here. Despite the fact that the ministerial subcommittee on children and young people prioritised childcare, the numbers of day-care nursery places and places with registered childminders have fallen since 2002.

Although some Departments have funded childcare provision, a major deficit remains. Currently, there is only one place per 6.4 children under the age of four, and there are fewer than 40,000 registered childcare places for the 310,000 children under 12 years of age. Therefore, spaces for older children — particularly those over 10 years of age — and children with disabilities are still limited.

The provision of flexible, quality and affordable childcare that meets the needs of all children and parents is the responsibility of a number of Departments, which is why we tabled the motion. A cross-departmental approach to the issue, through the Executive, is essential to ensure that a properly resourced childcare strategy is developed and implemented. Such a strategy would have a crucial role to play in ensuring that flexible, high-quality, affordable and accessible childcare provision exists for all families who wish, or need, to avail themselves of it.

Childcare is a critical issue for women's equality, and the lack of adequate childcare places in the North of Ireland is a major barrier for women who wish to return to education or employment. Women are still viewed as the main carers in society, and that remains

the case with caring for children. Better childcare provision will enable more women to access education, training and paid employment, which would help the economy and provide women with better choices in all aspects of their life.

That choice is also important for women who choose to stay at home with their children, because they must also have access to home-based and group support services. The role and contribution of the people who offer those services needs to be recognised, as does the role of parents who choose to stay at home with their children.

Better childcare provision clearly has a central role to play in helping to reduce child poverty, given that a lack of access to affordable childcare is one of the most significant barriers to securing employment for people from low-income families or families who are living in poverty. Improving childcare provision would also enable parents who rely on benefits, for instance, to progress to better employment and, therefore, get out of the poverty trap.

1.45 pm

Recent legislation on welfare reform will see the benefit that is provided to parents — including lone parents — change to jobseeker's allowance when their child turns 12 years old. However, the absence of a statutory duty on local authorities here to service the demand for childcare facilities means that it will be difficult for parents to have access to childcare facilities while they are at work, and that is a particular problem for women.

Childcare costs in Ireland are among the highest in Europe, and parents here receive the lowest subsidies towards meeting those costs. Some European countries subsidise childcare costs by up to 75%, whereas, in the North of Ireland, the figure is still only 25%.

The tax credit system that allows relatives to become childminders is also important. In 2002, a significant shortfall in childcare places in the North of Ireland was reported, and almost two thirds of unemployed mothers said that a lack of adequate childcare deterred them from seeking work or constrained them in their choice of job.

The lack of local community-based childcare places has had an impact on families living in rural communities and low-income families in particular, because public transport might not be available to bring children to and from crèches and childminders. Therefore, some such families will be unable to access those facilities.

A recent review by a rural childcare group recommended a number of specific targets aimed at improving childcare provision in rural areas. It is important that those targets are included in any

strategy. It is also important that parents can choose between different types of childcare provision, because some people prefer crèche facilities or after-school groups while others prefer childminders.

It was reported that a 20% increase in the number of childminders would be needed if the current demand were to be met — that was reported in 2002. Unfortunately, there has actually been a decrease in the number of childminders rather than an increase, which has resulted in many parents having to employ relatives to care for their children. Unfortunately, as I pointed out earlier, relatives who act as childminders do not have access to the childcare element of the tax credit system. That is a further financial burden for people who need childcare facilities, because they have to pay for it out of their own pockets instead of being able to claim for it through the tax credit system.

A change to that system would result in more people seeing childcare as a clearly defined career that could be developed and coming forward to become registered childminders. It would ensure also that quality services are provided for children — a suitably qualified workforce is always essential for that.

In England, a transformation fund is available that provides people working in childcare with opportunities, so that a more professional early-years workforce can be established. I hope that implementing such a fund here is something that will be considered.

Differing needs exist, but they are all central to any strategy on childcare provision. As I said, children with disabilities have particular needs, as do lone parents or groups of people who are socially excluded. Childcare provision needs to be flexible and reflect the differing needs of parents, including those who do shift work or work at weekends.

There is a lack of information on what kinds of childcare facilities are available. Some women's organisations believe that it would be extremely helpful for some sort of directory to be developed providing details on the types of facilities available and the localities in which they are based.

As I said in my opening remarks, although some Departments fund childcare spaces, more needs to be done. I hope that the Assembly will support the motion, which calls on the Executive to implement a coherent and properly resourced childcare strategy. Such a strategy will ensure the availability of affordable, quality and flexible childcare provision for children and parents who need it. Go raibh maith agat

**Ms Purvis:** I beg to move the following amendment:  
After the first "childcare" insert

"and the lack of provision for people who require flexible arrangements to allow them to avail of working opportunities in the evenings, overnight and at weekends, particularly in the current economic climate"



I thank Ms McCann for clarifying that the amendment is an insertion to the motion and that none of the original motion will be deleted should the amendment be made. I thank also those who tabled the motion — it is an excellent motion as it relates to an important topic and is very timely.

From the outset of the debate, we need to be honest about the state of childcare services in Northern Ireland. The problems that we face are fundamental. Not only is our childcare provision “woefully inadequate”, according to a report on an inquiry into child poverty that was published by the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, but, as Ms McCann outlined, the number of childcare places is actually falling.

Additionally, we appear to have no leadership on the issue. There is some dispute as to who has responsibility for this complex but critical area, and neither decision nor strategy is coming forward. That is the situation, despite the stated commitment to an anti-poverty agenda. We need a cross-departmental strategy.

In the meantime, we are struggling with outdated views on who needs childcare, why they need it, and what types of services are needed. My amendment addresses directly one area of our childcare provision that needs immediate attention: flexibility. The childcare services that are on offer here are designed largely to accommodate a nine-to-five working day. However, the traditional Monday-to-Friday eight-hour day is long gone, and for many families it never really existed. Parents are working evenings and weekends and often through the night. Many parents have to respond quickly to unforeseen developments at work or to unscheduled shift changes, and they need to make last-minute arrangements to care for their children. Even those who work regular hours often struggle to find adequate care for children during the school holidays. The lack of flexible childcare and the expense of childcare to cover unsocial hours — for those who can find it — are serious problems for parents who are struggling to respond to the demands of the current work environment and to the needs of their families.

In addition to flexibility, there are other serious gaps in our childcare services. If we were looking for a road map on this issue, we would find that the Shankill Women's Centre delivered one. Three years ago, the centre gathered together local women for a series of workshops to discuss education, employment, health and childcare. Even though childcare was a separate topic in those discussions, it dominated every other issue. The women of the Shankill area felt that there was no point in talking about opportunities in employment, training, education or health if childcare were not addressed first.

I have no doubt that the situation is the same in other areas such as the Falls, Whiterock and Ballymacarrett that are struggling with high levels of deprivation. The women of the Shankill called for five standards in childcare to be met. Childcare had to be affordable, of a high quality, flexible, accessible, and appropriate to need and age.

In 1999, the Department of Health determined that a family with two children that is on an average income could pay out as much as one third of that income on childcare when the children were under five years of age. Even with the Labour Government's new financial support for those families, childcare takes a significant bite out of the monthly budget.

The absence of affordable childcare is one of the most significant barriers to employment, education and training for households that are struggling financially. Many parents who would be inclined to move into paid work are not doing so because the combination of lower wages and higher childcare costs in Northern Ireland means that it does not make financial sense. It also means that, too often, families have to select childcare based on what they can afford, rather than on the environment in which they know that their child would thrive.

Research has shown that the quality of childcare services can vary significantly and that cost is not always connected directly to quality. People do not always get a better service for a higher price. Even though minding children — especially small children — is undoubtedly the hardest and most important work that there is, the wages in that field tend to be low, and the job, as a profession, is undervalued.

We need national standards for childcare and a transformation fund that will allow childcare workers to enhance and increase their professional skills and move along a clearly defined and well-rewarded career path. Such a fund could also allow childcare providers to upgrade their physical environment, programmes and services.

As has been noted, any need for childcare facilities outside the hours of 7.30 am to 6.00 pm is considered irregular. It is difficult to find adequate childcare outside those hours, and, if people can find it, they will pay a premium for it. We need to increase financial support for parents who work outside those hours. That would allow them to afford that care, and it would create incentives for nurseries and childminders to be available during what are seen as unsocial hours.

There have been proposals to amend the tax credits system to allow parents to claim childcare credits for a family member, particularly grandparents, to mind their children. That would provide immediate flexibility for a number of families, provide a small income for grandparents living on increasingly inadequate

pensions, and ideally, offer a caring and familiar environment for children. However, we need to see that proposal materialise.

Childcare services need to be local, and parents need to be able to get to them easily. I challenge any Member who has not already done so to take on the Olympic sport of trying to get on and off a bus in the rain with a toddler, an infant, a pram, and the shopping. If parents cannot get to services easily and if it takes too long to get there, the value of the services quickly diminishes.

A number of women's centres and community centres offer excellent childcare services for their surrounding areas, despite struggling with uncertainties with funding. We need to offer those programmes assured long-term funding and introduce capital grants for the development of childcare facilities in areas where there is a demonstrated need.

There is very little childcare provision in Northern Ireland for disabled children. In addition, older children are being left out: there are few age-appropriate services for children between eight and 14. That may reach crisis point in a few years if it is not addressed, when welfare reforms move lone parents from income support to jobseeker's allowance. The stated goal of those reforms is to move more lone parents into paid employment and move children out of poverty. However, if childcare is not dealt with, instead of helping those parents to move on and up, we will simply pull away a safety net, and there is a real risk that we will make their situation worse rather than better. The Childcare Act 2006 requires local authorities in England and Wales to meet the new demands for childcare that will be created by welfare reforms, and the Executive need to take immediate action to ensure that the same happens in Northern Ireland.

The gaps in childcare provision that the women of the Shankill identified are real barriers to parents, especially to women, re-entering the workforce. It is not only employment that is hampered by insufficient childcare services. All the programmes that Ministers have proudly outlined in the Chamber over the past few weeks to improve education, skills training, health and well-being and community services will be undersubscribed by parents of young children — by women in particular — if the need for affordable childcare is not addressed.

We have marginalised childcare because we have failed to appreciate its full impact on our society and our economy. We have approached it as an optional policy issue, mistakenly assuming that it is about accommodating the wishes of women who choose to be in paid employment rather than stay at home with their children. However, for the majority of families in need of childcare it is not a matter of choice. Those

parents need quality, accessible, affordable childcare, not because they would like to work but because they have to work. For many households with two wage earners, the second income makes all the difference. At best, it generates some flexibility in their finances, but for many families the second wage quite simply keeps them out of financial dire straits or even poverty.

For lone parents, the lack of affordable childcare is the primary barrier to employment. There are nearly 92,000 lone parents in Northern Ireland, caring for 150,000 children. Eighty-seven per cent of those families are headed by a mother, and 60% of lone parents are in debt. We need to stop treating childcare and the quality and accessibility of childcare services as though they were luxuries to accommodate a lifestyle option. They are matters of necessity and, in many cases, survival.

Let us also continue to dismantle the myths that childcare is a women's issue or that every family has a granny who is ready and able to step in and mind children while their parents are at work. Those are outdated and misguided perspectives that create hurdles to delivering quality childcare.

The dearth of appropriate childcare seriously inhibits skills development, further education, innovation and entrepreneurship by and for women. We are in a recession in which people are carrying vast amounts of personal debt, and impeding the ability of parents, particularly women, to maximise their earnings will only slow our recovery. Insufficient childcare support is inhibiting business growth and innovation, and we are fighting for economic recovery with one hand tied behind our back.

My amendment is meant to help to expand the picture of childcare —

**Mr Speaker:** I ask the Member to bring her remarks to a close.

**Ms Purvis:** — and I hope that my colleagues in the Chamber can support it and that we can work with the Executive to deliver the proposals.

**Mr Kennedy:** I speak on behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party; my colleagues and I are happy to support both the motion and the amendment. Childcare is a matter that every parent has to deal with at some stage. Yet, no matter how desperate their need for childcare, they will always be most concerned that the childcare is good and that they are leaving their children with people who are properly trained and in an environment that is safe and secure.

It is vital that in seeking to improve its affordability and accessibility, we do not lose sight of the need for childcare to be exemplary. I am glad that the motion makes that point.

2.00 pm

The quality of childcare increased in the first six years after the publication in 1999 of 'Children First — A Policy Statement', but we must ensure that standards do not slip. The motion's call for the Executive to provide a childcare strategy is depressingly familiar. The motion's origins lie in last summer's OFMDFM report on child poverty. That report followed the 2005 review of 'Children First', which claimed to represent the beginnings of a strategy when it was first published in 1999. Unfortunately, such a strategy has still not been published.

In the report, the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister called on the Department to increase the level of good-quality, affordable childcare; to improve the level of appropriate, affordable childcare for children who are less able; to improve access to affordable childcare in rural areas; to reduce the length of time that it takes to become registered as a childminder; to reverse the decline in registered childminders that some parts of Northern Ireland are experiencing; and to enhance the training and development of staff who work in early-years settings. All those areas are definite priorities as we look at childcare, and if implemented, they will go a long way to solving many of our society's varied problems.

Childcare can play a large role in early-years development. Adequate early-years provision improves the academic attainment of children in schooling. Affordable childcare, therefore, plays a vital role in allowing parents — particularly single parents — to get back into work if they wish to do so. It also helps by reducing spend on benefits and by adding to the economy's productivity. Adequate childcare provision is a necessity for a society that wishes to be as productive and as driven by equality of opportunity as it possibly can be.

As we have done with so many other issues, we have consulted and reported on the issue of childcare almost to death over the past 10 years. The motion and the amendment are reasonable, and what is called for is badly needed. However, it is not a new call for action, because we have known for the past decade that action is needed. The issue highlights that devolution is best for Northern Ireland and can work for the people of Northern Ireland. It puts local Ministers, who have the necessary time and resources, in charge of the matter.

The Committee's view, and my own, is that the time for studies, reports and consultations is over. That has been done, and endless pages of analysis and policy already exist. It is now well beyond the time for the Executive not to be doing what they were elected to do, and what they promised to do. They must make a difference for the people of Northern Ireland by providing adequate and proper childcare.

**Mr Shannon:** I support the motion and thank the Members who brought it to the Chamber. I shall focus on the introduction to the Northern Ireland Childminding Association's (NICMA) briefing paper, 'Childminder Start-Up Package', which states:

"The right for families to have access to affordable, quality childcare is fundamental to Northern Ireland's future economic prosperity, to tackling child poverty, and to achieving the best possible outcomes for all children."

I wholeheartedly agree with that statement, as I am sure do many other Members.

Long gone are the days when the majority of families could get by on one wage, with many mums staying at home to look after the children. Most working mothers in the Province do so out of necessity rather than desire. In most families, both partners must work in order to pay the mortgage. Maternity leave entitles mothers to a few months' pay, but what happens after that? The bills do not take a break simply because a mother has had a child. Indeed, as the proud grandfather of a beautiful baby girl, I know that the bills increase, and I am not just referring to the Northern Ireland football kit that we bought for her when she was born.

Whor daes this lae maist mithers? Haein tae gaun bak tae wark is tha ansur. Whau dae ye lae yeer wane wi? Thee ser sum femelies, which er extended, an fowk caun rely oan freens tae mien the wane. This is a guid blessin; hooaniver, a' muckle nummer o' haems daenae hae this oapshin, an tha next best thing is tae pae fer a regestered chileminder tae tak caer o' yer wane fer ye.

Whuther this is in tha foarm o' haem caer er state-provided nursery schuills an play centers, ye need tae mak shair that yer wane is safe en that ye er abel tae lae it wi' peese o' mien. Tha proablim is that ther is a shoartage o' regestered chileminders an this lack is gittin wor.

Where does that leave most mothers? They have to go back to work, but with whom do they leave their children? Some families are extended, and mothers can rely on relations to mind their children. That is a real blessing; however, a large number of families do not have that option.

The next best option is to pay for a registered childminder to take care of children for you. Whether by using home care, state-provided nursery schools or play centres, one must make sure that one's child is safe. Parents must have peace of mind when they leave their children. The problem is the shortage of registered childminders in Northern Ireland, and that shortage is getting worse.

Registered childminding is by far the most popular and affordable form of full-time childcare in Northern Ireland; it accounts for some 76% of the full-time places and 44% of all childcare places. There was a



90% drop in the supply of places with registered childminders in the three years to March 2006.

NICMA has told me of its proposals for helping to solve the problem of day care for children. They are constructive, and entail the Executive funding an innovative childminder start-up package. That is a positive way to address these issues. The package includes childminder start-up grants to encourage more individuals to choose childminding and to go through the registration process. The grants will help with the cost of setting up and registering as a childminding business. They will be of particular benefit in areas of social deprivation in which childminding provision is low. Individuals in such areas find the start-up costs associated with becoming a childminder — such as buying equipment and insurance — particularly difficult to meet. Another constructive suggestion is for the provision of one-to-one mentoring support for individuals as they go through the registration process. NICMA has also suggested the provision of a personal adviser to support new recruits. Those are good and important suggestions.

In the survey of parents and childcare in Northern Ireland, it was shown that there was a clear shortfall in the provision of childcare places, particularly in rural areas and in eastern parts of the Province — and, indeed, in the area that I represent; it would be wrong of me not to mention that in the Chamber today. A 20% expansion in the number of childminders is needed to meet the demand. There has been a significant increase in the use of unregistered childminders, which increases the potential risk to children. The proposal requires only £300,000 annually for an initial period of three years. It would enable the roll-out of the childminders' start-up package across Northern Ireland, with priority given to the areas most in need of childminding provision.

Something must be done. I ask the Minister to consider seriously and as a matter of urgency the implementation here of schemes that have been implemented on the mainland. They have done it there, and it has been successful. Let us see whether we can do the same here.

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

**Mr Shannon:** If we are to reach our full economic potential, we must ensure that all those able to work are doing so, and childminding is important in that.

**Mrs M Bradley:** I support the motion and the amendment.

Childcare is important from the perspective of child, parent and service provider. It is a tool essential to bringing us all out of this economic downturn. We are experiencing a great shift in attitudes: there is now an acceptance that equality plays a part in all aspects of life, including childcare. Any provision must be child-centred and suitable for the needs of the workforce

during this difficult economic period. A flexible and equality-driven service must be the core of any strategy, and such strategies must be open, transparent and contributed to by all Ministers. In the delivery of such a service, there must be a strong interdepartmental element.

The cost of childcare is too great for many families. We need affordable provision that encourages parents to get back to work and dispels the belief that it is not worth working because one will only work to pay for one's childcare. If we get more people back to work, we stand a better chance of stimulating the economy by increasing the disposable income of working parents, rather than increasing the number of those dependent on benefits.

The fiasco of the working tax credit, and all the controversy that goes with that, is really off-putting for many people who are considering going back to work, together with the fact that the childcare element of it is not available if the carer is a relative. That is the case for many people in Northern Ireland, where, for example, many grandparents provide childcare. The lack of places is high on the complaints list, as is the need for a more flexible service to fit the needs of the flexi-worker.

It is essential that the Assembly take on board the need for investment in childcare provision if we are to see a return on the economy and the rebirth of a more flexible and more accessible childcare system that is open and available to all. We must speculate to accumulate in this particular instance. It is only through utilising that attitude that there will be any valuable change for our constituents and their families. The lack of funding in early-years and special-needs childcare is a real problem, and one that will continue to rear its head until properly dealt with. I hope that the Minister of Education will take that problem on board and consider it accordingly.

The choice element is vital if parents are to have peace of mind when they place their child in a crèche or childcare environment. The upshot is that we should reap the benefits in the long term and get the chance to provide care for primary-school children who, according to many studies, are not really receiving age-appropriate childcare at the minute. If we can provide age-appropriate after-school care, we may — and I stress “may” — see a shift in the attitudes of our pre-teenagers and, in the long run, may even see a more respectful generation.

I think that it is obvious from today's debate and the various contributions that childcare requires a properly considered strategy with interdepartmental contributions. Such a strategy should develop a healthier economy and a more stable and happier family environment and have the interests of the child at its heart. Childcare

must be local, quality, flexible and accessible. That is what we need to provide, and it is up to the Executive to provide it. Constituents who are the parents of disabled children or children with special needs are blindsided when it comes to childcare and, often, can only access some respite care but not permanent childcare.

I request that all Ministers take heed of what has been said today and act accordingly. The scoping exercise being carried out by the First Minister and the deputy First Minister needs to be delivered and needs to be delivered soon. I support the motion and the amendment.

**Mrs Long:** I thank the Members who tabled the debate for bringing the issue before the House. The issue of accessible and affordable childcare is something that we need to concentrate on. I support the motion, which calls for a coherent and, perhaps most importantly, properly resourced strategy. I also support the amendment, which highlights the need for such a strategy to take into account irregular and flexible working hours. People do not always work nine-to-five or family friendly hours, and that has to be taken into account when we try to provide a strategy. If people do indeed want to be able to work, they have to have the flexibility to take the employment that is on offer.

During the OFMDFM Committee's study of child poverty, it was stated time and time again by contributors and witnesses, and highlighted in the research, that the best way to alleviate poverty and to break cycles of deprivation is to increase access to employment. Although the benefits system has been, and continues to be, amended to try to mitigate poverty and alleviate its worst effects, if significant step changes are to be achieved in people's living experience, increasing stable employment is the only option. Certainly, it is key to improving outcomes. However, it was just as frequently recognised that the lack of affordable and flexible childcare was a major limiting factor affecting access to training in preparation for work, access to employment, and people's flexibility within employment.

Research carried out by the Equality Commission — I think in 2003 — was brought before the Committee. It suggested that 67% of women stated the lack of affordable childcare as a factor in preventing them from taking up paid employment. Not only that, it showed that over 25% of mothers were constrained in the hours that they could work due to childcare, and a further 20% were limited in the jobs that they could take. It is not just about getting a job; it is about getting equal access to well-paid, stable employment, and to promotion opportunities once in employment.

That has an impact on the family and on the individuals whose personal aspirations can be frustrated and thwarted. It also has implications for the wider

economy, because people have skills and talents that cannot be fully harnessed by the economy due to that constraining factor.

2.15 pm

Indeed, we were told that the current provision was woefully inadequate, and that where it existed, it was sparse and often expensive. The Committee took that point on board in its discussions. However, that was not the only problem. There has been a lack of strategic direction coming from the Executive in what is a key aspect of the Programme for Government's pledge to support the economy.

In 1999, the 'Children First' childcare strategy first emerged. It was reviewed in 2005 and a final report was published. We are now in another review situation, but an active strategy encompassing the preschool and school-age aspects of childcare is not in place.

In 2007, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) considered rural issues specifically. Undoubtedly, there are rural aspects to childcare, but it is not purely a rural issue. The problem of being able to gain access to childcare can be exacerbated by geographical factors, but the issue is much wider. Also, it is unclear as to how those recommendations are feeding into the process of producing a strategic overview for the entire Executive.

People in multiple deprivations and with other family factors are further disadvantaged when accessing childcare, and that was shown in much of the research. Also, people from a low-income background, those who work part time, those who work outside traditional work patterns, and families in which one or more family member has a disability, find access to childcare incredibly difficult. If the family member with a disability happens to be a child, it can be more difficult still. Legally, they have the right to access, but often a parent is required to be present in the childcare facility. That, in itself, prevents that parent from seeking employment.

Clear lines of responsibility are lacking, and that must be addressed. The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS), the Department of Education and the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) were involved originally; DARD and OFMDFM also have some input. However, there is no clarity regarding the lines of responsibility for school-age childcare, and that was highlighted repeatedly during the study undertaken by the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. Both Departments came to the Committee a week apart and said that it was not their problem. The matter must be clarified and pressed home with those Departments.

I suspect that the debate will raise little that is not already known and acknowledged. However, a

measure of its usefulness will be in the appropriateness of the Executive's response.

**Mr Spratt:** We debate this important matter in the context of falling levels of childcare provision in Northern Ireland. Between 2002 and 2007, the overall number of day-care places fell by 1%, and places with registered childminders are down by 17% since 2002. That is deeply worrying and it is, without doubt, an important matter that must be addressed in the Province.

Quality affordable childcare is essential in allowing the development of a modern workforce. Women, including mothers, are a key element of the workforce, and as a Province, we must utilise all our resources, including human resources, to reinvigorate the economy. However, there is currently a huge barrier preventing that from happening. Sixty-seven per cent of women refer to the lack of affordable quality childcare as the main barrier to entering employment. That is no fault of theirs: it is the failure of the system. That must be addressed, and barriers to employment must be removed.

**Mr Beggs:** Will the Member accept that since the decision was taken to end the Executive programme fund for children, a gap has materialised that no Department, or Departments collectively, co-ordinated by OFMDFM, have filled? The extended schools programme is only partially funded, and that other stream of funding has ended. Will the Member accept that a considerable period has elapsed since that decision was taken and that, as yet, the gap has not been addressed by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

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

**Mr Spratt:** It is a cross-departmental issue. Some Departments have washed their hands of it, and I will touch upon a particular example of that, which has occurred in my own constituency.

The Members who tabled the motion are seeking to tackle the problem through an Executive-led strategy. By doing so, they are seeking, what I believe to be, the responsibility of their party colleague, the Minister of Education. Although there is no doubt that if the necessary investment were made in that key provision, children's learning skills would improve, unsurprisingly, all that has come from the responsible Minister has been another failure to act in children's best interests.

Let me provide a brief example of such a failure. Let me take Members to the Sandy Row area of my constituency, where the Kids Into Training and Education project — the KITE project, as it is known — has suffered at the hands of the Minister of Education. That fantastic project, which, every week, serves hundreds of kids in one of the most deprived areas of Belfast, has been refused funding by the Department of Education. I must say that I concur with the sentiments

of local pastor Paul Burns who said that the Minister, like Pontius Pilate, has washed her hands of the whole affair. Not only has the Minister refused to help those kids, but, in doing so, she is barring local mothers who depend on KITE childcare from going out to work. Despite that, the Minister claims that the issue is nothing to do with her Department.

Thanks to money from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, which was allocated through the Department of Health, the project is now being funded for a period of time through PlayBoard. Fortunately, those bodies recognise the importance of such a project in my constituency. It is time that the Department of Education and, indeed, all Departments consider the importance of projects and the vital work that they do in those communities, particularly in areas such as Sandy Row.

Present in the Chamber today are mothers who, without childcare, could not do the work of an Assembly Member and public representative. More must be done to give women such as those mothers in Sandy Row freedom to enter the workforce and realise their potential. As individuals, they will benefit, their family units will welcome the extra income, and everyone will benefit from the contribution that women make to Northern Ireland's growing economy.

My party and I support the motion and the amendment.

**Mr O'Dowd:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Beidh mé ag labhairt ar son an rúin agus an leasaithe.

The motion concerns economics: it is about the economics of our society. I will quote from the statement provided earlier by the First Minister on behalf of himself and the deputy First Minister:

"This statement is but a further demonstration of our determination to take whatever actions are open to us to combat the economic difficulties...by harnessing the wisdom and knowledge of those most affected by the current economic situation, we can navigate our way through the present difficulties."

If the Executive are able to manage a properly funded and resourced childcare facility in the North, it will go a great way towards helping us to navigate our way out of our current economic difficulties, because the people most affected by the downturn — those who live in socially deprived areas — are those who find it most difficult to find childcare facilities. As the statistics and reports that have already been mentioned, and which I will not repeat, demonstrate, there is a requirement for greater investment in childcare facilities.

Indeed, in the statement that she made prior to the debate, the Minister for Social Development outlined her proposals for the reconfiguration of social security offices. One of the deepest concerns among the agency's workers, particularly those who are female, is that if they are forced to travel long distances to work,

or their rotas are changed and they are unable to access childcare facilities, they may have to leave their jobs. Therefore, the issue affects a wide range of people in both our workforce and our potential workforce.

There is a deficit in rural childcare facilities, and that has a wide effect. I know many parents in rural areas who drive past their local rural primary school into the town and then go to work. They send their children to urban primary schools because they have more chance of accessing childcare facilities after school hours there than they do in the rural community. That means that rural schools are affected, and that has a knock-on effect across society.

Workers in childcare professions must be both looked after and paid adequately. As Dawn Purvis said, there must be a professional element to their training and to the achievement of professional qualifications to ensure that the profession, which provides a vital service to society, is cherished.

At this stage of the debate, many points have been rehearsed, and I do not intend to repeat them. I support the motion and the amendment. Go raibh maith agat.

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

*The debate stood suspended.*

2.30 pm

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

## Oral Answers to Questions

### OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Question 1 has been withdrawn.

#### **Discrimination/Inequalities: Section 75**

2. **Mr Butler** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what assessment it has made of the effectiveness of the Equality Commission in addressing discrimination and inequalities among section 75 categories. (AQO 2467/09)

**The First Minister (Mr P Robinson):** I was wondering, Mr Deputy Speaker, how you were going to be referee and striker at the same time with question 1.

As the funding Department for the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) is accountable for the commission's business activities and resourcing arrangements. In that context, the deputy First Minister and I approve the commission's three-year corporate plan. Our Department must also approve the commission's annual business plan. It also carries out reviews every five years or so, with the next review scheduled for 2009-2010.

The commission reports to OFMDFM quarterly on its performance on progress made towards achieving the aims, objectives and targets contained in its annual business plan. In turn, OFMDFM officials consider the contents of those quarterly reports and request further details where appropriate. Our officials also meet bimonthly with commission staff to discuss various issues, including the outworking of the business and corporate plans. Formal meetings at senior management level take place quarterly.

For the financial year 2007-08, the commission set 23 targets of progress: 18 of those were met, two were partly met, and three were unmet.

**Mr Butler:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom fáilte a chur roimh fhreagra an Aire.

I thank the First Minister for his reply. The question relates to the effectiveness of section 75. Local



government is an area of particular concern. There are two approaches to section 75: a complainant can go to a local authority — or whatever offending body — and lodge a section 75 complaint; or the Equality Commission can generate its own review of section 75. Is the First Minister concerned by the fact that during the years of the Equality Commission's existence, it has not generated a single section 75 complaint against any local authority and that it is left up to individuals? That is a weakness.

**The First Minister:** I am not sure that I recall any successful legal action relating to section 75. Part of the commission's work is to give advice and assistance so that organisations do not fall foul of section 75 requirements. Schedule 9 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires the Equality Commission to keep the effectiveness of the duties imposed by section 75 under review.

The Equality Commission is not appointed by the deputy First Minister and me; it is appointed by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. Given that the Secretary of State has section 75 responsibilities, he should keep account of the effectiveness of the organisation that he appoints. For our part, we have a pay and rations requirement for our Department and the commission. We can approve or not approve the commission's corporate and business plans, but we are limited because we do not appoint the organisation in the first instance.

**Mr P J Bradley:** What is the First Minister's assessment of the Equality Commission's role, particularly in relation to age discrimination?

**The First Minister:** I was going to try to get through this question and still be ministerial. My views on the Equality Commission are fairly well known. It is always difficult for a body that is not itself representative to carry out its role. The duties of the Equality Commission are set down in law; if it is believed that breaches of the requirements of section 75 have occurred, people can have redress through the courts. As I said before — though it is not always the only indicator of whether there have been breaches of section 75 — there have not, in my view, been any successful legal actions with regard to section 75 requirements.

**Mr McCausland:** I thank the First Minister for his answers. There is a statutory obligation on the Equality Commission to be reflective of the community in Northern Ireland. What is the First Minister's assessment of the Equality Commission's record in that regard, given that it has, in my view, failed in its obligations towards the unionist and Protestant community in the appointment of commissioners and in its record as an employer?

**The First Minister:** I can go along that road for 50% of the way. The other 50% has to take the form of

a stricture on the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, because it is he who appoints the members of the Equality Commission, rather than the commission itself. It is not a representative body, and one situation flows from the other. If a body is not representative, its staff get out of kilter and there is a cold-house feeling, which has a rolling impact. It looks dreadfully bad if the Equality Commission has to put its own requirements to the test. Some 30% of its staff is Protestant, which is clearly not reflective of the community. Urgent action is required, and simply placing an advertisement here and there is not enough. The Equality Commission is required to show equality in its own staffing arrangements and in the commission itself.

### Domestic Violence: Children's Strategy

3. **Mr Poots** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what assessment it has made of the impact of domestic violence in the context of delivering the children's strategy. (AQO 2468/09)

**The First Minister:** The 10-year strategy for children and young people aims to deliver improved outcomes across six main areas. We recognise the potential impact that violence in the home may have on achieving the high-level outcomes of being healthy and living in safety and with stability. However, the strategy does not repeat or replicate actions that emerge from other cross-cutting strategies.

Through implementation of the strategy for children and young people, we will work to ensure that the rights and needs of children and young people in Northern Ireland are properly addressed in emerging action plans under cross-cutting strategies such as the tackling violence at home strategy, which has been published by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, and which addresses domestic violence and abuse. The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) chairs the inter-ministerial group on domestic and sexual violence, which was established to ensure the involvement of key service providers and voluntary and statutory partners in this area. The junior Ministers represent OFMDFM on that group because of the potential impact of domestic violence on children.

In addition, an inter-agency regional steering group, led by DHSSPS and the NIO, was established to examine the issues around prevention, protection and justice, support, and training and development for practitioners. Senior officials from OFMDFM's gender and sexual orientation equality unit are represented on that forum. That strategic group feeds into the inter-ministerial group, working together on all the issues that are associated with domestic violence, sexual violence and abuse.



**Mr Poots:** I thank the First Minister for his response. Does he agree that the former SDLP Member for Lagan Valley and current Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People would be better advancing children's interests in the home and with regard to domestic violence, rather than pursuing parents who care about their children?

**The First Minister:** Everyone knows that resources are extremely limited and that the best use must be made of them. It is clear that the court case to which the Member alluded — and the appeal against that judgement — cost a considerable amount out of a budget that would otherwise have been available for other child support services.

Everyone can make their own judgement on whether that was good value for money. Both cases were lost; therefore, there was no positive outcome for the Children's Commissioner.

**Mr Gardiner:** Has the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister considered asking the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety to consider the overall mental-health implications of incidents of domestic violence on women?

**The First Minister:** The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety leads the group that deals with those issues; therefore, it would be more appropriate to put any questions about the details of that to him. The responsibility of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister is determined by two factors — the first is whether an issue relates to equality and the second is whether it relates to children. The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has responsibility for dealing with issues that relate to domestic violence.

**Ms J McCann:** Given that OFMDFM has responsibility for the elimination of gender-based violence, and given that some people who experience such violence have no recourse to public funds, will the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister consider initiating a special fund for those families that have no access to public funds, so that they can access support services?

**The First Minister:** I am quite happy to look at that issue in more detail. Such people might have access to legal aid and legal support in other circumstances. The deputy First Minister and I are happy to look at the issue in the first instance, to see how extensive it is and whether it can be dealt with under existing systems.

**Mrs M Bradley:** What additional resources has OFMDFM provided for the children's strategy? Does that Department intend to again bring into force a package of measures for children and young people?

**The First Minister:** It is a mistake to think that the measures relating to children and young people were

funded entirely by OFMDFM — a range of Departments has responsibility for the issues involved. The principle of removing the duplication of services — which is important because administering the duplicated services incurred a cost and so used up funds — and allowing Departments to take the lead responsibility in the areas involved has meant that money that would otherwise have been tied up in administration in OFMDFM is going to the Departments

Those issues are a priority for OFMDFM, because of the Department's cross-cutting nature. However, every Department, by its nature, has some responsibility for those matters, whether it is the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety or the Department of Education, and Ministers must ensure that those issues are prioritised in their Departments.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I know that this is the first Question Time since before the recess, but I remind Members who want to ask a supplementary question that they need to rise in their places to get my attention.

## Climate Change and Sustainable Development

4. **Mr Gallagher** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister when it will publish the strategy on climate change and sustainable development. (AQO 2469/09)

**The First Minister:** Following an earlier written response to him, the Member will be aware that we have initiated a review of the first sustainable development strategy that was produced by the previous Administration. Our objective is to produce a new high-level strategy that will align more effectively with the Executive's Programme for Government.

We have the first draft of the new strategy, which we are continuing to study. In the near future, we hope to be in a position to circulate a draft of the new strategy document to stakeholders in Government and to the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, before initiating a wider public consultation. Naturally, the new strategy will take climate change into account, within the broader principle of living within environmental limits. However, responsibility for climate change policy lies within the remit of the Department of the Environment (DOE) and is subject to a decision by the Executive.

**Mr Gallagher:** I thank the First Minister for his answer. I received a written response to my question on the matter in February 2009. Given the increasing importance that many Governments around the world, particularly those in London and Dublin, give to the development of low carbon technologies and other efficiencies, does the First Minister feel that the longer

we wait for a sustainable development strategy, the greater our economic disadvantage will be?

2.45 pm

**The First Minister:** I do not accept that, because we are not without a strategy. The existing strategy — that is, the 2006 strategy — will remain in place until it is replaced by the updated strategy, which will take account of our Programme for Government policies and targets. We are upgrading the policy, but the strategy is in place already, and we are working to it.

I believe that all parties in the House are particularly committed — as are the Executive — to the reduction of carbon emissions. We have set ourselves targets on that in our Programme for Government. The public service agreements are being advanced by various Departments, and a range of Departments is doing a lot of work to meet the Programme for Government targets.

**Mr T Clarke:** Will the First Minister tell us whether the lack of a published strategy means that Northern Ireland is operating in a void when it comes to sustainable development?

**The First Minister:** That is not the case. I could list what all the Departments are doing on sustainable development. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in particular has been proactive in the work that it is doing on a wide range of areas. The Department of Finance and Personnel, the Department of the Environment — obviously — and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development all have a role to play. They all continue to pursue the requirements of the Programme for Government.

The strategy, which I hope will be available fairly soon, will update that which was left by the previous Administration and will take into account the targets and requirements of our Programme for Government.

**Mr Beggs:** Has the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister considered how the Programme for Government's commitment to reducing our impact on climate change is being affected adversely by views that the Minister of the Environment has expressed? What latitude does a Minister have to express views that will detract from those objectives and that will detract ultimately from any strategy that may be agreed? Has the First Minister had discussions with the Minister of the Environment about the matter?

**The First Minister:** Let us be clear: the Programme for Government was approved by this Assembly and supported by the Executive. It is, therefore, the policy of the Executive and this Assembly. The views to which the Member refers are academic views that were expressed by the Minister about how climate change comes about. There is no question in the Minister's mind as to whether there is climate change; the question is whether it is man-made.

I think that the scientific evidence is on the side of those of us who believe that man is having an impact on the climate, and that, therefore, there is a necessity on the part of the Executive to deal with those issues. Even if it were not so, I have to say that the possibility that it were should be enough to alert any responsible Executive to take whatever measures they can.

## Special Economic Taskforce

5. **Mr McElduff** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the special economic taskforce will take proper account of the infrastructure needs of Tyrone, Fermanagh and other areas west of the River Bann. (AQO 2470/09)

**The First Minister:** The Programme for Government and the investment strategy set out clearly that promoting a regional balance and addressing existing regional disparities is a key objective for the Executive. That is crucial if we are to promote and facilitate economic growth and social progress across Northern Ireland.

Members will be aware that the deputy First Minister and I have set up a task force called the cross-sector advisory forum to allow us to continue dialogue with key stakeholder groups and to tap into the well of local economic — and other — talent in Northern Ireland. The forum, which is chaired jointly by the deputy First Minister and me, has 30 members. It has been established to address particular issues and to make recommendations for addressing the problems that are arising from the current economic crisis.

The terms of reference and details of the membership of the group have been placed in the Assembly Library for information. The first meeting of the forum took place on 6 April 2009. The infrastructure development of areas west of the Bann, and, indeed, of all parts of Northern Ireland, is considered in the investment strategy for Northern Ireland. Naturally, the forum's remit will take account of the impact that the economic crisis is having across Northern Ireland.

**Mr McElduff:** Tá mé buíoch den Aire as a fhreagra.

I am grateful to the First Minister for his answer. The importance of the infrastructure to our economy is implicit in the question. I want to highlight the fact that businesses west of the Bann face additional hurdles, including poor broadband access in many communities and a generally poor roads infrastructure.

Will the First Minister and deputy First Minister encourage the forum to take a special look at the economic needs of businesses west of the Bann?

**The First Minister:** The deputy First Minister, who represents a constituency west of the Bann, is unlikely to allow the concerns of the region to go unheard. As for infrastructure: Northern Ireland was in advance of

any other country in Europe with regard to broadband access capability. That is now being upgraded, and, happily, will be coming into the north-west of the Province, and there should, therefore, be considerable advantage from that.

As far as roads are concerned: I assure the Member that, during my time as a roads Minister — which, admittedly, was some years ago — I used to get accused of spending too much money west of the Bann, and most of the road improvements and — *[Interruption.] [Laughter.]* Oh, yes: if anyone looks, they will see that more money was spent west of the Bann during that period than was spent east of the Bann. However, I very much doubt whether the current roads Minister is discriminating against the west of the Bann on those issues.

We want the whole of Northern Ireland to enjoy prosperity. The goal of the Executive is to ensure that the benefits of devolution filter down to not just every strata of society, but to every location in Northern Ireland, and it is in the interests of us all to ensure that the communities west of the Bann have all the advantages of devolution.

**Mr P Ramsey:** Does the First Minister agree that in order to respond to the current crisis in the economy across Northern Ireland, it would be better to carry out an urgent review of the Programme for Government and the Budget rather than waiting several months for the outcome of a set review?

**The First Minister:** That question covers territory that I covered in my statement earlier today. I again say that I cannot see any logic in anyone suggesting that we should change our Programme for Government, given that it has, as its priority, the growth of our economy, which is precisely what anyone would do if they were starting with a blank piece of paper today.

Of course, the Budget will change from time to time, and there will be priorities that each party — and, indeed, each Minister in the Executive — may well want to put forward. We are open to proposals as to where reductions can be made in spending so that increases can be made in other areas. I do point out to the Member, however, that there has been a higher spend on capital projects in Northern Ireland during the past year than there has ever been, and we are planning to do even better in the next 12 months.

**Mr K Robinson:** I listened with interest to the exchanges about the roads system west of the Bann. I went down to have a look at it myself on Friday, and was mightily impressed — *[Interruption.]*

Yes, right down as far as Enniskillen, Tommy.

Has the First Minister considered the disproportionate impact of the recession on the East Antrim constituency, especially since 10% of employment

comes from the relatively safe public-sector sources, compared with the UK constituency average of 20%, and the Belfast average of 53%? What steps does he intend to take to address that inequality east of the Bann, and, specifically, in East Antrim?

**The First Minister:** I can recall that when I was Finance Minister, the Member for West Tyrone always used to tell me that because of the number of people working in the public sector in the Omagh area, there was a necessity for more public-sector jobs to go to that area. Actually, on a travel-to-work basis, there were more people working in public-sector jobs in his constituency than anywhere else in Northern Ireland, including in Belfast, per head of population of economically active people. The worst of the whole of Northern Ireland was that general Larne catchment area. My argument had consistently been that that was an area where we should start looking if we are displacing jobs from the centre of Belfast.

However, much has to do with infrastructure, and the Larne area has a very important facility with the ferry, which is a very important means of communication with mainland Britain, and it is vital that the roads to and from the port are improved.

I am sure that the Member is as glad as I am that the Government of the Republic of Ireland are still committing themselves to giving funding for the road improvement, which will help that area's economy.

## Climate Change

6. **Mr Ford** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to report on cross-departmental Executive policy in relation to climate change.  
(AQO 2471/09)

**The First Minister:** During the recent debate on the Act on CO2 advertising campaign, the Member for South Antrim Mr Ford rightly stated:

“If we are going to deal seriously with climate change, it must be looked at by the entire Executive.” — *[Official Report, Bound Volume 39, p214, col 2].*

The Member will know that the Programme for Government already provides an expression of the Executive's intention in that regard. In that document, we stated clearly and unequivocally that we are aware of global and local threats to our natural and built environment, and that it is clear that climate change is a serious problem facing the world. That position has not changed. Our Programme for Government has put in place commitments, actions and targets, which all Departments support, to tackle the problem of climate change.

**Mr Ford:** When Ministers give their responses, I am flattered when they quote the Members who asked them questions. I had hoped that the First Minister's



response would have had slightly more on policy and less on aspirations. Nevertheless, given that he has told Mr Beggs that any responsible Executive would take whatever measures they could on climate change, and given the range of responsibilities across different Departments, will he explain how he can deal with the fact that the DOE Minister has a policy of doing the absolute minimum that is required by law?

**The First Minister:** DETI recently provided funding to extend the work of the Department of Energy and Climate Change on low-carbon solutions for households and communities to Northern Ireland. Work is due to start this year on a renewable heat strategy, and a submission on the subject will issue shortly to the Minister.

Energy used for heat accounts for around 50% of carbon emissions in the UK. It is vital to tackle that in order to help to constrain climate change. Invest Northern Ireland funds the Carbon Trust's activities in Northern Ireland, and the sum for those activities will be £13.4 million for 2008-2011.

Invest Northern Ireland is developing a renewables strategy, and a position paper is scheduled for June 2009. Four substantial energy-from-waste projects were approved in 2008, with support totalling approximately £13 million. DETI continues to provide funding for Action Renewables to provide free technical advice to households and communities on renewable-energy technologies, and it offers a signposting service to the low-carbon building programme.

From July 2006 to March 2008, DETI provided £10.8 million in funding for the Reconnect programme to allow householders to install micro-renewable technologies. That resulted in the displacement of 54.4 MW of fossil-fuel-generated electricity and heat, which resulted in a CO<sub>2</sub> saving of 21,074 tons per annum. A reduced VAT rate of 5% is available for small-scale renewable technologies and for technologies that generate electricity. I could go on, because I have a list of about six pages, but Members might lose patience with me somewhere along the line.

I will now address the remarks made about the Department of the Environment. It is progressing work on adapting to the unavoidable effects of climate change. The Department has set up the Northern Ireland climate change impacts partnership (NICCIP) with businesses, non-governmental organisations, the voluntary sector and Government representatives to improve understanding. The DOE continues to work with Whitehall and other devolved Administrations in the UK to inform public policy in Northern Ireland. It would be very hard to assess why there would be a detriment to one advert's having been stopped by a Minister who did not want to run a national UK advert

here because he felt that such matters should be decided by the devolved Administration.

**Mr Spratt:** Will the First Minister confirm that his position on climate change is consistent with that in the Programme for Government?

**The First Minister:** It would not have been included in the Programme for Government had it not been consistent with the position that my Executive colleagues and I hold. Indeed, the position as outlined in the Programme for Government flows directly from the DUP's election manifesto of 2007, to which all Members of the party are obliged to keep and uphold.

The DUP has supported climate-change legislation at Westminster and has called for year-on-year targets to reduce carbon emissions. It has been suggested that there is no consensus on the scientific evidence; I do not care too much whether there is consensus or not. However, I do believe that it is appropriate for the Executive to take action and prepare for any eventuality.

3.00 pm

## REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### Bus Stops/Timetables

1. **Mr McKay** asked the Minister for Regional Development what action has been taken to provide bus stops and bus timetables in rural areas since he came to office. (AQO 2486/09)

**The Minister for Regional Development (Mr Murphy):** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The provision of bus stops is an operational matter for Translink. However, I have been informed that in the past five years, 306 bus shelters have been erected in rural areas through a contract with Adshel. In addition, Translink has continued to improve facilities for passengers by providing timetable information, improving signage where required and making repairs to existing bus stops.

**Mr McKay:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his response and the work that his Department has carried out to date. Indeed, recently there has been a great increase in the number of bus stops, of bus stop signage and timetables in rural areas of north Antrim.

Will the Minister tell the House what his Department's policy is in relation to the provision of bus shelters? Furthermore, what percentage of bus stops have shelters?

**The Minister for Regional Development:** My Department's Roads Service entered into a 15-year contract with the bus shelter provider Adshel in 2001 to provide approximately 1,500 bus shelters across the

North. The provision and maintenance of those shelters is funded by Adshel through advertising revenue at no cost to the Department. All councils, with the exception of Fermanagh District Council, have signed up to that contract, which restricts them from providing advertising shelters from any other source. All councils, in addition to Translink, are permitted to provide additional non-advertising bus shelters at their own expense.

When my Department receives a request for a bus shelter, it consults Translink to ensure that there is either sufficient usage or potential for future public-transport growth at the proposed stop. That ensures that the best use is made of the limited resources available.

Since Translink does not maintain central records on the number of locations of bus stops, it is not possible to provide the percentage information requested by the Member.

**Mr Burns:** Although bus stops and shelters are very important and play a vital role, bus transport itself and the lack of transport in rural areas are key factors. I call on the Minister to provide more transport in rural areas.

**The Minister for Regional Development:** I am not sure that the Member actually asked a question; however, my Department is striving to provide more transport in rural areas. Not only is Translink required to fund loss-making services in rural areas, it also provides rural community transport across the North.

If the Member wants more transport, I will be happy to hear him in Budget debates argue that the Department for Regional Development (DRD) rather than the Department for Social Development (DSD) should receive more money.

**Mr McCallister:** Since a review of Translink's passenger charter is due in the next few years, will the Minister examine the need for buses to stick to their timetables not just at the beginning and end of journeys but also at the stops in between, as is the case at present? Does he agree that such a change could improve reliability, particularly in rural areas?

**The Minister for Regional Development:** A central aim in departmental policy is to get more people to use public transport. As the representative of a rural area, I am conscious of the provision of public transport in rural areas and of the need to improve public transport continuously to achieve our aim of getting people out of their cars and into public transport. Therefore anything that can be done to improve that would certainly be examined.

As the Member said, Translink's passenger charter is up for review. If mechanisms come forward during that review to improve service, particularly in rural areas, I would be happy to examine them.

## Water Charges

2. **Mr Elliott** asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the impact on his budget of the deferral of water charges to 2011.

(AQO 2487/09)

**The Minister for Regional Development:** On 20 November 2008, the Executive unanimously decided that there would be no household water and sewage payments in 2009-2010. As that was a collective decision, the Executive must decide how that cost will be met, and the June monitoring round will provide an opportunity to do that.

As part of the recent strategic stocktake, DRD identified that some £200 million of additional funding would be required for 2009-2010.

The Executive have not yet made a decision about the funding of water and sewerage services in 2010-11 and beyond.

**Mr Elliott:** I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he accept that he will implement water charges in the very near future? If so, how does he propose to do that?

**The Minister for Regional Development:** As I outlined in my initial answer, that is a position for the Executive to take. When Members were first elected, the Executive decided to defer water charges for a year and to set up an independent panel, which brought forward a series of recommendations. We have yet to take decisions on all those recommendations, after which there will be a period of consultation.

The Executive decided to defer water charges further until 2010. Therefore, the Executive must decide how to meet the cost of that, because there is a very real cost to the provision of water and sewerage services. In that year alone, I estimate that cost to be in the region of £200 million.

Would that it were in my gift to decide how the Executive will find £200 million for the necessary investment in water and sewerage, but I am afraid that it is not. It is in the gift of the entire Executive, which is why it is an Executive decision. If there were to be any change beyond 2010-2011, the Executive must pay for that by finding the money across Departments and services or by other means.

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Given the Minister's answer to the Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone Mr Elliott, will he confirm how much more domestic customers would have paid if water charges had not been deferred?

**The Minister for Regional Development:** The average cost was some £200 per household. However,

those calculations were based on what would have been paid last year and the previous year.

Water charges had been proposed during direct rule, and their deferral has had an impact on households, because they have not yet had to meet those bills. It has also had an impact on the Executive, which have had to find the money to pay for that service. We are investing about £1 million a day in necessary improvements to the water and sewerage infrastructure, which had not received proper investment for at least 20 years. We are playing catch-up and making substantial investments.

Households undoubtedly made financial savings as a result of the Executive's decision. The Executive had to find the money to meet those costs and must soon decide how to meet the future cost of water and sewerage services.

**Mr Dallat:** In an attempt to be positive, may I ask the Minister to look into his crystal ball and suggest that the appointment of a new chief executive to Northern Ireland Water shortly will replace the floods of burst pipes — and the associated shambles — with new rainbows of hope for the future? On reflection, will he assure Members that there will be no separate water charges?

**The Minister for Regional Development:** I look forward to the appointment of the chief executive. The Member knows from his time on the Committee for Regional Development that the current chairman has been acting as chief executive and, in my view, has done a very good job.

As I said in response to the previous question, in the past two decades, there was no investment in the water and sewerage infrastructure. Consequently, we have a substandard system in which more than £1 million a day is being invested in improvements. During the time that it will take to improve that system, leaks and other issues will, inevitably, arise. However, we are making a substantial investment.

The Executive must decide whether people will be billed at all for water and sewerage services. Having covered the cost of that over the past two years, the Executive must decide how to proceed in the future. All other decisions will flow from that.

**Dr Farry:** I am grateful for the Minister's confirmation that the Executive deferred water charges before knowing how that decision would be funded.

Does the Minister believe that the Executive's approach to water charges helps or hinders Northern Ireland's efforts to avoid the efficiency savings that the Chancellor is set to implement on Wednesday 22 April? In the event that the Chancellor requests at least £450 million in cuts to the Northern Ireland block grant,

does the Minister feel that the decision to forgo water charges for two years is sustainable?

**The Minister for Regional Development:** The Executive knew that, if the cost of water were not to be collected from households, the only other place from which that cost could be met was from the Executive — they would have to dip into the Budget in order to pay for that. That was quite obvious — there is no other third party or fairy godmother to pay for all that or to improve the infrastructure to the required standard.

Regardless of what the Treasury decides, we have our block grant. Ahead of the return of devolution, we strongly argued about the sort of investment that was needed here — particularly in relation to water, sewerage and a range of other issues — to sustain the return of devolved Government. We will continue to argue that case.

I do not think that we will make our decision based on how we think that the Treasury may feel about us or may regard the decisions that are taken. We have to assert our independence. Although the Treasury is responsible for allocating the block grant, we have some dignity in being able to make our own decisions. Were we to find that we are not able to make decisions on how we spend the money that is allocated to us, that would present a very significant challenge for the Executive and, perhaps, for this institution as a whole.

I look forward to hearing what the Treasury has to say, but I certainly know that I will continue to argue for independence in our decision-making.

### Water Supply Difficulties: Ards Peninsula

3. **Mr Shannon** asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he is aware of water-supply difficulties in the Ards Peninsula in the past few weeks, particularly the recent incident that left many homes without water for four to five days; and to outline the reasons for these disruptions and what action he is taking to ensure that this problem is fully resolved. (AQO 2488/09)

**The Minister for Regional Development:** I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that the disruption to water supplies in the Ards Peninsula that occurred on Saturday 21 March 2009 was caused by a major defect in the mid Ards trunk water main, which supplies service reservoirs in the area. Problems with air in the water-main network hindered the prompt recovery of the system. Nevertheless, the supply was restored to the majority of customers on Monday 23 March 2009 and to the remaining customers on Tuesday 24 March 2009.



Northern Ireland Water (NIW) is currently undertaking a review of the incident together with any other associated problems with the water-distribution system in the area. In view of the frequency of the interruptions to the supply, NIW is investigating the possibility of implementing further infrastructure improvements to improve the continuity of water supply. I asked the acting chief executive of NIW to write to the Member when the outcome of the review is known. I express my regret and sympathy to the people who were affected by the disruption. It is my sincere hope that that will be the last of the problems that they encounter.

**Mr Shannon:** On behalf of the people of the Ards Peninsula, I accept the Minister's apology. It was absolutely chaotic that farmers were unable to use water to feed their cattle and sheep; that young mothers were unable to put water in milk for their newborn babies; that elderly people were unable to make a cup of tea; that people were unable to flush their toilets; and that they were unable to wash, shower or wash their clothes. In the middle of all that, there was no system whatsoever for the distribution of bottled water.

When the taps were turned on afterwards, the water in this bottle is the water that came out. It is not vodka, and it is not lemon-flavoured.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I remind Mr Shannon that Members are not permitted to use visual aids. The Member should ask a question.

**Mr Shannon:** Will the Minister assure the people of the Ards Peninsula that a system will be put in place to address the continual breakages, and that there will be a back-up plan that will be better organised? Will he also assure us that, in future, there will be no 50% supply of water to the houses in the Ards Peninsula, which we have endured since Christmas?

**The Minister for Regional Development:** I accept what the Member is saying about the difficulties that the breakdown in supply caused to the people of the Ards Peninsula. As with any major incident that occurs, NIW carries out a review of the effectiveness of its response. There are obviously issues regarding its response as well as the breakdown. Any lessons that are learned should be put to good use to ensure that subsequent responses are improved upon.

NIW accepts that there is an ongoing problem and that major work may be required to ensure that a disruption does not occur again. A review is being carried out, and NIW will be in touch with the Member and any other elected representatives in the area to inform them of the outcome.

**Mr McCarthy:** I will show this picture to the Minister.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Visual aids are not permitted.

**Mr McCarthy:** That is water that should be going through people's taps, and Alderman Shannon outlined the problem. That water was on the road. Indeed, it occurred on a dozen roads on the Ards Peninsula. Alderman Shannon said that the situation cannot be allowed to continue any longer. The system must be repaired. Northern Ireland Water acknowledges that there is a big problem, but it needs funding to improve the system so that that does not happen again. Not only do we have to speak on behalf of the residents, but we have to speak on behalf of businesses.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The Member must ask a question.

3.15 pm

**Mr McCarthy:** We are trying to encourage tourism — we have caravan parks and all sorts of things — so we must ensure that funding is in place —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Minister, do you wish to reply to that answer? *[Laughter.]*

**The Minister for Regional Development:** Sometimes, that is a very attractive proposition. *[Laughter.]* Again, as I said to the previous Member who spoke, I deeply regret what happened, and I know that NIW is looking carefully at that, what action is required, and what action is required of it by way of response.

The Member said that NIW requires money for investment, but it already has a substantial capital budget. Of course, the company is undertaking a significant catch-up exercise due to underinvestment over a number of decades. Nonetheless, a substantial capital budget is available. NIW must identify areas in which breakdowns are commonplace, and those areas must then be given priority treatment. As I said, there is an ongoing review, and Members will be informed of its outcomes and of the actions that will be undertaken as a result.

**Mr Cree:** I am sorry, Mr Deputy Speaker, but I do not have any props. The Minister will be aware of the recent water-quality scare in the greater Belfast area. Is he content that correct procedures were adopted? Should that sort of thing happen again, will the Minister guarantee that customer safety will be balanced against customer convenience?

**The Minister for Regional Development:** Although customer convenience is important, customer safety is always the number one priority. With respect to the event to which the Member referred, an analysis was carried out on routine samples taken from the Dunore Point water treatment works over the weekend of 11 and 12 April and a potential quality issue was identified. It takes approximately 24 hours to analyse samples.

Early on Tuesday 14 April, when the results suggested that there might be a problem with water quality, NI Water, in consultation with a consultant in

communicable disease control, issued a precautionary boil-water notice. The notice was issued through the press, media and Internet, and homes that could potentially have been affected in the greater Belfast area and in Antrim and Down were alerted.

Subsequent water samples, which were tested by NIW at an independent laboratory later on Tuesday, all returned satisfactory results, and that confirmed that the water supply was safe to drink. In consultation with the health authorities late on Tuesday evening, the boil-water notice was lifted. NIW staff worked through the night to remedy the problem.

Nevertheless, I have asked officials in the Drinking Water Inspectorate to investigate why the initial analytical results were incorrect and to identify what steps can be taken to ensure that the risk of a reoccurrence is minimised. I sympathise with all those who were affected, and I regret any disruption or inconvenience that the incident caused. However, I am sure that everyone agrees that when there is even a minimal risk to the health and well-being of the public, it is sensible to take precautions, such as issuing a temporary boil-water notice.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I refer Members to page 85 in the Assembly Companion, which refers to the use of visual aids. No visual aids are allowed in the Chamber.

### Millennium Way, Lurgan

4. **Mr Moutray** asked the Minister for Regional Development what priority he has given to the completion of Millennium Way in Lurgan. (AQO 2489/09)

**The Minister for Regional Development:** As the Member may recall, in response to a previous written question, I advised that the Malcolm Road to Gilford Road extension of the Millennium Way in Lurgan is one of a number of proposed highway improvement schemes that were identified in the 'Sub-Regional Transport Plan 2015'. The 'Investment Delivery Plan for Roads' identifies funds totalling £109 million over the next 10 years for those improvements and for those in the 'Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan 2015'.

However, the funding profile in the investment strategy does not accommodate those improvement schemes until the middle-to-late part of the 10-year period. Work is still to be concluded on a prioritised, non-strategic major improvement programme. Therefore, at this stage, I am not in a position to give an indication of the priority that will be afforded to the scheme.

**Mr Moutray:** I thank the Minister for his answer, however, given that properties in Lurgan were vested decades ago to allow for the construction of the Malcolm Road to Gilford Road link, it is disappointing that nothing has happened. The link is vital for that

part of the town, because it will help to alleviate traffic congestion in the town centre. Given that Lurgan has suffered economically over the past number of years, I ask the Minister to instruct his Department to prioritise that badly-needed scheme.

**The Minister for Regional Development:** I understand what the Member said. I have been to Lurgan to meet business people, and we discussed that key route.

I will be talking to representatives of Craigavon Borough Council later this evening, and I am sure that the same issue will arise at that meeting. Millennium Way will have to compete for priority — as will many other road schemes in many other towns. The final prioritisation has not been done, and I will bear in mind the Member's comments.

We informed business people in Lurgan that any potential developer contributions would have a significant impact on the scheme. We will keep an open mind on that in the future. Any information relating to developer interest that emanates from the area will be taken into consideration as well.

**Mrs D Kelly:** I note the Minister's comments about developers, but I do not think that such interest is realistic in the current economic downturn. Not only is there a long-finger approach to Millennium Way, but is it not the case that there is a £50 million shortfall in the southern division's budget? Given that the Minister has met the business leaders — and considering that Millennium Way will not be completed in the foreseeable future — will he ask his departmental officials to look at other measures that might alleviate traffic congestion?

**The Minister for Regional Development:** All Departments balance their budgets as best they can and prioritise according to greatest need. Therefore, there is no question of a project being long-fingered merely for the sake of it. People want to see the development of projects in every town in the North that I visit, and we try to prioritise as many of them as we can.

I met people from Lurgan Forward, and they suggested a range of traffic alleviation measures. Roads Service had further discussions with them on those measures, and perhaps we will receive more information on that issue this evening when we talk to councillors from Craigavon Borough Council. However, I know that Roads Service will be willing to look at any measures that will help the flow of traffic in and around Lurgan.

**Mr Gardiner:** The Minister will be aware of Millennium Way in Lurgan and its successful contribution to the town, but it is not yet completed. I urge the Minister to put speed on that and to try to ensure that it is completed as soon as possible.



What discussions has the Minister had with the Minister of the Environment, Sammy Wilson, in relation to planning policy statement 5 (PPS 5) and the completion of projects in the Banbridge area and other such towns?

**The Minister for Regional Development:** As I mentioned in my response to a previous question, I am aware of the importance of Millennium Way. I know that it is unfinished, and I appreciate the priority that the locals want to see applied to its completion. I have not had any discussion with the Department of the Environment (DOE) Minister about Banbridge and PPS 5.

### Fly-Posting

5. **Mr Lunn** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on his policy in relation to fly-posting. (AQO 2490/09)

**The Minister for Regional Development:** The responsibility for regulating the display of advertisements, including fly-posting, falls to the Department of the Environment. However, inappropriate outdoor advertising has the potential to impact significantly on road safety and the environment. Under the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993, my Department's Roads Service has the power to remove unlawful advertising signs from within the curtilage of the public road.

The implementation of that policy, together with successful prosecutions, has resulted in a reduction in the number of unlawful advertising signs being erected within the public road boundaries, especially in the Belfast area.

Roads Service regularly removes fly-posters from its traffic signals, street lighting and cabinets. Although district councils have no statutory duty to remove such posters, they have the power of removal. I understand that some councils have requested that that statutory duty be included in the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act, the enactment of which is programmed for 2011.

**Mr Lunn:** I thank the Minister for his answer. He will be aware of the public perception that Roads Service is inclined to prosecute easy targets and to ignore the more difficult cases. A church that is advertising a car boot sale is liable to get fined before something more sinister is addressed. The Minister mentioned the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993. Does the Minister agree that, in the future, the removal of fly-posters should be the responsibility of the district councils, to which he referred?

**The Minister for Regional Development:** I do not agree with the suggestion that Roads Service targets easy prey. It is unlikely that sinister advertising will

have a name attached to it or that the name of the individual who has responsibility for its display will be included. Not only are people putting up directional signs, but they are putting up signs that are advertising their businesses or promotions.

That is not the purpose of road signage. It is supposed to be to assist someone to find a place on the last step of his or her journey; it is not intended to replace other directional information. People are now putting signs up that advertise events, their business or some kind of promotion. When such signs impinge on road safety, Roads Service has a responsibility to take them down and fine those involved.

I recently met some MLAs, and we discussed the issue with particular reference to rural businesses. I accept that there is a need to discuss the policy and to talk to business organisations. The proliferation of business signs sometimes becomes unsightly, especially in the countryside — I am more familiar with the border area — and it has a detrimental impact on our ability to present this place as a green land that is attractive to tourists.

There is an opportunity, and perhaps an obligation, to address the issue. I have undertaken to talk to Roads Service about that and to talk to business organisations about trying to manage the issue better. That way, we should not end up fining some of the charitable people who want to provide some useful and charitable service or event and we can deal in some way with the increasing proliferation of signs along the roads.

**Mr Kennedy:** I am grateful to the Minister for his reply. Has he formed any view as to whether he is minded to heed the representations made by those in local government who seek greater powers over fly-posting?

**The Minister for Regional Development:** My general approach to that issue is to transfer to local government as many powers as is sensible. Obviously, the discussions about the review of public administration (RPA) have not concluded. I know that during Holy Week, in the lead up to Easter, there were further discussions about the detail of the powers that will transfer, and those discussions have yet to be concluded. As I said, my general approach has been to be supportive if local councils feel that they want to exercise certain powers, and if it makes sense for those powers to be transferred. I do not see any reason to stand in the way of that.

**Mr P Ramsey:** I welcome the Minister's comments on the issue. It is a hugely important matter that affects many towns, cities and rural areas. Fly-posting is a blight on many communities.

The implementation of effective legislation is necessary, and that should be done in conjunction with the Department of the Environment. The only way to

deal with the serial offenders that we are talking about — the nightclub owners and others who consistently abuse the law — is to take them to court and fine them. That would act as a deterrent.

**The Minister for Regional Development:** I accept what the Member says. There is an increasing number of signs, and they become unsightly and are damaging to the environment. They also damage our ability to promote ourselves. However, during what are difficult economic times, we have to strike a balance when going after businesses, fining people and taking the signs down. There are also resource implications for Roads Service when its workers actually go out and take the signs down and then have to chase up businesses to fine them per sign.

There is a need for a discussion about the issue, because businesses obviously have a need to provide some sort of directional signage. Some of them do that, particularly in rural areas. However, there is a difference between that and advertising. At one stage, protocols were agreed. That was certainly the case with estate agents, who probably use signs more than any other businesses, particularly on Roads Service equipment. Those protocols had some effect, but that seems to have drifted. It is time for another discussion with business organisations — both rural and urban — about signage and what we can do about it.

### Regional Transportation Strategy

6. **Mr Ford** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the proposed review of the regional transportation strategy. (AQO 2491/09)

**The Minister for Regional Development:** My Department has started to review the regional transportation strategy and aims to issue a draft document for consultation in July. It is anticipated that the review will be completed by 2010 in order to help inform the next comprehensive spending review. As the review impacts on a number of Departments, I have circulated a paper to the Executive. I intend, if that paper is endorsed, to then make a statement to the Assembly.

**Mr Ford:** I thank the Minister for providing the news that the review is under way. Can he give us any indication as to the likely balance of expenditure between roads and public transport? There are clearly needs for road improvements in many rural areas. However, in recent years we have seen much money spent on roads in greater Belfast, which has added to the commuter problem rather than diminishing it.

3.30 pm

**The Minister for Regional Development:** There is a need for road spend in rural areas, but there is also a

need for strategic corridors connecting towns and cities, which is part of the major road spending programme that is under way. The Member will be aware that the majority of our public transport uses the roads; therefore, it is not a clear case of one versus the other. Spending on the roads improves public transport services. For example, the creation of quality bus corridors and park-and-ride facilities allows buses and other modes of public transport more space to move about in urban areas, which improves those services.

Having said that, I should say that, when the major routes are completed — work on most of them is either under way, or there are plans being advanced for their completion — the debate will shift towards the issue of the contribution to and the reduction of emissions. I have started that shift internally in the Department. The debate will then move on to the issue of greater investment in public transport.

## CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

### Regional Art Gallery

1. **Mr Gallagher** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what plans he has to invest in a regional art gallery. (AQO 2506/09)

**The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr Campbell):** My Department supports, in principle, a regional art gallery. I am aware that the absence of a national gallery is viewed by many as a significant gap in Northern Ireland's cultural infrastructure. However, the necessary funding for such a facility has not been secured under investment strategy for Northern Ireland II. Before any decision can be made in that regard, considerable preliminary work is required, including the development of a feasibility study to identify, consider and cost possible options. A business case will also have to be progressed through the approval process.

In the development of any future plans, the Department will work in partnership with National Museums Northern Ireland and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland.

**Mr Gallagher:** There is significant potential for increasing tourism and for boosting confidence among our own artists. I understand what the Minister says about funding; however, given that this is a time when those who are interested in property should be thinking seriously about it, can the Minister give us any idea about the cost implications of an original arts centre?

**The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** I thank the Member for his question. The short answer is yes. However, I hesitate to give the Member the figure

for providing such a gallery, as it represents a significant investment and has been estimated at anywhere between £30 million and £70 million. A national gallery is a strategic objective of the Arts Council and is specified as such in its five-year strategic plan.

From looking at the examples of other nation states and regions, we have seen the benefits that a national or regional gallery can bring in relation not only to tourism, as the Member rightly identified, but also job creation. In considering which locality to invest in, inward investors would view as an asset a national gallery of some significance, whether that is of Guggenheim or Tate proportions or something similar. We need to think along those lines. However, as I said in my initial response, we need to develop the business case. The Arts Council has identified the need for such a gallery; the task of obtaining the resources to establish it will fall to me or to my successor.

**Mr McElduff:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Given the competing pressures in his Department and the calls for funding that it faces — for example, for the development of community arts or funding for sports facilities — how much priority does the Minister allocate to the establishment of a regional arts gallery?

**The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** As I said earlier, the provision of a national gallery is a strategic objective of the Arts Council. If the Arts Council tells me, as Minister, that that is at the upper end of its priorities and it wants to see provision made for that from whatever budgetary allocations that I can obtain, it is my job to respond to that. However, speaking on a personal level and on a level of departmental responsibility, we must seek to achieve that objective in the shorter term, rather than in the longer term.

Having said that and returning to my original answer, I should say that funding for any objective for which there is currently no provision but which could require anything between £30 million and £70 million is going to be difficult to obtain. However, “difficult to obtain” is not a reason for not proceeding. It is an objective and a priority, and I intend to pursue it as such.

**Mr Elliott:** In the context of the creation of major exhibition space, does the Minister have any concerns about the obvious threat to the Titanic project that is posed by a similarly themed project based in Southampton?

**The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** I do not have any concerns about competing projects. The Titanic project is a particular priority; it is being pursued, and I trust that it will be seen through to its logical conclusion. It will be of significant benefit, not only to Belfast, but to the whole of Northern Ireland. Any other projects of similar scale and size or which

seek to cater to similar demographic groups should, I imagine, seek support as and where they can. I do not draw the conclusion that the Member is, perhaps, inviting me to draw, which is that one project should be developed at the expense of the other.

## Library Authority

2. **Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether the establishment of the Northern Ireland library authority has proceeded as planned.  
(AQO 2507/09)

**The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** The Northern Ireland library authority assumed responsibility for the public library service on 1 April 2009, as planned. The chief executive is in place, senior staff positions have been filled, new finance and IT systems have been set up, and staff have transferred to the new authority. Work has begun on the procedures and programme for the library authority board.

This is a significant new era for a valuable public service, which, henceforth, will be known as Libraries NI. I look forward to a fruitful relationship with the library authority as we work together to develop the service to the public and to ensure its continuing relevance in these changing times.

**Mr Shannon:** It is very important that the new library service in the Province relates to all communities. Many people are asking — it is important that the Minister responds to this question today — how the library service will make itself relevant to the whole of the Province and, specifically, to the areas that have libraries.

**The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** I thank the Member for a very relevant question about an authority that has been established for only the past three weeks. It is important that the service that Libraries NI will deliver has local relevance and importance. Its organisational structure provides for senior staff at director and business-managerial level to be located in the areas that they serve. Board meetings will be held throughout Northern Ireland in order to provide opportunities for board members to visit different local libraries and to meet staff and users. In addition, in order to ensure that the library service takes account of local needs, it will establish four pilot local engagement groups, which will bring together representatives of other organisations — statutory, community and voluntary — including the local council in each area. In due course, the library authority will also play an active part in the community planning process.

**Mr Kennedy:** I am glad that I caught your eye, Mr Deputy Speaker. I am grateful to the Minister for his earlier answers. Has he any concerns or does he see



any disadvantages arising from the separation of education and library governance when it comes to keeping educationally relevant book collections, considering that schoolchildren are major library users? If so, how does he intend to address such concerns?

**The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** The chief executive, chairperson and other members of the Libraries NI board would be content to meet MLAs or any public representatives who have concerns such as those outlined by the honourable Member. My understanding is that the new authority does not have any concerns about access to the libraries as they are envisaged.

I recommend that the honourable Member and, indeed, everyone visit their local library. Some of the new libraries are fantastic resources and provide access to excellent services, not just for schoolchildren but for the wider community. I have visited a number of the new libraries, including Bangor library, where I launched the new authority on 2 April. I recommend that MLAs and the wider public avail themselves of the services that libraries provide. I also recommend that MLAs hold discussions with members of the Libraries NI board if they have any concerns that there may be a contradiction or problem. I do not envisage any problems, and no such issues have been raised with me prior to today.

**Mrs M Bradley:** How will the Minister ensure that there is a connection between the library authority and schools? School libraries were always supplied by libraries in the main library service; how will the Minister ensure that that relationship remains for the benefit of children?

**The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** I thank the Member for her question. I understand that the authority is already doing that. Indeed, we had a live video link-up with a school in the Western Board area at the authority's official launch on 2 April, and a number of primary-school children took part. The new board, its officers and members are acutely aware of the need to ensure that schools are an integral part of the library service. They realise that a first-class service must be provided to children of school age as well as to adults.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Question 3 has been withdrawn.

## Community Development Through the Arts

4. **Mr A Maskey** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what support the Arts Council provides to organisations not previously engaged with the arts to encourage community development through arts.  
(AQO 2509/09)

**The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** The Arts Council recognises the important contribution that the arts can make to community development. That is demonstrated by the support and funding that the Arts Council provides for a number of community-focused arts programmes including Re-imaging Communities, the small grants programme and Start Up. The Arts Council actively seeks to target and engage with new audiences and to increase participation in the arts; that is a central theme of its five-year strategy.

The Arts Council has provided £2.71 million of funding between 2004-05 and 2008-09 through the Awards For All programme. Through that programme, the Arts Council has directly sought to increase community-based arts activities and improve access to the arts among the most disadvantaged communities. The programme has recently been re-launched as the small grants programme, and £500,000 will be made available in 2009-2010.

The Re-imaging Communities programme was launched in 2006, and £3.8 million has been made available through it to date. That programme aims to help people to feel part of the community in which they live by using art as a vehicle to enhance the physical and natural environment and remove displays of sectarian aggression and intimidation. Last December, an evaluation of the programme found that only 18% of organisations that had received funding had previous experience of arts-related work.

The Arts Council administered the £100,000 Start Up programme in 2007-08. That programme sought to provide support to organisations that had not previously availed themselves of Arts Council funding. The Arts Council has allocated a further £50,000 in the current year for a similar seed-funding programme to encourage community groups to initiate arts programmes.

**Mr A Maskey:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for that pretty comprehensive response. Can he provide information on any specific methodology that the Arts Council might use to address areas of social need, for example?

3.45 pm

**The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** I refer the Member to the Arts Council, which has responsibility for that matter. In my response to the Member, I made the relevant point that we found that the current Re-imaging Communities programme ascertained only three months ago that fewer than a fifth of the organisations that had received funding stated that they had previous experience in arts-related work. By and large, a lot of that programme work is done in areas of socio-economic deprivation. However, only 18% of the communities that had availed themselves of the funding indicated that they had previous experience in



that type of work. That is an indication of the type of success that has been attained.

Through the Arts Council, we must try to ensure that there is improved access to and delivery of the programmes in the local communities so that they can move away from the manifestations of violence that exist in some working-class areas. Thankfully, those communities want to work themselves away from those. We need to support them, and the Arts Council is not averse to ensuring that that is the case.

**Mr Spratt:** The Minister provided statistics on the Arts Council and funding. Will he reiterate how much funding will be made available during 2009-2010 to encourage community development through the arts?

**The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** It is important that we ensure that people understand the extent of the efforts that are being made to ensure that community development through the arts is a success. The Re-imaging Communities programme has a budget of £600,000 for 2009-2010, and £500,000 will be made available through the Arts Council's small grants programme. The Arts Council will make a further £50,000 available through a seed-funding programme that encourages community groups to initiate arts programmes.

Those amounts may seem reasonably small, but we can judge their success in the communities that have availed themselves of them by looking at how they have helped to transform those areas. Previously, even up to two or three years ago, there would have been manifestations of violence, murder and intimidation on gable walls, but much of that has been replaced by murals and arts programmes that manifest the background, history and culture of the communities but without the violence. That is a mark of the success of those programmes. I have given details of the amounts of money that go into them, and I hope to replicate them year on year to ensure greater success in the future.

**Mr D Bradley:** Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom a fhiafraí den Aire an n-aontaíonn sé liom go n-imríonn na healaíona tionchar an-láidir — agus dea-thionchar — ar dhaoine de gach aois a bhíonn páirteach iontu; agus go n-imríonn na daoine sin féin dea-thionchar ar na pobail ina bhfuil siad ina gcónaí iontu? An n-aontaíonn an tAire liom, mar sin, gur fiú agus gur ceart tuilleadh infheistíochta a chur isteach in ealaíona pobail?

Does the Minister agree that, from the point of view of personal development, the arts provide a powerful and positive influence on those in the community who participate in them? Those people in turn exercise a positive influence in their own communities, and in some cases that leads to a flowering of those communities. Does the Minister agree that community arts warrant being an even higher investment priority?

**The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** Yes.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Question 5 has been withdrawn.

## Violence at Sports Grounds

6. **Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how his Department monitors violence at sports grounds. (AQO 2511/09)

**The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure is not responsible for monitoring violence at sports grounds. Violence involving spectators is a reserved matter and is the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Office. Violence involving players at sports grounds is a disciplinary issue for clubs and sports governing bodies.

**Mr McCarthy:** I thank the Minister for his reply. Does he agree that the delay in the introduction of the Football (Offences) Act 1991 is hindering games taking place — regardless of the venue — without violence being perpetrated against anyone?

**The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** I am cognisant of the issues that surround the Member's question. It is only a few months since we saw evidence of violence in a Northern Ireland sport stadium on what was, it has to be said, a very rare occasion. However, when violence does occur, it can be serious. To that end, my officials have had meetings with NIO officials, and, recently, I met Mr Paul Goggins MP, the NIO Minister with responsibility for that issue. I am content that he appreciates the need for progress, and I am in correspondence with him. I trust that we will shortly be in a position to make even speedier progress in order to get a satisfactory resolution so that firm and effective action can be taken against those who perpetrate such activities.

**Mr McCartney:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a thabhairt don Aire as an fhreagra sin.

I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he have discussions with football and other sports bodies about earlier kick-offs to offset any potential for violence outside sports stadiums?

**The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** In other parts of the UK, for matches that rate highly for potential difficulties, earlier kick-offs have ensured that problems have been minimised if not eliminated. We all know what we are talking about: less time during the day for alcohol to be consumed. The more time that there is to consume alcohol before a major game, the greater the chance of difficulties, problems and, on a few very rare occasions, violence. Therefore, the earlier the kick-off, the more likely it is that people will be prevented from doing that. Those are issues that the governing bodies must resolve, because they decide the kick-off times. That is usually done in

conjunction with the police, particularly for higher-profile games. I hope that that will continue and, where earlier kick-offs are required, I suggest that they be availed of.

**Mr B McCrea:** The Minister told us that violence at sports grounds is not his responsibility. However, does he accept that well-designed stadiums and venues play a significant role in health and safety? Given that his Department will be involved in the refurbishment of many leading sports venues, has he issued any guidance on that matter to the appropriate authorities?

**The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** The Member raises two separate issues. First, there is the issue of a statutory provision to deal with those who engage in activities that all of us would regard as illegal and violent; that is the responsibility of the NIO. Secondly, there is the issue of the responsibility for stadia provision. We have to ensure not only that, where possible, we have the safety and comfort of spectators uppermost in our minds but that those stadia — where large numbers of people are involved — are constructed in such a way as to make it exceptionally difficult for anyone to engage in illegal activity. We are examining that issue, and I hope to be able to make some progress on safety at sports stadia in the not too distant future.

### Ulster Scots: Underfunding

7. **Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the total level of underfunding of Ulster Scots compared with Irish, over the past 10 years. (AQO 2512/09)

**The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** Since the inception of the North/South Language Body in 2000, the amount of funding provided to the Ulster-Scots Agency and Foras na Gaeilge by my Department has been based on approved actions in the agencies' business plans together with associated staffing costs. Since 2000, approximately £44 million has been allocated to Irish-language projects and initiatives, and £16 million has been allocated to Ulster-Scots projects and initiatives. That includes funding to Ulster-Scots organisations and projects, such as the Ulster-Scots Agency and the Ulster-Scots academy implementation group.

Funding for Irish-language projects refers to Foras na Gaeilge, Colmille, the Irish-language broadcast fund and the Gaeltacht Quarter. The figures do not include funding that is available from departmental mainstream programmes for projects that may have an Irish or Ulster-Scots language or cultural dimension that cannot be separated from the primary funding objective.

**Mr Moutray:** I thank the Minister for his response. Does he see parity of funding as being critically

important to the development of Ulster-Scots heritage, culture and language?

**The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** I am grateful for the Member's posing a supplementary question that allows me to develop the theme of funding in the two instances. I outlined the funding that had been made over the past eight years, which indicated a disproportionate investment in Ulster Scots of only £16 million, while £44 million was spent on the Irish language. However, in the past three years the funding allocation from my Department for Ulster Scots has almost doubled from £1.5 million to £2.9 million. In the same period, the funding allocation from my Department to Irish has increased from £6.4 million to £6.8 million, an increase of 6%. There is some considerable way to go to get the parity that is required.

In other contexts, members of some political parties talk about the long term. I assure them and the honourable Member that I am in this for the long term and that the imbalance will be rectified. The disparity is not sustainable, and it cannot be defended, argued for or renegotiated. We are working to eliminate the disparity, and we have made significant progress. I intend to continue, and I hope that I will have the support of all honourable Members for eliminating that disadvantage.

**Mr Brolly:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Given the relatively higher status of the Irish language under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and the obviously greater level of participation and interest in the Irish language here, the Minister is incorrect in describing the relative amounts of funding as an imbalance. In fact, Sinn Féin contends that, because of that status and level of participation and interest, funding to the Irish language is not proportionate.

**The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** I thank the Member for his supplementary question. However, I am afraid that all that the question does is attempt to defend the indefensible. That cannot be done. The status of Irish and Ulster Scots is clear. Under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, the Irish language is in category 3, and Ulster Scots is in category 2. My aim and objective is to ensure that Ulster Scots attains the same level that the Irish language has. It could well be argued by Ulster-Scots groups — I hope that it is — that, in order to attain that status, they need additional funding, not less funding.

4.00 pm

I hope that the honourable Member and those who believe in and support his view re-examine their position on the matter, just as they have had to re-examine their position in other contexts. To discriminate against Ulster Scots is indefensible and will not be tolerated by my Department. I intend to ensure that

parity is achieved. I hope and expect that I will get support for that parity from all honourable Members.

**Mr O'Loan:** Does the Minister not agree that although Irish and Ulster Scots each has a valid place, each has quite a distinct profile as regards its use and historic body of literature, and that, therefore, simple equation of the number and types of projects is simply not a sound policy?

**The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** It never ceases to amaze me that whenever nationalists put forward arguments for equality in different contexts, they simply demand it and dismiss as irrelevant all subject matter that attempts to explain why inequality exists. When the tables are turned, however, and inequality is absolutely apparent, even to a blind man on a galloping horse, they attempt to say that it is a different matter. It is not different. Equality will be obtained and achieved. If people do not like that, it is their tough luck.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** That concludes questions to the Minister. I ask Mr Shannon to remove the exhibition, as it is no longer required.

## PRIVATE NOTICE QUESTION

### Job Losses in Manufacturing Industry

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The Speaker has received a private notice question, in accordance with Standing Order 20, to the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. I advise the House that, generally, when dealing with a private notice question, only the Member who tabled the question and the Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson of the relevant Committee is called. However, given the issue's importance, the Speaker has agreed that each party will be given the opportunity to ask a supplementary question.

**Mr Attwood** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to provide an update on the loss of jobs at Visteon, Shorts/Bombardier, FG Wilson, Nortel and other companies; and on what steps are being taken by her Department to protect the rights of workers and the manufacturing base in Northern Ireland respectively.

**The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs Foster):** From the outset, I want to reiterate that the job losses that have been announced during the past few weeks by Bombardier, Nortel, FG Wilson and, of course, Visteon are a matter of great regret. My thoughts remain with the employees and families who are affected.

Coming so close together, those announcements underline the impact of the global recession on Northern Ireland and illustrate how much market conditions have worsened during the past few months. I met Bombardier to hear and understand at first hand the reasons behind its redundancies. I am due to have a further meeting with the company's senior management at the beginning of next week.

Invest NI is currently engaging with FG Wilson in respect of significant training and R&D initiatives which offer opportunities to redeploy and retrain skilled labour as an alternative to redundancies. The company is also developing a comprehensive training plan for Invest Northern Ireland's consideration, the focus of which will be on enhancing FG Wilson's skill base to ensure that its products and processes remain amongst the most competitive in the world.

In the case of Visteon, trade union officials from Unite continue to discuss the current situation with the corporation. I have had useful meetings with trade union representatives since the closure — *[Interruption.]*

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order. The Minister has the Floor. Members must resume their seats. I am sorry to interrupt your remarks, Minister.

**The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** I have had useful meetings with trade



union representatives since the closure of the factory was announced.

In respect of Nortel Networks, Invest NI continues to meet and communicate regularly with both the company's administrators and its management. Speculation continues that Nortel may be able to attract interest in the sale of its core wireless-equipment business to other major blue-chip companies. We are also, therefore, working to ensure that we can promote fully the Monkstown campus's capabilities to take advantage of any new foreign direct investment (FDI) opportunities that may arise.

Unfortunately, in the majority of those cases, redundancies have been a necessary evil and have been made in order to protect the long-term interests and employment potential of major local operations, with Visteon, obviously, being the one to which that does not apply.

The employment rights of workers who have been made redundant by their employers are set out in the Employment Rights (Northern Ireland) Order 1996, which is, as Members will be aware, the responsibility of the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL).

If those workers feel that their rights have been breached in the execution of those redundancies, they can avail themselves of the services of their trade union, employee legal representatives or the Labour Relations Agency and seek the appropriate advice and guidance that could, ultimately, lead to redress through an industrial tribunal. The interpretation and application of employment law is, ultimately, the role of the chairmen of the industrial tribunals and fair-employment tribunals, who are members of the independent judiciary appointed by the Lord Chief Justice.

It is important that we continue to protect our manufacturing business base and ensure that when market conditions improve, Northern Ireland businesses are well placed to capitalise rapidly. Collaboration is a necessity, and I am working closely with my colleague the Minister for Employment and Learning to identify, as a matter of urgency, any new policies and schemes that could be introduced within the powers and resources that are available to the Executive. That work focuses on the provision of practical support and advice as well as implementing training and reskilling programmes and assistance.

As Members may be aware, I recently announced the establishment of a manufacturing advisory group as a subgroup of the Economic Development Forum (EDF). Trade unions suggested that idea to me recently, and it has received broad support from other members of the EDF. I can announce today that Mark Nodder, managing director of Wrightbus, has agreed to chair that subgroup, and work is currently under way to develop the terms of reference and agree membership.

Those arrangements should be in place in the very near future, and I expect the first meeting to be held shortly.

On an international scale, the Government continue to take action to bring stability to the financial markets on which all businesses depend. We are in constant dialogue with business about how to alleviate the current difficulties. However, people must realise that there is no easy fix and that the measures will take time to have an effect.

**Mr Attwood:** I thank the Minister for her presence this afternoon, and I acknowledge that, during the recent difficult weeks, she has been available in person and by phone. Given that Ford and its subsidiary Visteon have benefited from millions of pounds of grant aid over many years for operations in Northern Ireland, does she consider it unacceptable for Visteon to get up, go, and close its doors? It is a slap in the face for the company's workers, who, during many difficult years, always turned up to work for Ford in this part of the North.

Furthermore, is she concerned that the actions of Visteon and Ford, in denying their obligations to workers and by setting up subsidiary companies, could become a model for other international companies that operate in Northern Ireland and which might do likewise in the future? Finally, what contact has the Minister, and other levels of Government, had with Ford in America in order to ensure that Ford and Visteon honour their obligations to the 200-odd workers in west Belfast?

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

**Investment:** I thank the Member for his supplementary question. I had useful meetings with SDLP and Sinn Féin delegations about the issues that the Member mentioned. I heard, at first hand, how hurt the workers felt about their treatment by the management of Visteon, which, rather than announce the news themselves, left that task to the administrators. I empathise with the workers' feelings. However, we must now consider ways to help those people.

I have made several attempts to speak to Ford in Europe — I forget the gentleman's name — but have, unfortunately, been unable to connect with him. I will continue to try to contact him about issues that are within my remit. I encouraged trade union representatives to continue to seek legal advice and to continue to work with their unions. Furthermore, I urged them to look to their contract, which they showed to me, particularly the element that said that their conditions would mirror those of their Ford counterparts — I think that that was the term that was used. I understand that Unite continues to engage with Visteon and Ford, and Government will continue to monitor the situation and do what we can.



**The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mr Durkan):** I thank the Minister for the details that she has outlined in answer to the question. The Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment recognises that these are serious difficulties for any Minister to have to confront at the rate at which events have unfolded in recent times.

Will the Minister indicate whether she is content with the degree of economic intelligence available to her and her Department in advance of some developments, and whether she is looking at ways of improving the advance warning that the Department might have? What other interventions are she and her Department looking at in trying to ensure more effective support for firms and workforces that face such situations? Is she considering relaxations of specific EU state-aid rules in order to allow us to help in ways that have been ruled out in the past and to restore some of the supports that were available in the past?

**The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** I thank the Chairman for the points he has made. In relation to the first of those issues, I am satisfied with the economic intelligence available insofar as it goes. However, some of the companies involved — I am thinking of Bombardier in particular — are quoted on stock exchanges, and we do not have the information as quickly as we would like, but we understand why that is so. The information is provided to my Department as quickly as it possibly can in the circumstances. To be fair to all of the companies — Nortel, Bombardier and the other company — they have all been in constant contact with my Department, and are working with us. They are trying to find ways of reskilling their people as an alternative to redundancies.

I had a useful meeting with the Minister for Employment and Learning last week, and we are looking at ways to refocus on the provision of practical support for those people who find themselves in difficulties, and for those companies that are economically viable in the medium to long term, but are facing short-term difficulties. Those are the companies with which we need to work, in order to find ways in which to keep those people on board in the short term. The Minister for Employment and Learning and I hope to make an announcement in relation to those issues in the near future.

**Mr Hamilton:** I join with the Minister and others in expressing my concern at the job losses, particularly those at Bombardier Shorts, which most directly affect my constituency and constituents. Does the Minister agree with me that those job losses underscore the importance of the CSeries project? Given the importance of the manufacturing sector to the Northern Ireland economy despite these job losses, can the Minister confirm that she, her Department, the Executive and Invest Northern Ireland remain committed to the

manufacturing sector in Northern Ireland, and will she outline how that commitment is manifested?

**The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** In relation to Bombardier, the CSeries project is on schedule. My Department and I are working closely with the company to make sure that that new, highly technological development that is taking place here in Belfast goes ahead. There was some confusion in some of the media reports of the Bombardier job losses that they were in some way linked to the CSeries project; they are not. The jobs that will be lost at Bombardier are as a result of the current global recession, and Bombardier has revised its current aircraft production rates downwards. That has nothing to do with the development of the CSeries; in fact, the CSeries development shows that the company is looking to the future. It is providing a new aircraft that will be fit for purpose for the latter half of the twenty-first century. We should take that as a sign that the company is here, and is here to stay.

Indeed, FG Wilson confirmed today in a statement that it remains absolutely committed to its plants in Northern Ireland, and refuted any allegations to the contrary. Those companies are here in Northern Ireland, and want to stay in Northern Ireland, because they know the value of the workforce and the skills base here.

However, those companies are facing a short-term downturn. The Government must find ways to help them, which is why I am having talks with the Minister for Employment and Learning, in the hope that we can bring forward a package to help the manufacturing sector in particular, which, as we know, lost 2% of its base in just one week. That was a huge hit, and we must provide a rapid response that will help the manufacturing sector.

4.15 pm

**Mr P Maskey:** Go raibh maith agat. We hear that the administrators are trying to take action against the Visteon workers to remove them from the site. Perhaps the Minister's Department could look at clawing back some of the money that Invest NI gave to Visteon over the years. We should send out a clear message of support for the workers in the Ford Visteon plant in west Belfast in the hope that the administrators will call off their attempt to remove them. Dialogue is the only way forward in this case, and Sinn Féin urges that.

Gerry Adams MP, along with other colleagues and the Minister, met the Visteon employees to discuss the situation at the plant. That situation is a massive blow to west Belfast and other areas. However, it is easier to sustain existing jobs than to create new ones. On that basis, what is the Minister's Department doing to sustain existing jobs and create new jobs? Go raibh maith agat.

**The Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** I hear what the Member says about the administrators at Visteon, and I agree that dialogue is the way to sort out those difficulties. He referred to clawback: Invest NI provided Visteon with financial assistance in 2003 for the development of a fuel rail, and of that offer, £97,210 was paid. In that instance, the letter of offer contained clauses to protect our investment, and clawback will be invoked if we feel that there is a need for it. Having looked at the situation briefly, it appears that that will be the case.

As regards what the Department is doing to sustain jobs, I hope that the Member understands that my talks with the Minister for Employment and Learning are based on practical issues, and on supporting economically viable firms that may not be able to sustain jobs in the short term. I hope that we will be able to do something about that in the short term.

We will continue to look for new jobs and new foreign direct investment (FDI). I met Invest NI international staff this morning in Belfast and I told them that this is a good place in which to do business because of our skills levels and our people. We still need investment from abroad, and there is a need to go out and sell Northern Ireland as a place to invest in. Although I totally agree with the Member about sustaining jobs, there is also a need to look for new FDI.

**Mr K Robinson:** I thank the Minister for her replies up to now. She will recall that I have spoken to her and written to her, and to Sir Reg Empey, expressing my concerns about looming job losses. Unfortunately, we are now dealing with real job losses. Retraining and upskilling will work in some instances, but the approach of some employers has been less than helpful, and we heard about examples of that from other Members. What can the Minister and the Executive do to continue to pursue management to ensure not only that they respond to the positive moves that she is making through the Executive, but to value the work, skill and loyalty that has been put in over the years by existing workforces?

We must retain those workforces; we must ensure that firms survive the economic downturn and that the workforce is there to give the Northern Ireland economy the lift that it is going to need at some point in the future. Will the Minister assure the House that those issues are being considered and will be addressed?

**The Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** I thank the Member for his question. He is absolutely right; there is only so much that Government can do. I hope that Sir Reg Empey and I will be able to offer packages in the near future, but employers must play their part and, as part of those packages, offer retraining and reskilling to their staff.

That is a big commitment for them. However, indigenous employers in particular have told me that they want to retain their staff. William Wright of Wrightbus said that the redundancies that he announced some time ago were the first that he had ever had to make. That is a big wrench for someone of his standing.

We will certainly work with employers. We will tell them that they have a responsibility to the community — as I said, most of them take that responsibility seriously — and that we want them to work with the Executive so that we can keep people in their jobs in the short term. By doing so, those firms will be ready when the upturn comes, in the medium to long term. In fact, this represents an opportunity for employers to provide their staff with new skills and training, and we hope that they will see it as such.

**Mr Neeson:** I thank the Minister for her reply, and I acknowledge her efforts in dealing with the problems that have arisen. As the Minister knows, many of the people whom the job losses have affected live in east Antrim. I, therefore, have a personal interest in what is happening.

First, is the Minister satisfied with all the work that Invest NI is doing to deal with the problem? Secondly, can more be done to assist research and development, the creation of new products and the development of further overseas markets?

**The Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** I am glad that the Member mentioned a number of issues. He is absolutely right: we need to raise a number of issues with those firms. That is exactly what we are doing with companies such as FG Wilson. Invest NI has engaged with FG Wilson on training and on new research and development initiatives, and to help it to find new markets for its goods. That is the type of work that we are doing with those companies.

FG Wilson is considering a number of offers of R&D support, and we hope that we will have several R&D projects with the company in the near future. That demonstrates FG Wilson's willingness to do work in Northern Ireland and its commitment to Northern Ireland, which it spoke about in the press today. I have no doubt that it wants to keep its staff in place, as do the other companies, apart from Visteon. Bombardier Shorts and Nortel are here for the long term, and we want to work with them to ensure that they can stay for the long term.

**Ms Purvis:** I thank the Minister for her answers so far. I also thank her for her focus on securing and developing the manufacturing base in Northern Ireland. More than 2,000 job losses have been announced in the past month, the majority of which are from companies in my constituency, including Bombardier Shorts and Hughes Christensen.

First, what use is being made of the EU globalisation fund to reskill and retrain those people who face redundancy? Secondly, apart from clawback, will the Minister clarify what lessons can be learned about the investment money that Invest NI gave to firms for research and development? Products that are researched and developed in Northern Ireland should also be produced here, and not moved out by companies, a point to which other Members referred.

**The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** The latter issue is a difficult one, because it is only when a company moves research and development to another country that one realises that is what exactly it was planning to do. However, we will continue to apply due-diligence tests to the amount of money that we give to those companies in order to ensure that they remain in Northern Ireland.

Concerns have been raised with me about the use of research and development money in Visteon, and the fact that that money went to South Africa to develop a product that is now being used there. Obviously, that is of great concern to us, and we will pursue clawback, if that is the procedure that we need to use.

We have looked into whether we can avail ourselves of the EU globalisation fund. Unfortunately, however, the scale of the job losses in Northern Ireland is not huge in European terms.

Such job losses are not considered huge in European terms: that would entail the loss of tens of thousands as opposed to thousands of jobs. We have looked at the EU globalisation adjustment fund, but I am afraid that it does not appear that we can avail of it. That is not to say that we will not continue to engage with Europe.

Earlier, the Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment said that we should consider relaxing some state-aid rules. We are doing that, and I apologise for not responding to that earlier. We are engaging with Europe and are looking at ways in which we can be more creative with our schemes, and we hope to be able to say something about that in the near future.

## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

### Childcare Strategy

#### *Debate resumed on amendment to motion:*

That this Assembly expresses its concern at the lack of availability of affordable, quality childcare; and calls on the Executive to implement a coherent and properly resourced childcare strategy. [Ms J McCann]

#### *Which amendment was:*

After the first "childcare" insert

"and the lack of provision for people who require flexible arrangements to allow them to avail of working opportunities in the evenings, overnight and at weekends, particularly in the current economic climate" [Ms Purvis]

**Mr Moutray:** I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate today. Childcare is a pertinent issue that requires due attention from the Executive and from the Assembly as a whole. It is important that we reflect on the Programme for Government and that the Executive placed our economy at the heart of it.

The lack of affordable quality childcare will continue to hamper economic growth and prosperity. If we do not address the issue, we will widen the gap for parents, particularly women, who seek to return to education or employment. Although such a strategy will cost the taxpayer a considerable amount initially in the provision of affordable childcare, the cost will be clawed back, as the provision of childcare will enable parents to return to work or education.

My constituency of Upper Bann, particularly my home town of Lurgan, has been economically deprived for some years. Better childcare funding would improve Lurgan's economy, as it would encourage parents back into employment and learning. Childcare services not only benefit children by improving their lives and social skills, they generate economic benefits by supporting parents in moving to work, education and training.

Childcare is an essential part of today's society, whether it takes the form of childminders, out-of-school nursery clubs, day nurseries or playschools. However, it needs direction. It is important that the House recognise that childcare services are needed not only for young children but for those of school age. We continue to promote lifelong learning and endeavour to reduce unemployment, particularly in the current climate; therefore, a high standard of local childcare facilities is essential.

The Employers for Childcare charity said that no one Department is accountable for the provision of funding; that reinforces the need for the Executive to adopt a multi-faceted approach. Like my colleagues, I call on the Minister of Education to address the issue and the need for childcare beyond pre school places.



The Education Minister has a key role to play, and she has shied away from this issue for too long. She has not given priority to early-years learning, and I call on her to act on this debate and to prioritise the matter.

It would be remiss of me not to mention that, as the Northern Ireland Childminding Association said:

“Childminding provides care and learning for children aged between 0 – 14 years.”

It is important that we do not fall into the trap of thinking that childminding stops at four or five when a child starts school. Childcare is often needed for after-school hours to meet the work patterns of parents in this very different society. That is an important factor that needs to be addressed in the strategy.

Many valid points were raised in the Chamber today, and it has been demonstrated that there is a need for better and more childcare provision across the Province. There is a need for a strategic, coherent, long-term, cross-departmental solution. I support the motion.

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

4.30 pm

**Mr Elliott:** I give a warm welcome to the motion and the amendment. Unfortunately, I and many in this Chamber have listened for many years to the issues surrounding quality affordable childcare. We have heard much in this Assembly about the economy being at the heart of the Programme of Government, and, although it may not be totally obvious, the economy is at the heart of this motion and the debate on it.

The provision of childcare is something that we need to develop and that needs to be progressed as part of the Programme for Government. Any investments in childcare will be repaid in the form of economic and social development. Such investment should, therefore, be included with the economy as a top priority for the Executive. That would help to progress not only the economy but affordable quality childcare, and vice versa. The two work very much in tandem.

Work must be available for those who want and/or need it, and those who want to work must be brought back into a working environment. That would be a start in achieving equality and getting more parents back to work, and I must put on record that I am pleased that some employers now have much more flexible working arrangements. Unfortunately, that is not the case with all employers, but a lot of employers now provide a flexibility in working arrangements that is vital for many parents.

Once parents find work, the next issue that they face is of finding quality, affordable childcare. I know that it has been mentioned, but, coming from the rural community of Fermanagh and South Tyrone, I must touch on the rural aspect of the childcare issue. The issue is particularly acute in rural areas, as they have a

dispersed population, less-developed infrastructure, a lack of public transport and a reliance on using cars. That means that limited and isolated childcare provision can have a particularly devastating impact on the families, individuals and children living in those areas.

I welcome the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development's rural development programme and the establishment of the rural childcare programme as part of her Department's anti-poverty strategy. However, there is still a real need for improvement in that area, and a joined-up approach between Departments is vital. I believe that it was Mr O'Dowd who earlier explained some of the importance of that. There are areas in which, if Departments worked together, the situation could very easily be improved. For example, in the area of education, it may be possible to improve transport to schools or the transport that is available for children who need to go to childcare facilities, perhaps directly from school.

I want to ensure that Members are aware that childcare is not simply about a place for parents to leave their children when they go to work. That is important, but childcare is about much more. The early years are a vital and essential time for the development of children, particularly those aged from 0 to six years and even older. That is why the quality of childcare is absolutely vital.

We in the Assembly have waited far too long for an early years strategy. For many months, we have heard that such a strategy is coming and is soon going to happen. I was told quite recently that it is now imminent. I truly hope that it is imminent, and that it comes forward sooner rather than later.

**Mr D Bradley:** The Member referred to quality childcare. Does the Member agree that childcare is about much more than child minding; that it is, in fact, one of the basic building blocks in the education system; and that those involved in childcare should have the best qualifications available? Does the Member further agree that a transformation fund, similar to that operating in England, is an appropriate way to enhance the expertise of those involved in the childcare workforce here?

**Mr Elliott:** I thank Mr Bradley for those comments. Of course, I agree with his sentiments, which are very close to my heart. Obviously, child minding is an essential part of childcare, but it is also about child development, and it is in that respect that I hope that the early years strategy will resolve at least some of the issues that have been debated today.

I also hope that the strategy will not sit on a shelf gathering dust for years without being progressed and implemented. We heard earlier about all the consultation documents. The issue has been consulted



to death, and what we want is action. We want affordable, quality childcare for parents who need it.

In England and Wales, the decision has been taken that, where there are gaps in the market, local government should be responsible for plugging the hole and providing adequate, quality, affordable childcare. We need to think seriously about the possibility of replicating such provision, tailored to our own needs in Northern Ireland, and, failing that, the Government need to develop a strategy to intervene in the failed market. Many charities and other non-profit organisations would be capable of stepping into the breach if they were resourced more fully and appropriately by the Executive and by councils.

**Mr Beggs:** I declare an interest as a member of Horizon Sure Start in Carrickfergus and Larne. I, too, support the motion and the amendment.

As other Members have said, there have been many childcare strategy documents over the years. In 1999, there was the Department of Health's review of Children First, and, in 2007, the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister raised the issue in its investigation into child poverty.

The key words in today's motion are that it is now time to:

"implement a coherent and properly resourced childcare strategy."

It is not just about producing a fancy document; it is time to actually deliver something. In fact, it is past time. There have been too many theoretical documents; it is now time to do something on the ground.

As I said in an earlier intervention, there was a funding mechanism in place, and that was the Executive programme fund for children. However, our former Finance Minister — who is now First Minister — decided to bring that to an end in order to improve efficiency and effectiveness. Members are aware of the gaps that have been left in their constituencies, because the reality is that the funding mechanism that has replaced it has not been working. Supposedly, Departments were to pick up the projects and continue to fund them, but, clearly, that has not been successful.

I suspect that that is the case because children's issues and childcare issues are cross-cutting in nature, and they do not affect only one Department. Therefore, when Departments prioritise their funding, childcare issues do not come top of the list. Therefore, funding applications have not been as successful as they would otherwise have been if there had been a mechanism in place to prioritise the overall benefits to several Departments. Other Members have also mentioned that issue.

I wish to specifically mention a Skool's Out project in my constituency. A relatively small amount of seed money has enabled that project to provide a successful breakfast club and after-school club. It has been living piecemeal. However, in an area of need, it has delivered

one of the objectives of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: improved community relations. The project is based in an area that has had a troubled past, yet the children, parents and the management committee come from a cross-community background, and it has contributed to greatly improved community relations in the area.

In respect of community regeneration, that area suffered from houses having to be knocked down because of antisocial elements and other difficulties. Therefore, the project is actually contributing to regeneration in the area — a DSD function.

A major benefit of such clubs is the educational output of homework clubs that assist children in educational attainment. After tabling a question on that matter, it appears to me that that is a key responsibility of the Department of Education. However, equally, our junior Ministers are responsible for children and young people's issues. Either way, the Executive are responsible, and we do not wish to push the problem from pillar to post. We need a resolution.

There is also a health impact in respect of providing good childcare, and the education that comes with it. Therefore, there is a role for the Department of Health.

At a recent Investing for Health conference in Northern Ireland, the Chief Medical Officer for Scotland indicated the importance of investment in those early years to remove health inequalities. Therefore, a major impact can come from investing in our young people.

I support the comments made earlier by Dominic Bradley about how important it is to invest in the young. I also remind Members of Professor James Heckman, Nobel laureate economist, who is working with organisations in Northern Ireland, and whose essential message is that we should invest in the young because it makes economic sense.

Clearly, we need to create a method of joining up the dots; we must not have separate Departments passing the buck. The junior Ministers are ultimately responsible for these issues, and the Office of the First and deputy First Minister, if it does not like the children and young people's fund, must invent something that works similarly. If they wish to rebrand that fund — if that makes them happy — I do not mind. However, we require a mechanism that ensures that the funding that children need will flow, meaning that parents will be able to return to work knowing that their children are safe and are being educated.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I call Mr Alex Attwood. I remind the Member that the time for debating the motion is almost up. I would prefer that he not give way to any other Members.

**Mr Attwood:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I advised my colleague Mr Bradley of that very point before I rose to speak.

I also welcome the motion. A strategy on childcare will be outlined in the near future, and one of the standards against which I will judge any such strategy is the very sensible but moderately costed proposals of the Northern Ireland Childminding Association (NICMA). Over a year ago, that organisation outlined proposals, which would cost only £300,000 a year over a three-year period, to address the lack of child-minding places across the North. Indeed, the SDLP recently tabled a motion in the Business Office that urged the Executive and individual Ministers to implement NICMA's proposals. We must judge forthcoming proposals against that standard.

I say that because, in Northern Ireland, child-minding places account for 76% of full-time day care and 44% of all childcare. NICMA, which is well placed to give good advice, has recommended that the Executive make an intervention of £300,000 a year over three years to begin to undo the evidence of the last three years and make more child-minding places available. That sensible and moderate intervention should be implemented.

If that recommendation were taken up, it would mean two things. First, it would introduce grants in the North similar to those that exist in the Republic of Ireland of perhaps as little as £600 or £700. Those grants would enable people to take up child-caring duties, attain administrative experience, buy equipment and acquire the insurance necessary to keep children in their home. It would also provide for mentoring on an individual basis for new childminders.

The consequences of that — this would be music to Mr Elliott's ears, were he present in the Chamber — would address the needs of areas of the North where child-minding is in the most acute need. That would address the needs of areas of Derry such as Creggan, Brandywell and the Bogside. That would address the needs of areas of south and east Belfast such as Blackstaff, the Mount and Shaftesbury, and it would address the needs of areas of County Fermanagh, including Belleek, Garrison, Newtownbutler and Rosslea. The moderately priced intervention proposed by NICMA would create jobs, opportunities for women to get back into work and new child-minding places in the areas of most acute need. I suggest to the Assembly that it is against that moderately priced proposal that we should judge the Executive's proposals, if and when they come to pass.

4.45 pm

Secondly, we should do something in our own gift about childcare. All Members employ staff, and, without going into issues about those staff, we do not get

childcare support provision for staff in our individual offices. Members of the permanent secretariat in the Assembly and Assembly Members get support, but our office staff, who provide a service to our communities and constituents, do not, through the Assembly provisions, get any support for child-minding. I have many issues with the Assembly Commission, but it should take this matter forward with urgency.

Having said all of that, I must declare an interest. As some Members may know, 20 days ago my wife gave birth to our second child, Anna; and the issue of childcare support and child-minding will be acute for me within the next year.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Everybody knows about the baby by now. *[Laughter.]*

**The junior Minister (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister) (Mr G Kelly):** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle and congratulations — for the childminding, that is.

I am pleased to respond to the motion and on the important issue of childcare. The Programme for Government commits us to ensure access to affordable, quality childcare, improve educational outcomes for the most disadvantaged and work towards the elimination of child poverty. The important contribution that adequate and affordable childcare can make to reducing poverty was also highlighted in the recent report on child poverty by the OFMDFM Committee.

As junior Ministers with responsibility for children and young people, Jeffrey Donaldson and I are tasked with driving forward the strategy for children and young people. The strategy's aim is to ensure that all children and young people fulfil their potential, and evidence suggests that childcare is a key element in achieving that objective.

The gender equality strategy also recognises the role of childcare in actively promoting an inclusive society and in achieving equal value for paid work and equitable participation in unpaid work. The Beijing "Platform for Action" identified the lack of appropriate and affordable childcare as a factor preventing women from achieving their full potential, and the Equality Commission's statement of key inequalities reached the same conclusion. There are many good reasons for wanting to improve the quality, affordability and accessibility of childcare, and there is a strategic importance in improving gender equality, advancing the social welfare agenda, improving the life chances of children, reducing child poverty and improving the economic prospects of the whole community.

Notwithstanding the current economic downturn, there has been a long-term trend for more women and parents to enter the workforce. As a result, childcare has become an increasingly important public policy issue. Access to good childcare is key to achieving a

range of Government objectives. It enables parents, particularly lone parents, most of whom are women and who are in a group at highest risk of poverty and social exclusion, to move into work, training, education, or, if they so wish, to increase their working hours.

High-quality childcare provision, which every Member has mentioned, can have a positive impact on children's educational and health outcomes and can enhance development and skills. It affords options for children, parents and families to help lift individuals and families out of poverty and social isolation.

For employers, supporting parents to balance work and childcare responsibilities can improve staff morale and retention; improve returns on training; and reduce staff turnover and absenteeism. It can also enhance an organisation's financial performance, productivity and ability to adapt. For society, it supports increased employment and social cohesion — something that a number of Members have mentioned.

Local and international research shows that quality childcare forms the basis of better outcomes for children and the economy. However, research also shows that the best outcomes come from a delivery system that is coherent, organised and strategic. As other Members have said, the system that we have at the moment could, at best, be described as fragmented.

The future prosperity of our economy depends on investment in key areas. Childcare is one such area. We already lag behind some of our Scandinavian neighbours in the approach to delivering childcare, and we must discover what we can learn from those countries that are recognised as Europe's "best in class". However, we do not lag behind only Scandinavia. As a number of Members mentioned, we also lag behind provision in Britain and the South of Ireland in many respects.

Many Departments play a direct or supportive role in the provision of childcare: the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in relation to registration and inspection; the Department of Education in relation to extended schools and early-years education; the Department for Employment and Learning in relation to childcare for those who are engaged in training; the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in relation to creating job opportunities; and the Department for Social Development in relation to funding for women's centres.

Policy must be responsive to demographic, social and economic changes. However, the challenges are substantial. We need to ask some hard policy and operational questions. How, for example, can we devise a system that incorporates high-quality registration and inspection regimes with childcare-workforce planning? How can we respond to the local circumstances of areas with diverse needs or to the needs of families

with preschool children or post-primary children in urban or rural areas? That was something that our rural colleagues also raised.

From the labour force survey, we know that over 230,000 parents who work have children who are under 12 years of age. In that figure, 144,000 parents have children who are under six years of age, but there are fewer than 50,000 registered childcare places. Research sources as diverse as the labour force survey, the millennium cohort study and the Northern Ireland Childminding Association all paint a similar picture. Parents want and need quality childcare that fits with their working lives and supports their children's educational, social and emotional development.

Therefore, we must consider how to best provide childcare services that meet quality standards, are affordable, do not create disincentives to taking up employment, and fit in with the diverse family structures and working patterns of a modern economy. They must be sufficiently flexible to accommodate the working patterns and unique circumstances associated with the current economic downturn, including those seeking to enter or re-enter the labour market. That is easier said than done.

The constraints are very real and include legal issues and considerations as well as the fragmentation of policy responsibility. However, those constraints should not be allowed to divert us from making improvements, because there is an additional imperative beyond the educational and economic benefits of childcare. There are wider benefits to aim for, including the general well-being of our children and their parents.

I strongly believe that robust research evidence is the fundamental basis for good decision-making in government. I am glad to be able to tell the Assembly that the next meeting of the ministerial subcommittee on children and young people will discuss a paper that considers the options for the future of childcare here. Although I cannot pre-empt the outcome of those meetings, the issues include whether and how to reshape the childcare vision, strengthen local capacity to provide childcare services, and maximise the synergies among the statutory, voluntary and community sectors, as well as the important role of the private sector and employers in the provision of childcare. Those are issues that Ministers will have to consider how best to address. Several Members raised the issue of disabled children. I assure them that the paper on childcare provision will address the particular needs of those children.

What I have said thus far has described the potential value of childcare, along with the constraints and the imperatives that demand future improvements. That is not a task for government alone. The views and opinions of key stakeholders need to be obtained to



ensure a participative approach to secure development and delivery.

Children and young people need to be directly involved in designing the process. As junior Ministers with responsibility for children and young people, we will continue to ensure that they have the opportunities to be heard and to make their views known on issues that affect them. We established and chaired the ministerial subcommittee on children and young people with the support of all the Ministers in the Executive, the NIO and the Court Service. It is a cross-cutting issue, so all Departments are represented so that they can discuss who has the responsibility or cross-responsibility for childcare services. Departmental attendance is very important.

The subcommittee also provides us with a mechanism for ensuring that cross-cutting children's issues are kept high on the agenda and are tackled with a joined-up approach. Childcare by itself is not a panacea for the eradication of child poverty or the revival of future economic success. It is but one important strand among many. We need to keep focused on a joined-up approach, one that provides leadership and strategic vision, if we are to improve on the current situation. That means putting childcare higher up the policy agenda.

I look forward to reporting back to the Assembly on the outcome of the work that the ministerial subcommittee on children is doing in this important area. Indeed, that subcommittee will meet shortly.

Members stipulated five points about the strategy. It should be: coherent; flexible; not limited to nine-to-five hours; of good quality; and, as our rural colleagues continually — and rightly — remind us, cognisant of the extra pressures that people in rural areas face. With respect to the implementation of the strategy, two Members — Jim Shannon and Alex Attwood — mentioned NICMA. We are aware of that matter, and it will be included. Go raibh maith agat.

**Ms Purvis:** I welcome the support from all sides of the House for the motion and the amendment. As I said, the amendment is intended to expand on the motion in order to reflect the reality of the type of childcare that is needed to address child poverty and to help our economy across the board.

I thank all Members who spoke; all-party support for quality, affordable, accessible and flexible childcare that is age- and need-appropriate — in other words, it is geared towards early-years children, children with disabilities and school-age children — is not in doubt. It is somewhat disappointing that the media seem to be uninterested in a fundamental social policy issue such as this that affects our economy and those living in abject poverty and that also unites this House.

As several Members said, including Mr Moutray and Mr Elliott, childcare facilities are not places for

people to dump their child while they work a shift. They play an important role in a child's development, especially during his or her early years. We know how crucial the early years are in educational achievement and, therefore, in future employment and earning opportunities. In these tight economic times in particular, we must be creative so that people can be helped to make the most of any earning and training opportunities.

We heard from all sides of the House about how a fully funded childcare strategy could help our economy. In order to ensure that such a strategy delivers for parents and carers alike, it must include good-quality options that are accessible, affordable and flexible. I welcome the junior Minister's announcement of further consideration of the matter through the ministerial subcommittee, and I urge it to bring forward a strategy as soon as possible. As Ms Naomi Long said, there is nothing new in the debate, and its outcome will be measured by the response to it.

I shall finish by congratulating Mr and Mrs Attwood on the birth of Anna and Mr Jim Shannon on the birth of his granddaughter.

**Ms Anderson:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Éirím le tacaíocht a thabhairt don rún.

I support the motion and the amendment. I, too, welcome the support of all those Members who spoke.

For women in particular, the lack of suitable, flexible and affordable childcare is one of the most significant barriers to their participation in the labour market. Many Members made that point. Although childcare is a parental issue, as my colleague Jennifer McCann said, more often than not, responsibility for it falls to mothers. Childcare is very much an equality issue; it is about social and economic equality, because those who are on low incomes — the working poor — and those who live in areas of high deprivation have the greatest difficulty in accessing affordable childcare.

As Jennifer McCann, John O'Dowd and Tom Elliott stated, childcare is also about rural equality. The rural childcare stakeholder group's report, which the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development commissioned in 2008, acknowledged the difficult circumstances that women and families face when attempting to find affordable, accessible childcare in rural areas.

As Stephen Moutray said, be in no doubt that the lack of affordable childcare is a massive problem for countless families across the North of Ireland. That reality is borne out by the evidence that Members gave. For instance, in June 2008, there were 92 day-nursery places here for each 1,000 children aged nought to four.

In England, however, there were more than double that number. My colleague Jennifer McCann also reminded Members that childcare is subsidised by 75% in some countries in Europe, compared with a mere 25% here.



5.00 pm

A survey undertaken by the Equality Commission in 2003, which MLA Naomi Long mentioned, found that almost one quarter of employed mothers were constrained in the hours that they worked by childcare problems. A further 20% stated that they were constrained in their choice of job by childcare needs. The working-age economic activity rate for women without dependent children is 73%, and the corresponding rate for women who have three or more dependent children is 45%. Some 67% of women cited the lack of affordable, quality childcare as the main barrier to their seeking employment. Therefore, the lack of childcare is not only failing our children, but, by creating another barrier to employment, it is failing our prospects of economic growth.

Tom Elliott spoke about the need to relate childcare with the economy, and Members should bear that in mind. Despite that, Children in NI pointed out that as far back as 2002, it was estimated that childcare provisions needed to be increased by 20% to meet the demand. However, as Jimmy Spratt said, we are debating this issue at a time when the number of childcare places is falling steadily, rather than increasing. Jimmy Spratt and John O'Dowd called for more childcare provision, as did many other Members.

Unless action is taken now, affordable childcare will continue to become increasingly unattainable for the vast majority of children here. Alex Attwood told us about his daughter, and he said that he had a vested interest in childcare provision. Jim Shannon does not want his beautiful grandchild growing up without her mother having access to childcare provision.  
*[Interruption.]*

Mr Shannon does not want his grandchild's mother to have inadequate childcare provision. In Ulster Scots, he said that the wane needed to be minded in a safe place, which is something with which all Members will agree. Tá sé an-tábhachtach go mbíonn páistí in áit atá slán dóibh.

Proper support and resources should be put in place for the Women's Centre and the many voluntary organisations that provide childcare in our communities. Mary Bradley talked about the fiasco around working tax credit and called on all the Ministers — and I noted that it was all the Ministers — not only to take heed of what was being said in the Chamber, but to act responsively and to address the issue.

Action needs to be taken to develop childminding recruitment and retention strategies to ensure that parents have sufficient choice and affordability. We must support those parents, mainly mothers, who choose to stay at home to care for their children in the early years, by providing access to appropriate home-based and group support services. The only way that

we can achieve that — and the only way that we can achieve the level of childcare provision that is required in the North of Ireland — is through the kind of coherent and properly resourced strategy that the motion and the amendment call for.

We cannot pre-empt the outcome of the ministerial subcommittee discussion on childcare, but we hope that it will address the issues that have been raised in the Chamber today and take account of the recommendations of the child poverty inquiry. Dawn Purvis quoted from the OFMDFM report on child poverty, and all the members of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister agreed that the provisions were woefully inadequate.

Danny Kennedy and Naomi Long stated that the findings of the report need to be dealt with sooner rather than later, and I recommend that the ministerial subcommittee consider the OFMDFM Committee's report on child poverty and the recommendations that dealt with childcare. The Executive must take ownership if the ministerial subcommittee report is to have any kind of impact. It must be implemented on a genuine cross-departmental basis.

Despite some comments in the Chamber today, I am mindful that the nought-to-six-year-old strategy is being developed by the Department of Education. I am also mindful that the Minister of Education, along with OFMDFM, will be represented at the World Forum on Early Care and Education, which will be held in Belfast this year. That forum will have representatives from more than 70 countries, and more than 1,000 people will be in attendance. Therefore, work on the issue is being rolled out by Ministers through their departmental remits.

From my experience through the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister's inquiry into child poverty, I know that the lack of affordable childcare is a huge issue for a massive number of families and stakeholders. There is a need for a cross-departmental approach, as opposed to its being the responsibility of just one Minister. Stephen Moutray and Roy Beggs said that it was cross-cutting in nature. We need to acknowledge that and take into account that it is the responsibility of many Ministers and the Executive in their totality.

I welcome the fact that childcare provision has been made a priority by the ministerial subcommittee on children and young people. What we need to see is those priorities being turned into effective action with real and meaningful change. That was reflected in many of the comments made in the Chamber today.

We look forward to hearing from the junior Minister when he reports to the Assembly on the outcome of the ministerial subcommittee's discussions and to hear specifically how many Departments were represented

and what kind of commitment each of the Ministers or their representatives gave at those meetings.

I support the motion and the amendment. Go raibh míle maith agat.

*Question, That the amendment be made, put and agreed to.*

*Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

That this Assembly expresses its concern at the lack of availability of affordable, quality childcare; and the lack of provision for people who require flexible arrangements to allow them to avail of working opportunities in the evenings, overnight and at weekends, particularly in the current economic climate; and calls on the Executive to implement a coherent and properly resourced childcare strategy.

**Mr D Bradley:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. During the debate on world autism awareness day, which was held on 31 March 2009, Mr Savage made a remark that could be construed as meaning that Members benefited financially from their work with the charity Autism Northern Ireland. Members of the all-party group on autism, and Autism Northern Ireland itself, expressed extreme concern to me as chairman of the all-party group about the import of those remarks. Therefore, I ask that the Speaker examine those remarks and rule whether there are grounds for asking the Member to withdraw them.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The Member may know that that was not a point of order. However, I will refer his remarks to the Speaker.

## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

### Loss of Nursing Posts

**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 are called to speak will have five minutes. One amendment has been selected and published on the Marshalled List. The proposer of the amendment will have 10 minutes in which to propose and five minutes in which to make a winding-up speech.

**Mrs I Robinson:** I beg to move

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to reject plans to cut 722 nursing posts, given his pledge to the Assembly to make efficiencies rather than cuts, and to re-direct resources towards front line patient services.

The amendment seems to ignore the fact that the efficiency targets are demanded by the Treasury and are non-negotiable, even if we wish to make special dispensations. Efficiency savings are supposed to be about doing things better, not about getting rid of key facilities. Waste, bureaucracy and poor performance have to be tackled.

Unfortunately, the Minister's response to the need to meet efficiency targets has been to punish the community by enforcing stringent cuts on front line services and attempting to palm the blame off on other people. Recent events have shown that Mr McGimpsey's smoke and mirrors routine of trying to claim credit for all that is good about his Department's performance, while trying to blame everyone else for controversial or unpopular decisions, has run its course. It is of no further use, and the Minister stands before us exposed as lacking the imagination or determination to deliver, in a real and meaningful way, on the efficiency agenda. The Health Minister can no longer have his cake and eat it.

A Department that spends millions of pounds on travel expenses should not be threatening to put older people out of their homes; a Department that wastes millions of pounds on bonuses and artwork should not be threatening more than 700 nurses with the axe; and a Department whose postage costs £7 million is not beyond efficiency savings.

I saw a recent press release from a Member making disparaging comments about our call for efficiencies in that area. That is exactly the sort of closed-mindedness that I am talking about. If we do not start looking for efficiencies in this bloated bureaucracy, it will inevitably lead to the cuts in front line services that the Minister has put forward.

The Minister hailed the budgetary allocation awarded to his Department as a great success. Members will remember that debate, because prior to that the Minister had washed his hands of accepting the Budget allocations in the first round. He made great play over not having his fingerprints on the allocation in the first round.

On 22 January 2008, when the final Budget had been agreed by all the Ministers of the four parties, Mr McGimpsey said in a press statement:

“The final budget allocation is a good news story for the Health Service. ... in light of the financial circumstances facing the Executive, I believe it is the best outcome possible.”

He puffed out his chest and claimed that he had done a great job. Indeed, his party colleagues slapped him on the back for his claim to have gained extra money. That being the case, they cannot now adopt the position claiming that health should be immune from the need for efficiencies, or that more than 700 nurses need to be axed because of spending plans forced on the Minister by malevolent outsiders. Either the Minister got a good deal or he did not. He cannot have it both ways.

Recent history has shown that Mr McGimpsey has undergone a remarkable, rapid transformation from the Bevanite, cradle-to-the-grave, Minister — and every other cliché he has deployed to describe himself — to the Minister for cuts. Gone is the man who welcomed the president of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions to his party conference; to be replaced by axe-man McGimpsey, cutting away at our front line health services.

On 2 May 2008, he said —

**Mr Beggs:** Will the Member give way?

**Mrs I Robinson:** No, I will not.

On 2 May 2008, he said:

“To start to make cuts is not what people voted us in to do”.

Just a couple of months ago, on 2 February, he was adamant:

“No cuts will be made to front line services.” — [*Official Report, Bound Volume 37, p154, col 1*].

How did we get to this point? We are here because the Minister is trapped in headline-chasing mode, which is doing the people whom he should be working for a disservice.

The sole determining factor in whether an issue becomes “top priority” for the Health Minister appears to be whether he is speaking to a group of people with an interest in the subject, or whether it is receiving specific media attention at the time. For example, take eating disorders. The DUP, in common with other parties in the House, consistently states that there is a need to improve the care available for people who suffer from eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia. We all exhorted the Minister to do more to help those

who were suffering owing to a lack of provision, but we were repeatedly given the brush-off.

5.15 pm

The only thing that managed to elicit a response from the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety on that issue was his overriding desire to avoid negative publicity. Only when the BBC started to ask questions did the Minister announce the creation of a tiny unit. The Minister, speaking on the radio, suggested at one point that we could have one dedicated bed in each trust area. How on earth would that contribute to the development of an effective state-of-the-art service? It would not even touch on the problem.

We have seen that pattern from Mr McGimpsey before. He is, of course, perfectly happy to claim the credit for initiatives, such as free prescriptions, yet he tries to blame other people for his decision to axe 700 nursing posts and to close residential homes for the elderly as part of his programme of cuts — a programme that the House, including Members from his own party, has rejected.

Since he became Minister, Michael McGimpsey has stated in his press utterances that no fewer than five subjects are his top priority: suicide prevention; healthier lifestyles; improving access to mental-health care; high-quality health facilities; and health provision in the south-west. That is government by press release, lacking in strategic vision, or capacity —

**Mr Spratt:** He does not like other people doing that.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order. All remarks must be made through the Chair.

**Mrs I Robinson:** — for new or fresh thinking.

Mr McGimpsey, it seems, is more interested in chasing headlines and in building up his media profile than in tackling the serious issues in our Health Service. Instead of describing an issue as a top priority every time the media ask questions — [*Interruption.*]

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order. There appears to be a problem. I wish to make it clear to everybody that remarks must be made through the Chair.

**Mrs I Robinson:** I will repeat the last part, because it is important. Mr McGimpsey, it seems, is more interested in chasing headlines and in building up his own media profile than in tackling the serious issues in our Health Service. Instead of describing an issue as a top priority every time the media ask questions, Mr McGimpsey would do better to spend his time devising serious policies that are designed to improve all healthcare fields in Northern Ireland.

It is an off-the-cuff suggestion, but if the Minister would like to sit with me in an accident and emergency facility, in any hospital in Northern Ireland, on any given day or evening, I would be happy to sit with him

and let him observe exactly what sort of crisis our Health Service is in. A reduction in the number of nurses and professionals on the floor of those A&E units does not bear thinking about — A&E units can barely manage as it is.

I throw down that challenge to the Minister: any day or night, at any time, I will sit with him in the accident and emergency unit of his choice, in order to let him see what pressures our Health Service front line staff are under. I support the motion.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Before I call Mr McCallister to speak, I repeat that all remarks will be made through the Chair, and I insist that the debate be conducted in that manner.

**Mr McCallister:** I beg to move the following amendment: Leave out all after “Safety” and insert

“to review proposals from health and social care trusts to reduce nursing posts, including requesting from the Executive that the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety is exempt from the comprehensive spending review efficiency savings process thereby devoting more resources towards front line patient services.”

This debate is essentially about the DUP’s political priorities. Some people in the DUP would rather play politics with our Health Service than maintain a consistent or credible position that has the best interests of the Health Service and the people of Northern Ireland at its heart.

Since the draft Budget was debated in late 2007, the proposer of the motion and some of her colleagues have done nothing but attack the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety on every possible occasion, not with the interests of the Health Service in mind, but in an attempt to discredit a Minister who is, despite their sniping, actually delivering.

**Some Members:** Hear, hear.

**Mr McCallister:** As the record will show, that is much to the DUP’s shame.

There is a significant gap between the size of the health budget in Northern Ireland and that in England. Even the DUP made that clear in 2005 when its manifesto called for a 20% rise in health spending. However, the DUP did not deliver anywhere near that level of increase when it got into a position of power. At the end of the current CSR period, that gap will be somewhere in the region of £600 million, but despite that huge gap, the DUP is silent on the issue.

Indeed, the proposals in the previous Finance Minister’s original Budget would have made the situation even worse. Thankfully, the Health Minister, along with thousands of people who work in the Health Service, fought for, and won, extra resources, despite the aggressive opposition to that from Mrs Robinson and some of her colleagues.

**Some Members:** Hear, hear.

**Mr McCallister:** Due to the extra money that was secured, the Health Minister has been able to announce a series of new measures, such as initiatives to deal with cervical cancer and provide breast screening and extra cardiac operations, to name but a few. Ultimately, that money will save lives, yet some people in the DUP oppose the Minister getting a single penny extra; they really should be ashamed of themselves.

As everyone knows, the DUP wholeheartedly —

**Mr Easton:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr McCallister:** No one in the DUP ever gives way to me.

**Mr Easton:** I promise that I will.

**Mr McCallister:** Can you believe a DUP promise? *[Laughter.]*

As everyone knows, the DUP wholeheartedly supported efficiency savings. In case some on the DUP Benches have forgotten, every single DUP Assembly Member marched through the lobby in support of efficiency savings. The DUP’s pathetic attempt to now distance itself from any efficiency-saving proposals smacks of crass political hypocrisy.

**Some Members:** Hear, hear.

**Mr McCallister:** The DUP not only supported efficiency savings, it advocated reform. In the ‘News Letter’ on 28 November 2007, Mrs Robinson stated:

“In order to continue defending almost half the budget being directed to just one sector with any credibility, we must be able to point to radical reform and modernisation.”

Once again, the DUP’s glowing sentiments appear to be at odds with the record of what it actually did.

Some in the DUP have opposed the Minister when he has attempted to meet the Executive’s targets. When he introduced radical reforms and modernisation programmes, there was DUP opposition that was led by Mrs Robinson, who sniped from the sidelines and opposed the most progressive parts of the Health and Social Care (Reform) Bill when it was proceeding through the House.

I must question whether some people in the DUP are serious about health and ask whether, when bringing pointless motions to the Floor of the House, they really have the welfare of the people of Northern Ireland at heart. We hear nothing in such motions about Peter Robinson emphasising the importance of efficiency savings; nor do we hear anything about efficiency savings in DUP-led Departments or about the waste of resources that is, in many instances, emanating from those Departments.

**Lord Morrow:** Will the Member give way?



**Mr McCallister:** Perhaps even worse than that is the DUP's opposition to Northern Ireland's new Public Health Agency. That is a radical initiative that the rest of the UK and Europe is watching with interest; however, what did our heroes in the DUP do about it? They predictably, but no less disgracefully, opposed the new agency in both the Committee and the House. Where was Mrs Robinson's call for radical form?

**Lord Morrow:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr McCallister:** Briefly.

**Lord Morrow:** I suspect that the Member is in support of the amendment. *[Laughter.]* Does he recall that when the health budget was uplifted to in excess of 50% of the overall Budget for running Northern Ireland, the Minister categorically stated that he was very happy and content and that he had fought a good fight to obtain a budget of that size? Will Mr McCallister take that into account in his comments?

**Mr McCallister:** I am more than happy to comment on that, because it touches on what Mrs Robinson said earlier. The Minister was stating the fact that it was a better settlement than that which the DUP wanted him to be given. Indeed, for months, the DUP campaigned against a single penny extra being given to the Minister of Health and his Department.

When the DUP was in opposition, before devolution, it wanted a 20% increase and was critical of increases as small as 9%. However, when it reached a position where it could do something about the funding of the National Health Service in Northern Ireland, it dramatically failed to do anything. The Minister and Members on this side of the House agreed that the uplift was very welcome, in comparison with what every DUP Member wanted the Health Service to be run on. That is my simple answer.

Members also had to sit through the spectacle of the DUP attempting to defend smoking advertisements at points of sale. Those advertisements predominantly affect children and have the potential to place a great financial burden on the Health Service in Northern Ireland. The Ulster Unionist Party will not be lectured by a party whose record on health has been completely discredited.

The proposal to reduce the number of nursing posts is simply a proposal. Many of the trusts' proposals have just arrived on the Minister's desk, and no final decisions have been taken. My party fully understands the concerns expressed on this issue. The Minister will examine those proposals closely before taking any final decisions. I was grateful to the Minister for his recent decisions regarding Skeagh House and Slieve Roe House.

However, if the amendment were passed today and agreed by the Executive, that would mean that such a

proposal would not have to be implemented in the current CSR period, which will allow proper time for real change to take place. If the DUP is serious about what it says, it will have no problem in supporting the amendment. If it does not want efficiency savings and does not deal with the consequences of what it has proposed and agreed to, it must reverse its position.

Let me be clear: Ulster Unionist Party Members are not against efficiency savings. We believe in an efficient and effective Health Service, but we have concerns about the size and pace of some of the changes that are required in such a short period. Having listened to those on the front line, including UNISON and the RCN, we know that our amendment has the support of front line health workers.

If Members support the amendment, they will charge the Minister with reviewing the proposals and making a case for exemption in the current CSR period. I appeal to all Members to listen to our health workers and to support the amendment, thus allowing proper time for real and meaningful change. After all, when it comes to health, we are dealing with individuals' lives.

**Mrs O'Neill:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion, which is closely linked to the motion tabled by the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety and debated in February, which called on the Minister to ensure that efficiency savings did not impact on front line services. In that debate, all the arguments were well rehearsed about the impact that proposals would have on front line services, particularly in relation to job losses, closure of residential homes and lack of domiciliary care. The Minister was left in no doubt about Members' concerns.

Today's motion focuses on the loss of nursing posts based on the trusts' current best estimate, which is that 722 nursing posts will be lost. In a briefing paper supplied by the Royal College of Nursing, it is clear that the RCN supports the reform and modernisation of health and social care services. However, it is also clear that much work remains to be done by the trusts to build the confidence of the public and the healthcare workforce in the new health and social care services. The manner in which the trusts have progressed the proposals and consulted has been fragmented and confused to say the least.

In Committee, we examined how the savings are to be made and how they are likely to impact on front line services. We received evidence from a combined delegation of trade unions, who told the Committee that there was a severe lack of information for its members. We raised that issue with the Minister and with the trusts. In fact, in a previous debate in the House, the Minister recognised that that was a problem and told us that it would be rectified. However, that has

obviously not happened, because we are debating the issue again.

In its briefing paper, the RCN states that it is still not aware of the details on the loss of nursing posts and where they will occur, and it has absolutely no idea of a time frame. That is totally unacceptable, and I call on the Minister for clarity on those matters.

5.30 pm

The UUP's amendment is, I believe, an attempt to protect its Minister. The UUP fails to recognise that the CSR proposals are a British Treasury-driven initiative. We are not masters of our own economic destiny. If Members had voted for the motion that was tabled by my party colleague Mitchel McLaughlin, which called for more fiscal autonomy for the Assembly, perhaps we would be in a different situation.

**Mr B McCrea:** Will the Member give way?

**Mrs O'Neill:** No, I have only a short time left.

The Health Department has a unique arrangement with DFP, which allows it first call on money made available at each monitoring round. We all welcome that. To go down the route of making the Health Department exempt from the CSR process sounds great, idyllic and the best thing to do. However, that would have a knock-on effect on other Departments. All Ministers struggle to meet the CSR demands and all Ministers have targets to meet. We all need to realise where we are. The amendment would have an impact on the other Departments. Where would we take the money from? Should we take it from social housing or from education? We would have to take it from another public service. That would be a hard decision, and one that the Executive would have to make.

We need Michael McGimpsey, the Minister of Health, to step up and do the job that he has been appointed to do. In an earlier debate in February on efficiency savings in the Health Service, he made it clear that he has the final say in all those matters. The trust proposals come to the Minister for his approval, and he said:

"If formal consultations do not produce a clear position, cuts will simply not get through." — [*Official Report, Bound Volume 37, p316, col 1*].

On that basis, I urge the Minister to examine in detail the proposals that are being put forward by the trusts, and to reject any measures that will result in cuts in nursing posts, as that would have a direct impact on front line services. I support the motion.

**Mrs Hanna:** The SDLP is sympathetic to the spirit of the amendment, but it believes that no Department can be totally exempt from efficiency savings. However, there should be no cuts to front line services. I have sympathy with the Minister in trying to balance a budget for such a demand-driven service, but I believe that the

proposers of the motion are engaged in a bit of a cynical exercise. Rather than point-scoring, I would like to have heard some proposals for savings from the Chairperson of the Health Committee that would ensure that there will be no reduction in nursing posts, which is what the motion is about. Have the proposers of the motion asked their colleague the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he has reviewed his comprehensive spending review policy with regard to the impact on employment and services? Indeed, do they have any suggestions for saving resources?

There is a fundamental contradiction between the loss of nursing jobs and the stated aim of the comprehensive spending review to free up resources to reinforce front line services. Speaking as someone who was a nurse for all too many years, there is nothing more front line than a nurse at the bedside of a desperately ill patient, or a nurse in the community who is an essential member of a primary care team.

I recognise that the reform and modernisation of health and social services is a never-ending and ongoing challenge. We support the Minister's intent and his commitment towards an ever-greater focus on positive public-health promotion. It is not just about treating the consequences of ill health, it is about appropriate care in the community.

We recognise that the comprehensive spending review efficiency targets have been imposed on the Health Minister in an arbitrary fashion. The SDLP also recognises that given that the health budget accounts for almost half of Executive spending, there must be greater efficiency and enhanced productivity in the Health Service.

The trusts must put in place robust workforce development plans to ensure that registered nurses are adequately trained for the new service delivery that is expected of them. The planned cuts and redeployment of staff will have significant training and professional regulatory implications.

Nurses cannot be treated like pieces on a chessboard: a nurse cannot be taken out of an acute ward and shifted into community nursing without appropriate training, induction and support, or into mental-health nursing without statutory post-registration induction, education and support. Adjustments will certainly be required in the clinical mix among doctors, registered nurses, allied health professionals and care assistants. However, the casualization of nursing skills, which occurred so disastrously in the Thatcher era, cannot be repeated. So much was lost, and we are still trying to regain that ground.

The Royal College of Nursing has produced credible evidence to show that the critical role of the ward sister and other nurse managers is being undermined by the proposals. In some hospitals, ward managers are being

asked to work across too many wards and too many locations. When that happens, the role of nursing ward managers as clinical leaders and patient advocates is undermined.

There is a continuing reduction of specialist nursing posts and a tendency to place inappropriate and unpaid leadership responsibilities on band 5 and 6 registered nurses, particularly on night duty staff. Senior nursing posts should be created in every acute hospital, which might convince nurses that their concerns are being listened to.

All changes must, of course, keep section 75 in mind. Any changes must be implemented with equality, integrity and probity, and, at all times, they must put patients' interests first. The bottom line is that there should be absolutely no reduction in front line services and in nursing posts, as has been stated in the motion.

**Mr McCarthy:** The Alliance Party members will not, and cannot, support policies initiated by the Executive or the Minister to cut the number of front line nursing staff. Despite repeated denials by the Health Minister, that will be the end result. We will support the motion and oppose the amendment, because we do not believe that cutting front line positions is necessary to attain the efficiency-saving targets as outlined.

The Minister was correct when he said that his baseline budget was inadequate. We agreed with that, but he is wrong to try to suggest that cuts in front line provision are necessary to operate within that budget. By playing politics with front line staffing positions, the Minister is only harming the case that he made for a higher budget, which we supported at the time. We appeal to the Minister and the Executive to halt the process and to stop immediately the loss of over 700 nursing jobs throughout Northern Ireland.

Any person who has been in hospital for any reason must have seen at first hand that all the nursing staff are completely overworked, almost to the point of exhaustion. The Health Service needs more qualified nurses to carry out the duties that they are expected to perform in the interests of the patients whom they serve.

Of course the Alliance Party wants efficiencies and savings to be made across all health provisions and in all Departments.

**Mr Kennedy:** Tell us. Where are they?

**Mr McCarthy:** Listen. Give us a chance.

We accept the many advances in the administration of health techniques in almost every aspect. We also acknowledge the increase in demands on the Health Service; again, that is despite all the preventative measures that have been taken and despite people's having been educated to look after their own health. Where there is demand, in our opinion, it is incumbent

on Government to provide — as our own Health Minister has said repeatedly — a world-class Health Service. That cannot be achieved by reducing the number of nursing staff by over 700.

In preparation for the debate, I expect that all Members will have had the opportunity to read the comments of the Royal College of Nursing for Northern Ireland, which has been mentioned already. It has made many comments, among which is that nurses are at the front line in delivering care to patients and that the reduction of their number by 700 will have a disastrous effect on their professional ability to deliver the first-class service to which we all aspire.

The reduction of 700 nursing posts cannot be delivered by voluntary retirements or by what is called "natural wastage". The consultation process was confused and fragmented. The RCN, as the authority for the nursing profession in Northern Ireland, must be listened to and worked with in order to ensure that bad decisions are avoided before it is too late.

**Mr Elliott:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr McCarthy:** No, I am racing on here.

Recently, increased costs to the Health Service have been revealed — *[Interruption.]* Listen, chaps.

**Mr Kennedy:** Listen up.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order. Some Members appear to have forgotten my earlier pronouncement that all remarks must be made through the Chair. Continue, Mr McCarthy.

**Mr McCarthy:** Recently, the vastly increased cost to the Health Service of hefty compensation claims due to medical negligence has been revealed. How does that occur? If that is the case at present, what could it be in the future when the number of nursing staff is reduced by around 720? That places even more responsibility on fewer staff. Is that not a recipe for even more mistakes and more compensation claims to be made?

What about the extra cost to the Health Service of having to rely more on agency staff? The director of the RCN said recently on that issue that you cannot get much more front line than a nurse and that the college is greatly concerned about the impact that the reduction in nursing posts will have on patient care.

**Mr Buchanan:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr McCarthy:** No. Nurses want to provide good care to patients.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The Member must draw his remarks to a close.

**Mr McCarthy:** Did a Member want me to give way? *[Laughter.]*



My party is concerned that the loss of those 700 jobs will have a detrimental effect on care throughout the community.

**Mr Buchanan:** In rising to support the motion, I make it clear from the outset that my party will neither give credence to nor support the amendment. It is one of the most ludicrous and ill-thought-out amendments that I have ever seen brought to the Floor of the House. It contradicts everything that the Minister has said previously.

Of course, that is nothing new from a party for which “delivery” is not a word in its vocabulary. To suggest, as the amendment does, that the Minister should review health trusts’ proposals to reduce nursing posts rather than reject totally plans to cut 722 nursing jobs, as is demanded by my party’s motion, beggars belief. The Assembly now has clear evidence that that party speaks with a forked tongue: it sings from two entirely different hymn sheets.

I remind the Minister and his party that he has, on several occasions, given his pledge, both to the Health Committee and on the Floor of the House, that efficiency savings in his Department would not affect front line services. On 10 February 2009, the Minister reiterated his position in the House when he said:

“Let me make it clear — efficiency savings are not cuts. That is why, when I became Minister, I considered, and threw out, what had been proposed under direct rule”. — *[Official Report, Bound Volume 37, p315, col 2]*.

5.45 pm

If the Minister is true to his word, he will have no alternative but to reject outright any plans to cut 722 nursing posts. The message from nursing staff in hospitals across Northern Ireland is crystal clear — they are already overstretched and under pressure. All Members will agree that nurses provide front line services to patients at bedsides or in the community. Therefore, the suggestion of reviewing the trusts’ proposals to reduce those front line staff flies in the face of any previous commitments or promises that the Minister gave to the House.

**Mr Easton:** The Minister also said:

“The final budget allocation is a good news story for the Health Service.”

The Ulster Unionist Party says that it does not have enough money, yet, at the time, the Minister announced that he was happy with the Budget. Is that not a contradiction?

**Mr Buchanan:** I thank the Member for his input; there is ambiguity in the Ulster Unionist Party’s stance. The Minister must come clean and outline his true position on those issues to the House.

The second part of the amendment calls for the Department of Health, Social Services and Public

Safety to be exempt from the comprehensive spending review efficiency-savings process thereby devoting more resources towards front line patient services. I remind the Minister and Members from the Ulster Unionist Party that the comprehensive spending review was not plucked out of thin air or dreamed up by a member of the Executive. It was handed down by the Treasury as a mechanism to reduce over-bureaucracy in Departments in order to enable them to operate more efficiently, enhance productivity and free up resources for reinvestment into front line services.

**Mrs I Robinson:** I thank the Member for giving way. As the Member will be aware, despite the fact that the comprehensive spending review was Treasury orientated, the Executive agreed that if the Department of Health realised — or bettered — the 3% savings, it would retain those extra moneys. No other Department received such benefits.

**Mr Buchanan:** The Member is correct; no other Department was afforded that benefit. The Minister said that the additional funding will:

“save lives and transform the lives of thousands more.”

He said that without those efficiencies the Department would be unable to deliver all the new service developments around cancer, mental-health and learning disabilities, because the efficiencies are paying for those developments.

On the one hand, the Minister says that the efficiencies will pay for those new services; on the other, his party says that the Health Department should not be part of the comprehensive spending review. One part of the party does not know what the other part is doing. Moreover, it should be noted that other Departments must rebid for any efficiencies from the pot. As the honourable Member Mrs Robinson said, the efficiencies in the Health Department return directly to that Department to be reinvested in front line services.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The Member must draw his remarks to a close.

**Mr Buchanan:** I support the motion.

**Mrs McGill:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the debate. My party colleague Michelle O’Neill outlined our position on the motion and the amendment. The debate raises the profile of nurses’ significance in society and highlights how Members value their work.

However, there is some ambiguity about the figure of 722 jobs. It would be valuable if there were some clarity about where that number came from in the first instance, and whether those 722 posts will disappear completely.

The Minister has said on occasion that these are not cuts. Other Members have referred to that. I am prepared to accept that what the Minister has said is



the truth — that these are not cuts; they are changes to front line services. However, the point is that we need to know whether the changes to the front line services will enhance the service, or will change it in such a way that patient safety and health would be adversely affected. I am prepared to accept what the Minister has said, but there is ambiguity, and we need some clarity on that.

In the briefing from the RCN, which has already been mentioned, reference is made to the Minister's comments of October 2008. The briefing states that the RCN generally supports the direction of travel of the modernisation. We all do. Perhaps I should not generalise in that way, but many of us accept the modernisation. As the spokesperson for the RCN said on another occasion, we are not against change for the sake of being against change, but we do need to establish exactly what the effect will be, whether these truly are efficiency savings, and exactly what the situation will be in the ward.

The RCN briefing made the point that there are issues related to training. If a nurse, for example, has to shift from one particular area of work to another, when and how will that training take place? I spoke with a representative of the Western Health and Social Care Trust this morning, and raised that issue. I am not sure that the way in which that will happen — moving from one area of work to another — has been sorted out. There has to be some type of time frame for that. I would welcome clarification on that from the Minister.

My understanding is that 350 nursing posts are under consideration in the Western Trust area. That was mentioned at a meeting of the Health Committee when Mr Easton raised the issue with Elaine Way. The issue of reinvestment was raised, which will involve 216 posts in the Western Trust, leaving 134 posts unfilled. I am keen to know where those 134 posts will go. I understand from a report produced by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) in relation to clostridium difficile and nursing shortages in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust that there is a direct link between nursing shortages and infection. I would welcome some clarity about those 134 posts. Will we notice that gap in the Western Trust? My reading of the issue is that that has not been managed in a uniform manner across the trusts. When I spoke to the representative of the Western Trust today, I got some reassurance on how it was being managed. We in the west will be keen to follow that up.

Before finishing, a LeasCheann Comhairle, I want to state, as have other Members, that we value the work that nurses do. We do not want to put them under extra pressure. There is not enough money for everything. The Minister himself has said — and I could not agree more — that there have been years of underfunding here. As the Minister said, that is unacceptable. The

difference between here and England amounts to £600 million —

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

**Mrs McGill:** I welcome today's debate. Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

**Mr Poots:** Here we go again with the Ulster Unionists. If one had taken out the references to the DUP from Mr McCallister's speech, it would have been reduced in content by around one third. He made the usual cry of give us more money and we can do the job. He should not take on the job of rocket scientist, because anyone could claim that if they were given more money, they could do a better job.

We want to see the Minister do a good job with the money that he has, and cutting 722 nursing jobs does not represent doing a good job.

My wife is a nurse, so I should declare an interest. It is not that the proposed cuts will have a personal consequence for me, but they will have a consequence for the thousands of people who benefit from the service that Health Service nurses provide.

Mr McGimpsey has yet to challenge the Appleby Report. I want to hear today whether he will say that the Appleby Report is not fit for purpose. Professor John Appleby said that Health Service productivity in Northern Ireland was 17·4% less than that in the rest of the UK. As a consequence of that, it was determined that £280 million of savings were there to be made. If the Ulster Unionists are going to challenge that, and say that the Appleby Report is not up to scratch and that they want to take it apart piece by piece, I want to hear them do that. They have not done that to date.

**Mr McCallister:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Poots:** I am happy to give way. Let us hear what the Member has to say about the Appleby Report.

**Mr McCallister:** Will the Member also accept that one of the key elements of the Appleby Report was to do with public health, and the need to engage the population and urge them to look after their health better by tackling drinking, obesity and all those problems that lead to huge health inequalities? However, that lot voted against the Appleby Report in the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety and in the Chamber.

**Mr B McCrea:** And smoking.

**Mr McCallister:** Smoking as well. The DUP supported that. If we are to debate the Appleby Report, let us debate it all.

**Mr Poots:** It appears that Mr McCallister's answer to all this is to create another quango that will cost more taxpayers' money. Over the past 10 years, although the health budget has doubled, we have seen administration and management costs rise by 33%. The

money has gone not to the front line but to administration. That is where Mr McGimpsey must start looking, because that is what efficiency savings are about. They are not about cutting nursing jobs or services for senior citizens —

**Mr Kennedy:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Poots:** Yes, in a minute.

It is about tackling the difficult issue of administration and management costs. *[Interruption.]*

I will give way to Mr Kennedy now.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order, please. Let us restore order in the Chamber. I am keen that everyone be present for the vote, but one or two Members' participation in it is looking a bit dodgy. I ask all Members to make their remarks through the Chair.

**Mr Kennedy:** I thank the Member for giving way. At least we now have clarity on the DUP's position. Apparently it wants to protect the 722 nursing jobs. It is doubtful whether the party is under pressure to do so, but the DUP effectively wants to sack hundreds of Health Service employees. Will the Member confirm that that is his party's position?

**Mr Poots:** I thank Mr Kennedy for his intervention. That is why I like to give way to the Ulster Unionist Party. He does not want to do away with administrative positions, which are of no help to people in the front line, but he wants to sack the nurses. Let us get that message out. This is what the deputy leader of the Ulster Unionist Party is saying today: sack the nurses and keep the pen-pushers in their jobs. That may be the price that the Ulster Unionist Party is prepared to pay, but it is not the price that the DUP is prepared to pay, nor is it the price that Members from the other parties are prepared to pay.

Over the period in question, Mr McGimpsey's Department will get a 3·8% increase each year. The Health Service is not being cut; it is receiving increases above inflation whether Mr McGimpsey likes it or not. The efficiency savings that should be made would be ploughed back into the Health Service.

**Mr B McCrea:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Poots:** Yes; I always welcome the opportunity to give way to Basil McCrea.

**Mr B McCrea:** Does the Member agree with the statement that Mrs Iris Robinson made in the House of Commons, in which she described the direct rule health budget increase of 9% as insufficient? Does he agree with her when he says that Northern Ireland has suffered years of underinvestment? Does he agree with her when she says that to get up to the same funding levels as England, we need a 20% increase? Does he agree with those statements? Will he support our

Minister in getting more money for our people and our Health Service?

**Mr Poots:** Basil McCrea called me "Mr Angry" earlier, but he does anger even better. We must tackle issues such as bed blocking and those consultants who use hospital facilities to operate semi-private services in the Health Service.

We do not need to be endangering the lives of expectant mothers by closing maternity units such as the one in Basil McCrea's Lagan Valley constituency. I put it on the record today that the Royal Victoria Hospital, Antrim Area Hospital and Craigavon Area Hospital are not fit to cope with additional births.

6.00 pm

If Mr McGimpsey proceeds with his plan, he will be putting the lives of expectant mothers and their children at risk as a consequence. We need to tackle those issues. Mr McGimpsey is pleased to tell the public that he can provide more money for Herceptin, free prescriptions and IVF. I am happy with all of those decisions — however, I am not happy if they are taken on the back of sacking nurses and doing away with 722 nursing posts. The Ulster Unionist Party may be proud of that, but I am wholly opposed to it. *[Interruption.]*

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order. The Deputy Speaker is allowed to be heard. The business on the Order Paper has not been disposed of by 6.00 pm. In accordance with Standing Order 10(3), I will allow business to continue until 7.00 pm or until business is completed. Again, I hope that all Members will still be here for that.

**Mr Gardiner:** Political distrust is a very unpleasant commodity. The political distrust that lies behind a whole string of DUP motions in the Assembly is clear for the entire electorate to see. For the DUP Finance Minister to impose 3% efficiency savings on the Health Service here and then for Mrs Robinson, the DUP Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, to lead a series of debates criticising the Health Minister when he tries to implement those efficiency savings is a deeply cynical thing to do.

This is playing political games with difficult decisions that affect people's lives and only demonstrates the failure of partnership Government, rather than the efficient discharge of the scrutiny function rightly placed with the Assembly Committees. Bringing endless political point-scoring debates to the Floor of the Assembly — with the name of Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety appended to them — fatally undermines the partnership that should exist between the Committee and the Minister; a partnership that is designed to procure the best results for patients and users of the Health Service.

Unfortunately, such petty political point-scoring is what we in the other parties have come to expect from the so-called lead party of Government. To the ordinary voter, of whom I am one, it simply looks like a political set-up or game — cut the Minister's money and then criticise him every time he tries to make efficiencies.

Frankly, the scale of the problems that face us in the Budget, public spending, job protection and creation are so great that this kind of political distrust that the DUP indulges in is deeply damaging to the whole process and credibility of government here. It is about as far away from statesmanship, and giving real and responsible leadership, as one can get. This is coming from a party that is playing politics when real leadership is needed, a party that has failed to recognise what even the dogs in the street know — that there is a hole in the Executive's finances that the DUP Finance Minister has failed to deal with for the past seven months.

That is why I strongly support the amendment that my honourable friend John McCallister proposed today. It reflects the realities of the situation in the Health Service, and not the 'Through the Looking-Glass' events that the Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety presented.

There have been years of underfunding in health and social care, and there is already a £600 million funding gap between Northern Ireland and England. We need almost £300 million per annum to make our services match those delivered in England and another £300 million to match the investment that those services will receive this year and next.

**Mrs I Robinson:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Gardiner:** No, thank you.

Instead, the reality is that the DUP, using its voting strength in the Executive, has imposed savings on the Health Minister of £700 million over three years. That masks the total failure of the DUP, when it entered Government through its close partnership with Sinn Féin, to negotiate a peace dividend from the United Kingdom Government. The DUP said that it would not enter Government without such funding, but it did. It was only because the Health Minister fought for extra funding that he was able to secure a significant increase in available resources over the comprehensive spending review period.

Without that extra funding, there would have been no development of services such as the introduction of bowel-cancer screening, which will save up to 70 lives a year; an additional 700 heart operations and procedures each year; the introduction of the human papilloma virus (HPV) vaccination against cervical cancer, which kills around 40 women each year; remote monitoring for up to 5,000 patients, and an addition of 200 units in respect of community —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The Member must draw his remarks to a close.

**Mr Gardiner:** Let the DUP proposers of today's original motion tell that to the electorate.

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

**Mr Gardiner:** I support the motion. *[Interruption.]*  
Correction: I support the amendment.

**Mr Gallagher:** I acknowledge the commitment and professionalism of our nursing staff across Northern Ireland. They are, as I have said, true professionals. They are the people who make sure that patients are treated with care, compassion and dignity, whether in their home, in a community setting, in primary care, or in hospital, as is often the case.

It is a disgrace that we are now in a situation whereby more than 700 nursing posts are to be lost. Whether the UUP wants to blame the DUP, or the DUP wants to blame the UUP, this matter is so serious that it needs to be sorted out between the Health Minister and the Finance Minister, because they both have a responsibility from which they cannot escape.

Despite the fact that nurses are such a key group of workers, we know that when these proposals were taken forward by the trusts, there was very little real, meaningful and true consultation with the nurses on the ground. That has only added to the frustration that many of them currently feel.

The Western Health and Social Care Trust, as Claire McGill has mentioned, will lose more than 130 posts, and we have been told by the health authorities — at a number of different levels — that that will be taken care of through natural wastage. We are asked to believe that it will be all right. The reality is that I have had nurses come to me in recent months — well-trained, highly-qualified nurses, some of them at intensive-care level, and many of them young — who have had notification in writing that their contracts are coming to an end. They do not know what the future holds for them.

Instead of cutting nursing jobs, we should be challenged by the task of finding some alternative means of employing them, if it comes to that. I agree with the Chairperson of the Health Committee that there are areas of need. She referred to eating disorders, and I agree that the level of care for people with eating disorders across Northern Ireland is appalling.

With regard to mental health, the situation is perhaps slightly better, but there is a great deal of room for improvement.

If some of those nurses are now to leave our hospitals, there must be appropriate and well-resourced training so that they can move into other settings, because, at the end of the day, they are the people who will take



the pressure off the Health Service — the primary-care and secondary-care sectors in particular — and will, with appropriate treatment, screen out many patients before they get to other levels. Therefore, we need more resources if the worst comes to the worst here with regard to working in hospitals.

We have arrived at this point because some Members voted for the Budget, which contained the comprehensive spending review measures; unfortunately, we are now living with the consequences. I notice that the Deputy Chairperson of the Health Committee described the efficiency savings as British-inspired. Yes, it is a Gordon Brown initiative and in that sense it is British-inspired, but it is here because that British-inspired initiative was voted through by Sinn Féin. Therefore it is time that we all look at the Budget afresh.

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr McGimpsey):** I am grateful for the opportunity to respond to this debate, not least because it once again highlights the major challenges faced in delivering millions of pounds in efficiency savings.

As I have said many times, all Northern Ireland Departments must achieve £790 million of efficiency savings by March 2011; for my Department, that equates to some £344 million by 2010-2011. That is £700 million over three years, which is a huge task.

Members are aware of trusts' proposals — and I emphasise that they are proposals — to achieve the necessary efficiency savings: proposals that have been the subject of considerable public concern. The motion calls on me to reject plans to cut more than 700 nursing posts; it suggests that those proposals are cuts and not efficiencies.

In our drive towards changing the way in which health and social-care services are provided, nurses will play a vital role in delivering more care in the community: that is what the population wants. I am committed to investing in the front line, but we need to realise that the front line is moving into the community. I have demonstrated that by providing extra funding for the management of chronic diseases, reform of mental-health and learning-disability services, and more community services for our growing elderly population.

Therefore, I welcome this debate on the vital contribution of the nursing profession. However, how sad it is once again to witness attempts by some in the DUP to use the debate as yet another political point-scoring exercise — that, in spite of the fact that the decision to make efficiency savings was made by the Executive and all parties, including the DUP.

I have to ask: is that selective memory loss or just an unwillingness to wake up and face the stark reality that achieving efficiency savings is a major and difficult task for the Health Service. It is hypocrisy of the highest order for the same people who are asking for efficiency

savings to criticise me when I try to make them. Such actions highlight yet again how some are prepared to play politics with the Health Service at any cost.

Let us be absolutely clear: a DUP Finance Minister proposed the efficiency-savings process, and the DUP enthusiastically supported it at the Executive and in the Assembly: the comprehensive spending review process has the fingerprints of the DUP all over it.

I am confident that the direction of change for services for older people, for mental-health care, for hospital services and for health and social care is change for the better. However, I have concerns about the speed and scale of that change.

Just look at the responses to the public consultations on the trusts' proposals that generated such widespread political debate, media coverage and campaigns. The huge response to those proposals stands in stark contrast to the eerie silence on proposals from other Departments, and it reflects how valued and essential health and social care services are to the public. I have always said that health and social care services must be more efficient and effective in how we use our limited resources. Today, patients access services of the highest quality more quickly than ever.

6.15 pm

Health continues to lead the way in the reform demanded under the review of public administration (RPA). The RPA will result in a reduction of almost 1,700 managerial and administrative staff, and it has already seen the number of senior executives fall from 180 to 65. In total, the RPA will bring about £53 million in savings every year.

Although it has taken some time for Members to waken up to the impact of achieving £700 million in savings, I am delighted that the penny has finally dropped. I only wish that their concerns had been raised when I was battling to secure extra moneys for vital services as part of the Budget settlement. Let me remind the Assembly what was said at that time: the Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety insisted that I should accept the Budget as originally proposed. She was so committed to the cause that she even got herself thrown out of the House over it. Indeed, she even claimed that, in a bid to save money, the Mater Hospital should shut, and the new hospital for Downpatrick should be mothballed. At a time of economic recession, can anyone explain to me why I would want to get rid of 1,300 jobs in the Mater Hospital, including almost 600 nursing posts?

In addition, Mrs Robinson's colleagues said that it was outrageous for me to request more resources over and above the draft Budget, and they claimed that there was a significant element of farce about my battle to increase funding for health. Let me tell the DUP that there is no farce in putting patients first and ensuring



that more money is devoted to health. The DUP's inherent failure to recognise that the demand for health services is rising and urgent investment is required is the only farce around.

When will some Members on the DUP Benches waken up to the fact that their Minister controls the purse strings? Instead of scaremongering and sniping from the sidelines, why do they not talk to their Minister about getting more money for the Health Service? Have any of them even raised it with their Minister of Finance and Personnel? No, they have not.

I welcome calls to exempt the Health Service from efficiency savings. We have to provide 3% efficiency savings on the block grant, but there is no law that says that it has to be by Department. The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has the largest share of the Budget, but it also has the greatest need. Our population is continuing to grow, we have an increasingly elderly population, and expectations for improvements in health and social care are rising. That means that we need to make the most of our limited funds, and we are doing that.

Trusts already have proposals to deliver £140 million of savings a year from increased productivity, including reductions in absenteeism, reduced energy costs and agency spend. That is in addition to the £53 million already being achieved through reduced management costs under the RPA. To think that we are ignoring such potential savings is naive in the extreme.

The motion is about the reduction in the number of nursing posts. Health and social care is delivered by people, and almost two thirds of our spend is on staff costs. It is also naive to assume that efficiency savings of that magnitude can be achieved by simply tinkering with the system. People who make such claims need to live in the real world. We cannot achieve efficiencies of that scale without their having an impact on how our staff deliver services to meet ever-changing needs. However, over the past 12 months, I have worked closely with trade unions, the Royal Colleges and trust management to minimise the impact on staff. That is because nursing is fundamental to high-quality healthcare.

Nurses deliver care across all settings and to all patients. Shifting our focus from providing care in the acute sector to providing it to people in their own communities means that there will be fewer staff delivering hospital services. It also involves nurses bringing their skills and expertise to treat and care for people in their own homes

I am determined to protect the welfare of staff who serve with commitment and professionalism, and that is why I have made it clear that I do not expect compulsory redundancies. I am also committed to maintaining the number of nursing students, and I have invested an extra £2.2 million to providing support to

students in the clinical areas. I have addressed shortages of midwives by increasing the number of midwifery students and making more resources available to increase capacity.

However, the debate should not simply be about the number of nurses. Indeed, and instead, our focus should be on what is required to deliver an effective service and what is required to deliver safe and good-quality care. If we are reducing our reliance on hospital beds and are making better use of support staff and focusing on preventative care, we must be prepared to adjust the workforce numbers to match the work that is required.

The Appleby Report made it clear that there was real scope to deliver hospital services that improve the quality of care and allow us to target resources to those most in need. My Department is ensuring that that happens, and that is largely what we are talking about now. In fact, all of the Appleby recommendations are under way or have been implemented. However, Professor Appleby also considered that Northern Ireland required uplifts of 4.3% each year in the funding of health and social care in order to meet increasing levels of needs, rather than the 1.2% that was granted by the Executive —

**Mr Poots:** It was 3.8%.

**The Minister of Health, Social Service and Public Safety:** No; the 3.8% refers to the National Health Service in England — you were referring to the wrong Health Service, Mr Poots. *[Laughter.]*

Professor Appleby therefore recommended that there must be some way around the implications of the Barnett formula in relation to health and social care if the assessed funding requirement was to be delivered. How unfortunate that that was the only recommendation from the Appleby Report that has been ignored. The uplift that was provided to health and social care was only around one quarter of what Professor Appleby recommended as necessary. Therefore, some Members from the DUP must go out and quote from the Appleby Report, so that they will ensure that that recommendation is implemented. The one recommendation from the Appleby Report that is not being implemented is the financial one; that is, the one that I have just talked about.

I must ask why it has taken so long for some Members to grasp the fact that the Health Service needs enough money to meet the ever-growing demands of the public. I make no apologies for fighting hard and against considerable opposition in attempting to secure extra funding as part of the Budget settlement —

**Mrs I Robinson:** Will the Minister give way?

**The Minister of Health, Social Service and Public Safety:** That extra money ensured that I was able to introduce essential service developments such as bowel cancer screening and an extension to breast

screening programmes, to name but a few of those developments that will transform, and save, lives.

It is true that I described the final Budget settlement as being as good as it could get at that time; however, I also said that it is still not enough, and I will continue to fight for more.

At a time of recession, when so many people are struggling with financial pressures and unemployment is rising, the demands on our Health Service will increase. Now is the time for investment. Without adequate funding, how else can we address the years of historic underfunding of our health and social care systems? How else can we begin to close the £600 million funding gap between Northern Ireland and England? How else can we ensure that people in Northern Ireland have the same access to healthcare as is the case in the rest of the UK?

Let me make it absolutely clear: I am not arguing that the Health Service should not be attempting to make efficiency savings. Rather, given that the needs of my Department are so much greater, I ask why we are being asked to do so much in such a short period of time. We simply cannot give anymore; there is no slack in the system. Indeed, Dr William McCrea recently sent me a letter in relation to this matter, in which he asked me to apprise him of the extent of the proposed cuts. Furthermore, he expressed his support for the views of his constituents in asking that the National Health Service be exempt from the Executive's comprehensive spending review. *[Interruption.]* That is a letter from a sincere individual who is not playing politics. The date on the letter is 30 March 2009.

Why do the sick and needy have to pay for years of underfunding of our Health Service? After all, when it comes to health, we are dealing with people's lives. It is time for everyone to face up to their responsibilities. It is not as if I have not warned everyone of the difficulties that the Health Service faces in trying to make those efficiency savings.

Yes; in respect of our capacity, we are managing at the moment. However, we are at our limit. If we are to continue to protect the quality of care that is provided, we cannot give any more — we must get real. The debate is not just about numbers of nurses; it is about the healthcare of our current population and that of future generations. I would like more time to deliver those changes, but I do not have it.

As Minister, I am determined to do the right thing, to reform and to modernise in order to deliver the services that people need. Those are the criteria against which I will consider these proposals. I will also consider the remarks made by Members today.

**Some Members:** Hear, hear.

**Mr B McCrea:** Mr Poots referred to his family connections in the nursing profession. He knows that I also have family connections, because they nurse together. He knows that my partner's sister is a nurse and that my brother-in-law is a nurse. He knows that we on these Benches hold the nursing profession in the highest possible honour.

Mr Poots also knows — because others have spoken about the stress that nurses find themselves under in the National Health Service — the amount of work and responsibility that falls to them, which is why I fully support the Minister's quest for additional resources to look after the heroines and heroes in our Health Service who need it most. Let no one be in any doubt that we in the Ulster Unionist Party absolutely and fundamentally support the nursing profession.

**Some Members:** Hear, hear.

**Mr B McCrea:** I congratulate the DUP on its ability to play clever politics, to be sleekit, to take something and to turn it round, and to use the motion in order to play on people's fears. I acknowledge the DUP's ability to pour poison and invective on those who are standing up and fighting for the people of Northern Ireland and for the Health Service, as the Minister is expected to.

I also admire the DUP's ability to rewrite history. I admire the fact that somebody said — and I am happy to take an intervention, if anybody wants to tell me where this text came from:

“Northern Ireland has suffered from relative underfunding for decades...more than 20% extra spending per capita on health care is required to achieve the same level of service as in England.”

Who said that? The DUP manifesto in 2005 did.

“The Health Service in Northern Ireland has suffered from long-term under-funding relative to the rest of the UK.”

Who said that? The DUP manifesto in 2007 did.

In March 2005, describing the direct rule health budget increase of 9% as insufficient, who said the following?

“The extra money does not allow for any new service development. Proposed allocations will not even allow trusts to stand still. In fact they are being forced to withdraw services.”

**Mr McCallister:** Iris Robinson.

**Mr B McCrea:** Iris Robinson; that is correct. Now, the DUP is turning round and saying, “by the way, live within your means.”

That is rank hypocrisy. In fact, it is not just hypocrisy; it is duplicitous double-talk from a party that is duping the people of Northern Ireland. When it comes to health, I look at the DUP's partners in crime on the Sinn Féin Benches, and I must say that, while I acknowledge its right to be in Government, I despair of that party's ability. This idea about — *[Interruption.]*

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order.

For the benefit of all Members, including those who have recently arrived in the Chamber, I asked that all remarks be made through the Chair. I intend to see out the debate in that way.

6.30 pm

**Mr B McCrea:** I give way to Mrs Iris Robinson.

**Mrs I Robinson:** I thank the Member for giving way. First, the speech that you quoted was from me. I was arguing in the House of Commons —

**A Member:** Through the Chair.

**Mrs I Robinson:** Pardon?

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I think that a Member was suggesting that you speak through the Chair, Mrs Robinson.

**Mrs I Robinson:** I am sorry — I will try. I was speaking in the House of Commons. Of course, one makes the case when fighting in the House of Commons when one does not have an Administration in Northern Ireland. That is what my speech was about.

On the subject of manifestos, I remind the honourable gentleman that it was his party that said that it would not enter into government with Sinn Féin/IRA unless and until guns were handed in. *[Interruption.]*

There is a difference: we got the guns. If we are talking about manifesto promises, that party is the biggest hypocrite.

**Mr B McCrea:** I thank Mrs Iris Robinson for her excellent intervention. It demonstrated duplicity, doubletalk and rewriting of history, among all the other invective. Sinn Féin keeps saying that it will increase taxes, but who will pay those taxes?

**Mrs O'Neill:** Who said that?

**Mr B McCrea:** OK, perhaps Sinn Féin does not want to increase taxes. However, that party demands fiscal responsibility, so if it wants more money for the Health Service, it will have to fight for it.

I listened to the Alliance Party come out with more motherhood and apple pie and promises of how it would make cuts. However, not one example was given. All I hear is political immaturity. It is time for people to get — *[Interruption.]*

It is not often that I cannot command the Floor, but the Alliance Party is doing its best to prevent me from doing so. When it comes to the issue, we, as 108 MLAs, will collectively have to start making tough decisions. It is absolutely appropriate that when cuts of 3% across the board must be made, there will have to be change. Members need to recognise that.

I conclude by rejecting the terrible position that the DUP has taken.

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

**Mr B McCrea:** I commend the Minister of Health for fighting for all the people of Northern Ireland, and for fighting, as he should do, for our Health Service.

**Mr Easton:** The House will consider little of more importance than the subject that is under discussion. The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety would do well to listen. Trusts' potential loss of 722 nursing posts will, if not reversed, mark a seismic mistake of ministerial folly.

Our National Health Service is world-renowned for its expertise. Many in the House, me included, can testify to its surgical and medical expertise. At the core of the service stands the distinguished profession of nursing, which is a vocation. Many of our nurses have distinguished themselves by the care that they give. They deserve to be treated fairly, and they deserve the respect that is due to them. We all know that many nurses — including my sister, who is a nurse in Lagan Valley Hospital — go above and beyond the call of duty in their commitment to their patients. I am at a loss to fathom how 722 nursing posts can be axed without a critical negative impact on front line services.

The Northern Ireland director of the highly respected Royal College of Nursing has already informed us that, if 722 posts are cut, patient care will be damaged and further strain will be placed on an already pressurised workforce. Proposals to cut the number of nursing-ward or team managers, to force them to work across multiple locations and to downgrade their roles are unacceptable threats to patient care and client safety. Those proposals must be revoked.

A report by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority suggests that the loss of the nursing posts will cause an increase in healthcare-acquired infections. The RQIA report contains powerful messages about how inadequate nurse staffing levels contributed to the spread of infections, yet the five trusts wish to add to that danger by doing away with 722 nursing positions.

That eloquent analysis places none of us in any doubt about what the motion is about: protecting front line services and enhancing, not damaging, patient care. Does the Minister think that he knows better than the Royal College of Nursing? Does he expect the House to believe that he knows better than the men and women who daily provide services in an increasingly pressurised workplace?

The Minister's logic that one can cut 722 posts and not hinder front line services defies reality. I challenge him to go to hospitals, treatment rooms and homes in which district nursing services are being provided to witness for himself the pressures that nurses are under and to appreciate the fact that many nurses are regularly working unpaid overtime. The Health Service has



many demands, but, frankly, the Minister's cutting of 722 nursing posts will only add to the problems faced on the front line — it has no part to play in solving those problems.

I have asked the Minister to direct his attention towards areas that can contribute to the solution and increase productivity, and I make no apology for reiterating that. Every time they are mentioned, he seems to pooh-pooh them. I said that he must address the level of non-attendances at outpatient clinics, which stands at 196,000 — he has not done so. I said that he must address some of the 14,000 cancelled clinics — he has not done so. I said that he must address the alarming cost of medical negligence claims, which amount to £14 million — he has not done so. Furthermore, he must address the £6 million cost of independent sector providers, and whether it is really necessary to pay management consultant fees of more than £100 million. Consider the £40 million cost of employing agency staff: if one is getting rid of nurses, it does not make sense to re-employ them as agency staff at twice the price. Strategically, the Minister is in error in his belief that cutting 722 nursing positions will not detrimentally impact on front line services.

**Mrs I Robinson:** Would he also add to that lengthy list the fact that —

**Some Members:** Through the Chair; that is a conversation.

**Mrs I Robinson:** I cannot keep my eyes from that end of the room. *[Laughter.]* Dream on.

The Minister should also take cognisance of the amount of money that is spent each year on locums. Last year, I believe that they cost almost £700,000.

**Mr Easton:** I take on board the points raised by the Member, and there are plenty more statistics that we can read out if the Minister wants us to do so.

Better front line nursing cannot be achieved with fewer nurses. Consider the pressure that they are under already. Put simply, this is not rocket science. I suggest that the Minister takes a reality check. Do not take my word for it; take the words of nurses:

“the proposals will damage patient care and place further strain on an already pressurised nursing workforce.”

The loss of 722 nurses will damage front line services. The Minister should remember — to use a metaphor — that he will do what it says on the tin. He said efficiencies, not cuts; he said resources would be directed towards front line services —

**Mr McCallister:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Easton:** No, you would not do it for me, so tough.

On close examination, the amendment reads:

“to review proposals from health and social care trusts to reduce nursing posts”.

The amendment does not guarantee those nursing jobs; it only seeks a review. Furthermore, it asks the Executive to accept:

“that the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety is exempt from the comprehensive spending review”.

Is the Ulster Unionist Party asking us to break the law and go against the directive from Westminster, which we had no choice but to accept? What is equally amazing is that the Ulster Unionist Party is asking us to go against its own Health Minister, who supported the Budget in the Executive, stating that he was satisfied with the Budget and that it was a good day for health in Northern Ireland.

Even if we were legally allowed to exempt the health budget from the comprehensive spending review, what would that mean? It would mean that all the efficiency savings identified by the Minister would not have happened and that all the extra money he was given would not have been given. It would mean that the Minister would not get first refusal on the first £20 million handed back, which amounts to an extra £60 million over three years. No other Department gets that extra money, and failing to get it would mean that the Minister would not have been able to announce all those new services, including free prescriptions.

Those new services came about as a result of record investment and the size of the budget that the Minister got, and that would not have happened if the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety had been exempt from the comprehensive spending review. Before the Northern Ireland Assembly was up and running, the health budget was £3.982 billion. By the end of the three-year Budget period, it will be £4.491 billion, which is £500 million more for health — a record investment in health in Northern Ireland.

The amendment from Tweedledum and Tweedledee is a smokescreen; it cannot be done. If it could be done, the other Departments would have to find savings to make up for the shortfall; DSD would have to stop benefits, and there would be no money for community groups; DARD would have no money for grants for farmers; DRD would have no money to repair roads; DEL would have to close colleges — I am sure that the Ulster Unionist Party would not want their Minister to have to do that — and DCAL would have to stop money for community events.

In tabling the amendment, the UUP has shown itself to be financially inept and financially unstable. It is no wonder that the Ulster Unionist Party is in so much debt and almost broke. When one looks at the state of the finances that Basil McCrea received from the Assembly, one will see that he had to fire some of his



own staff because of his financial ineptitude. Let us get real; let us save the nursing jobs.

I will try to get through some of the points that were raised during the debate. On the one hand, Sammy Gardiner praised the extra money, but, on the other, he wanted to do away with the extra money by doing away with the comprehensive spending review. I would be glad to see him coming through the Lobbies with us to support the motion.

Tommy Gallagher said that the Health Minister should speak to the Minister of Finance and Personnel. However, I submitted a question for written answer in which I asked whether the Health Minister had raised the subject of efficiency savings on nursing and residential care homes, and I was informed that he has not even raised it in the Executive; he has not even bothered to do so. That shows you what the Minister thinks of nursing jobs and residential homes. He has not even bothered to raise the issue at the Executive.

Minister McGimpsey complained about all the parties supporting the comprehensive spending review, which he supported. It is a pity that the Minister was not concerned enough about the nursing positions to raise them at the Executive.

I did not take any notes on Basil McCrea's contribution, because I do not think that he was talking about health.

John McCallister said that the DUP was opposed to the new health agency. When debating the Health and Social Care (Reform) Bill, DUP members did not oppose a new health agency; we wanted to keep it within the new regional board.

**Mr McCallister:** They voted against it.

**Mr Easton:** No, they did not. Mr McCallister needs to tell the truth to the people of Northern Ireland, because that is not true. Members can check the record.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order.

**Mr B McCrea:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I think that I heard the Member say that Mr McCallister has to tell the truth. I ask him to withdraw those comments.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I was already on my feet to do exactly that.

**Mr Easton:** DUP members were accused of voting against the health promotion agency during debates on the Health and Social Care (Reform) Bill, but we did not. Therefore, Mr McCallister did not provide the truth. *[Interruption.]*

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order. I need to hear the explanation from the Member.

**Mr Easton:** Mr McCallister stated that the DUP voted against the new health agency. We did not vote against the new health agency, so what he said was inaccurate; it is not true. Mr Deputy Speaker, you can

check the Hansard report, and you will see that the DUP did not vote against it. I will not be apologising.

**Some Members:** Hear, hear.

**Mr Kennedy:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Following the debate and once the Hansard report is published, I ask you to reflect on what was said by Mr Easton and decide whether his comments were parliamentary.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I will refer the matter to the Speaker, who will make the decision.

**Mrs Long:** Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. It would be helpful to have clarification, because, if I heard Mr Easton correctly, he asked Mr McCallister to tell the truth. That is not necessarily an accusation that he was doing anything otherwise.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** That is precisely why I have decided to refer the matter to the Speaker, who will be the final arbitrator.

**Mr Easton:** I am happy to await the Speaker's ruling.

Michelle O'Neill supported the motion and called on the Minister for more clarification on the plans and to step up and do his job. Kieran McCarthy said that the Minister was playing politics with nursing job cuts and called for them to be stopped.

Tom Buchanan said that the UUP was speaking with forked tongue. I am not sure whether it was the Conservatives speaking or the UUP, so he is correct on that. Claire McGill wanted to know about the confusion and ambiguity from the Minister on efficiencies in savings in front line services.

6.45 pm

Edwin Poots said that the lives of expectant mothers and, potentially, those of their babies were at risk because of the trusts' proposals for maternity services. The Chairperson of the Health Committee, Iris Robinson, talked about the smokescreens and mirrors that the Minister —

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

**Mr Easton:** The Committee Chairperson also said that there are not enough nurses in accident and emergency units. Furthermore, she challenged the Minister to go with her to see that that is the case.

I support the motion.

*Question put, That the amendment be made.*

*The Assembly divided: Ayes 9; Noes 51.*

AYES

*Mr Armstrong, Mr Beggs, Mr Elliott, Mr Gardiner, Mr Kennedy, Mr McCallister, Mr B McCrea, Mr McFarland, Ms Purvis.*

*Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Gardiner and Mr McCallister.*

**NOES**

*Mr Boylan, Mr D Bradley, Mrs M Bradley, Mr Brady,  
Mr Bresland, Mr Brolly, Lord Browne, Mr Buchanan,  
Mr Burns, Mr Butler, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke,  
Mr Craig, Mr Dodds, Mr Donaldson, Mr Durkan,  
Mr Easton, Dr Farry, Mrs Foster, Mr Hamilton,  
Mrs Hanna, Mr Irwin, Mrs Long, Mr A Maginness,  
Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr F McCann,  
Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCausland,  
Mr I McCrea, Dr McDonnell, Mrs McGill, Mr McGlone,  
Miss McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mr Moutray, Ms Ni Chuilín,  
Mr O'Loan, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Poots, Mr P Ramsey,  
Mr G Robinson, Mrs I Robinson, Mr P Robinson,  
Mr Ross, Mr Shannon, Mr Simpson, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey,  
Mr Weir.*

*Tellers for the Noes: Mr Buchanan and Mr Easton.*

*Question accordingly negatived.*

*Main Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to reject plans to cut 722 nursing posts, given his pledge to the Assembly to make efficiencies rather than cuts, and to re-direct resources towards front line patient services.

*Adjourned at 6.58 pm.*

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## NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Tuesday 21 April 2009

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

*Members observed two minutes' silence.*

### ASSEMBLY BUSINESS

**Mr Speaker:** During yesterday's debate on the loss of nursing posts, Mr Basil McCrea and Mr Danny Kennedy raised points of order in relation to remarks made by Mr Easton. Members can be in no doubt by now that it is unparliamentary to accuse another Member of telling lies or deliberately misleading the House. I have considered the remarks that were made by Mr Easton and the exchanges that then took place during the debate. Although at one point the remarks came close to causing concern, in the context of the exchanges in the debate, I do not consider that anything unparliamentary was said.

However, I noted the Official Report, and a number of other remarks that were made yesterday also came close to crossing the line. I once again ask all sides of the House to think more carefully about what they say in the House. I understand that, from time to time, Members will say things in the heat of debate that, on reflection, they might have said differently. However, I remind all sides of the House to be careful with their language during debates.

## MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

### Executive's Action Plan in response to the Barroso Task Force Report

**Mr Speaker:** I have received notice from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) that the deputy First Minister wishes to make a statement regarding the Executive's action plan in response to the Barroso task force report.

**The deputy First Minister (Mr M McGuinness):**  
Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. With your permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement on the visit that the First Minister and I and the junior Ministers made to Brussels at the end of March, just before the Easter recess.

During his visit on 1 May 2007, President Barroso announced the creation of a European Commission task force. That unique initiative was taken to support the Executive's efforts to realise the benefits of peace by achieving a step change in economic performance to benefit all our citizens. The core members of the task force are the services of the European Commission with a role to play in the economic modernisation of regions, together with the European Investment Bank.

Danuta Hübner, the EU Commissioner for Regional Policy, led Commission officials in the delivery of that work. The task force report was presented to the then First Minister and me by Commissioner Hübner in Belfast on 14 April 2008.

The first part of the task force report provides a socio-economic profile of our region, and the second part looks at our achievements in the framework of EU policies over the period 2000-06. The report gives us both a stock take on our current position and a road map for enhanced engagement with Europe. It makes suggestions for possible activities that can be undertaken over the 2007-2013 financial period to maximise the benefits to our region, in line with the EU growth and jobs strategy. The sectors covered are agriculture and rural development; education and training; employment and social policy; enterprise; environment; fisheries; regional development; research; and transport and energy.

President Barroso was clear that the task force was a long-term commitment and that it was, as he said, a marathon rather than a sprint. It was envisaged that the Commission would accompany us in this work through to the end of the current EU financial period in 2013. Over this period, European regional aid to western economies is being phased out, and we will need to rely increasingly on our own resources.

Initially, the task force assisted with the rapid implementation of the 2007-2013 socio-economic

development programmes. However, its underlying objective is to bring the region more firmly into the European networks that make up the knowledge economies, especially Commission networks that can assist the Executive to become more involved in the shaping of EU policies.

The Executive's response to the Barroso task force report renews our approach to Europe, which was first outlined in the strategy document for 2006-2010 entitled 'Taking our Place in Europe', which is a high-level, overarching framework for outward- and forward-looking engagement with the European Union.

In developing its European policy and programme priorities, the Executive want:

"To engage more effectively with the European Union, and its policies and initiatives, to help us to achieve the Executive's Programme for Government priorities, particularly in relation to growing a dynamic, innovative economy and helping us to achieve a shared, better and sustainable future for all."

Members have been provided with the web link to the Executive's document entitled 'Priorities for European Engagement', which sets out the Executive's collective response to the European Commission's task force report on the North. It includes an action plan containing our European policy and programme priorities for the year 2008-09. Copies of the document have been placed in the Assembly Library.

That document marks an important watershed, as the Executive reinvigorate our engagement with Europe. It is the first time that we have identified our collective European policy and programme priorities. That is a substantial achievement, and the Executive have established a framework for mainstreaming Europe within each Department's strategic and financial planning processes.

The action plan covers a nine-month period, from 1 July 2008 to 31 March 2009, and reports on progress to 31 December 2008. Good progress has been made against key targets during the first six months of the plan's implementation, with half of the targets having been met. For example, we have provided formal input on 12 EU policy areas of relevance to us; increased the number of projects that secure funding from competitive EU programmes; and increased Civil Service secondments to Brussels, with 10 staff placed in 2008.

The action plan was compiled on a financial-year basis. The intention behind that was to align European policy and programme priorities with other departmental activities in order to synchronise quarterly monitoring with normal business and Programme for Government reporting cycles. Biannual progress reports will be delivered by the Barroso task force working group, which is chaired by junior Ministers and attended by deputy secretary representatives from each Department.

The action plan will roll forward from one financial year to the next. At the end of each business year, annual reports on achievement will be compiled and forwarded to the Executive for consideration, along with a draft plan containing European priorities and new targets for the year ahead. Each year, in early summer, OFMDFM Ministers will travel to Brussels to discuss progress with the European Commission and seek support for the Executive's new action plan for the financial year ahead.

The Executive are committed to expanding their role in Europe. There is a strong recognition that Europe is important to us and that many in Brussels are well disposed to us. We want to build on that and continue to develop the best possible relationships with other Europeans. We are committed to playing a full part in Europe. We will continue to build influence and help shape EU policy formulation and decision making to ensure that we obtain the best possible outcomes for our citizens and businesses.

In common with the rest of the world, the Executive have considered how best to respond to the crisis in the world's financial systems and the ensuing global economic downturn. Resolving those problems will require collective action and strong alliances between regions and states across Europe. As Members are aware, the economy is the main focus of our Programme for Government as we build a prosperous, inclusive and equal society. We have seized the opportunity and are maximising the goodwill that exists towards us in Europe. That is especially important given the global economic downturn.

We will take advantage of every source of help in order to meet our economic needs and fulfil our Programme for Government objectives. We offer one of the most competitive business opportunities in western Europe. We will continue to strengthen our business links with Europe, ensuring that we are recognised as a dynamic and innovative region that is capable of securing significant inward investment when the global economy recovers.

When we presented our response formally to President Barroso in Brussels, he congratulated us on our action plan and our European priorities. Overall, our meeting was very effective, with the president reaffirming his support for the Executive and the region. He said that the Commission's services would partner us in our continued European engagement. President Barroso encouraged us to make use of all available EU instruments in taking that work forward. He said that we were ahead of many other regions, and he noted the comprehensive nature of the action plan and the impressive start that we had made.

We took the opportunity to raise a number of issues of concern with President Barroso, seeking his advice and



support. Those issues included a state aid application by Bombardier for the development of its CSeries project, which is being assessed by the Commission's competition services. We briefed the president on the Executive's plans for the Titanic signature tourism project. We discussed our ongoing work to develop proposals for an international centre of excellence dedicated to peace building and conflict resolution. President Barroso congratulated us on our progress on those issues.

The president expressed his sympathies regarding the recent shootings here and gave his full support for our joint actions following those reprehensible and pointless events. He recognised the support that we received from all political parties and from wider civic society. The president outlined the widespread pressures caused by the global economic downturn and urged the innovative use of public money to address those pressures. We came away with a strong signal of his willingness to help and support us.

During our visit to Brussels, we met the President of the European Parliament, Hans-Gert Pöttering, who addressed the House last year; trade commissioner, Baroness Ashton; internal market commissioner, Charlie McCreevy; the Irish and British ambassadors to the European Union and the British ambassador to Belgium. At a reception in our Executive's office, we met a wide range of people from the EU institutions and from other regions operating in Brussels. Everyone we spoke to endorsed our strategy and made offers of practical support. Some of those offers have already led to direct interventions on our behalf by the commissioners that we met.

We were reminded of the difficulties and uncertainties around the EU institutions this year following changes in the Parliament and the Commission and the potential outworking of the Lisbon Treaty, not to mention the overriding priority of dealing with the economic downturn. Against all that, we have a solid strategy and much support and goodwill to help us implement it.

10.45 am

The key task force engagements for 2009-2010 include: a delegation of our officials to visit Brussels in the spring to work with their Commission counterparts on policy and programme content in the 2009-2010 action plan; a ministerial visit to Brussels in the summer to build support for the Executive's 2009-2010 European priorities; and a return inward visit by European officials in the late autumn to outline the new Commission's policy priorities for 2010 and to provide insight into the strategic vision and aims of the new college of commissioners over its five-year mandate.

Those key engagements, which will build on the relationships that are already in place, will help to maintain the political profile of the Executive during a

period of institutional uncertainty in Europe. Informal contacts between officials on both sides will continue and be reinforced in the months ahead.

We have made an excellent start to building closer relations with Europe. We have a comprehensive Commission stock take analysis on the extent and depth of our European relations and a high-level overarching strategy for European engagement to guide us. For the first time, we have a set of collective European policy and programme priorities and a mechanism whereby Europe is mainstreamed in Departments' strategic and financial planning processes. The publication of the Executive's 'Priorities for European Engagement: Action Plan 2008-2009' marks a step change in our relations with the European Union.

As the Barroso Commission draws to a close, we will work hard to maintain and enhance our profile in Brussels. We will ensure that we have a strong platform from which to launch future political engagement with a new college of commissioners and the European Parliament. Our engagement will be ambitious, innovative and strategic.

In the meantime, the First Minister and I are grateful to Ministers and to Members of the Assembly for their support. We will, naturally, update the Assembly on further developments as appropriate.

**The Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mr Kennedy):** I thank the deputy First Minister for his statement, and I am grateful for the opportunity to respond to it.

What changes, if any, did the Executive make to reflect the concerns that were raised by the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister in its response to the Department on the Executive's action plan and those reflected by other Statutory Committees? My Committee sent its response to the Department. How will OFMDFM ensure that it fulfils its role as the co-ordinating body that oversees the work not only of its own Department but of the other Northern Ireland Departments in its response to the task force report and implementation? What benchmarks are the First Minister and deputy First Minister putting down to measure the implementation of the task force report and its practical outworkings for the Northern Ireland economy?

The deputy First Minister will be aware of objective 7 in the task force report, which is designed to record and share the experience of peace building and conflict resolution in Northern Ireland. OFMDFM is the lead Department in developing proposals for international research into peace building, and, although there are indications that the Department is bringing that forward, no timetable has yet been provided. Is the

deputy First Minister in a position to indicate a timescale for all that important work?

**The deputy First Minister:** The Chairperson of the Committee asked several questions. The role of junior Ministers will be critical. They will be charged with the responsibility to take that forward, under our tutelage, of course. The Executive and the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister will be concerned about ensuring that benchmarks are put in place that accurately reflect the progress that has been made over the period.

We have much to offer our European partners on the issue of conflict transformation and peace building. In fact, at all of the engagements in which we were involved in Brussels, it was accepted by everybody that there is much interest around the world in our story of conflict resolution and transformation. It is quite clear that the European Union has contributed substantially to the peace process: £1.3 billion has been allocated across the Peace I, II, and III programmes.

We will develop proposals for an international centre of excellence that is dedicated to peace building and conflict resolution. That will allow the experience of building peace and conflict transformation in our society to be shared with other European regions and internationally. We strongly support the commitment that the Commission has shown to the development of such an international facility, which will be a legacy for our society and will enable it to support and help other nations in moving out of conflict and creating a better future for their communities. We welcome the Commission's continued support for the centre of excellence as we develop the concept and move towards the production of a business plan. We have been encouraged by other key European players to move that work forward.

In the past few days, I have been involved personally, at the invitation of a peace group based in County Donegal, in discussions with former members of the Israel Defence Forces and former Palestinian prisoners. I spoke to some 28 people who were keen to come to the island of Ireland and to listen to the experiences that people here have of conflict transformation.

All Members are aware of various visits that have been made to the Assembly. For example, two large delegations of Iraqi parliamentarians have visited this place in the past 18 months. People from the Assembly have travelled to various parts of the world at the request of others. It is not that we seek that work; the fact is that there is tremendous interest, and invitations are issued. Many members of the political parties that are represented in the Assembly have been on those trips.

All of that is work in progress. We have made a good start. Clearly, the action plan is now in place. It is

comprehensive and deals with all the issues. As we go forward, we will, obviously, continue to refine our approach and intensify our engagement, particularly through the responsibilities of Departments, as they are key players in the process.

**Mr Moutray:** Can the deputy First Minister indicate what role there is for the Province's three MEPs alongside the Executive in increasing engagement with Brussels and securing the optimum outcome for Northern Ireland?

**The deputy First Minister:** Obviously, without getting into the personalities, our three MEPs have their own responsibilities as regards their representation at the European Parliament. On every occasion when the First Minister and I engage with Europe, we seek to ensure that all three MEPs are updated on the work in which we are involved. It is fair to say that, although all three of them are intensely interested in our work, they are not always interested in engagement with us on how we deal with that work. I refer to one MEP in particular. In that regard, he does himself and the people whom he represents a disservice.

As far as the other two MEPs are concerned, it is clear that they are interested in engagement with the Executive at the level of First Minister and deputy First Minister and that they support our efforts to intensify our engagement with Europe. Indeed, they have advocated that on a number of occasions.

**Mr P Maskey:** Ba mhaith liom fáilte a chur roimh ráiteas an Aire.

Can the deputy First Minister describe the visit's success and what it has achieved in more detail? Go raibh maith agat.

**The deputy First Minister:** The visit was immensely successful. Its main purpose was to demonstrate our commitment to European engagement and to show that we fully appreciate the unprecedented opportunity that has been presented by President Barroso's task force for us to become more competitive and, thereby, enhance jobs and growth.

We gave the president our response priorities for European engagement, including the action plan that outlined our targets for May 2008 to March 2009. This is the first time that locally elected Ministers have agreed European priorities collectively, and it showed our European partners that we can, and will, play a full, collective role in Europe.

We took the opportunity to raise local concerns. In Brussels, everyone to whom we spoke is now aware of the importance of the Bombardier C Series, and people at the highest level now follow that case with our interests in mind. Furthermore, we spoke about the Titanic project's importance in regenerating the entire city of Belfast and encouraged a timely assessment of

the proposal. During all our meetings with two presidents, two commissioners and two permanent representatives, we emphasised that, despite the efforts of those who are opposed to the peace process, we can and will work together for the benefit of all the people in the region.

We expressed our desire to become more involved in European policy networks and to seek new sources of funding. Moreover, we emphasised a two-way approach that gives something back through sharing our experience in areas in which we have skills that others require. Our high level of engagement, not only during the recent visit but during all previous visits, and the fact that President Barroso took the trouble to visit here — the first time that a head of the European Commission had visited Parliament Buildings — demonstrates that people in Europe are well disposed to the situation here and are anxious to help. We appreciate that very much.

**Mrs D Kelly:** I welcome today's statement. I am sure that it is entirely coincidental that it was scheduled after the SDLP tabled a no-day-named motion to discuss the Barroso report.

The Executive's response to the report has taken almost as long as the Barroso Commission took to report in the first instance. I am disappointed about the lengthy delays. Why did the deputy First Minister's response make no reference to Commissioner Hübner's offer of a place at her Cabinet table for a Member of the Northern Ireland Assembly? Will the Executive accept that offer? If so, how and when?

The Barroso report refers to the impact of the community and voluntary sector. In particular, it says that that sector had:

"proved their capacity to deliver under difficult conditions".

However, the deputy First Minister's statement does not refer to that sector, which faces difficulties during the economic downturn. Other than through the junior Ministers, the First Minister and the deputy First Minister, how will the Assembly build better relationships with Europe? Will a special Committee or interdepartmental working group be established?

The report is very aspirational. *[Interruption.]* I have one further question. All the Committees —

**Mr Speaker:** The Member must ask a question.

**Mrs D Kelly:** The Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister asked how specific actions will be measured against outcomes contained in the Barroso report. How will we take that process forward?

**The deputy First Minister:** It is difficult to respond to that ramble. However, when some people ask questions, they are interested only in engaging in a point-scoring exercise. I prefer people to approach the matter from a genuine point of view as opposed —

**Mrs D Kelly:** I am.

**The deputy First Minister:** I do not accept that. We are involved in an important body of work, and Members will be aware that considerable work was undertaken in order to develop a response to President Barroso's report. The content of the Executive's action plan is based on input from all Departments. This is the first time that the Executive have agreed a collective European policy and programme priorities. The first Administration, which was led by the SDLP and the Ulster Unionist Party, did not even attempt to do that. No previous Administration for this region has produced such a document.

However, bringing together and agreeing sectoral policy and programme content is a time-consuming process.

11.00 am

We also had to put in place an implementation mechanism to mainstream Europe in each Department's strategic planning process to ensure that progress was monitored and reported back to the Executive. That has been achieved. As I said, the Executive have mandated junior Ministers to chair an interdepartmental working group to oversee implementation and provide ongoing strategic leadership. That group will identify a set of key targets for the 2009-2010 financial year that build on progress to date, and the next meeting of the group is scheduled for 30 April.

As we move forward — and taking on board some of the nit-picking in the question — the fact remains that we are now seriously engaged with the European Community, probably for the first time in the history of the Assembly. Others need to play a responsible role in supporting the work that we are doing, rather than sitting back and continually carping over issues that could quite easily be accommodated by a sensible discussion between the Executive, OFMDFM, and the OFMDFM Committee. We are quite willing to take on board everyone's points.

The issue of the voluntary and community sector is very important to us, and we have clearly shown that with the inclusion of representatives from that sector in the cross-sector advisory forum. As we move forward, the measures and outcomes will be further refined by the Barroso working group, but they will obviously have to be linked to departmental planning processes.

**Dr Farry:** I thank the deputy First Minister for his statement. I am sure that he would agree that the reputation of Northern Ireland in Europe has never been greater than it is today. However, the flip side of that coin is that the pressure on us to take full advantage of the opportunity is very acute.

To return to the issue of measures, I am conscious that the Executive have targets with respect to gross



value added (GVA) conversions within the United Kingdom. Has any consideration been given to attempting to introduce GVA targets across Europe, so that Northern Ireland's performance can be compared to that of other regions of the European Union? I understand that the system has a rather unfortunate acronym — NUTS. Technically, those targets could be introduced, as it would be essentially a political decision.

In relation to the Executive's response to the Barroso task force report, great play is made of the importance of the Executive's regional economic strategy, as well as the policy on cohesion, sharing and integration, neither of which is actually in place. To what extent will the absence of those policies undermine our ability to deliver on the initiatives?

**The deputy First Minister:** The first point is certainly something that can be considered, but obviously we could only undertake such consideration in consultation with our colleagues in the European Union. We understand the importance of ensuring that we move forward in a cohesive way and in a way that clearly recognises the great challenges that exist. The challenges are great; we have consistently heard — even over the course of the past days and weeks — of situations that are absolutely unpalatable to Members, with people being attacked in their own homes.

Much work is being done. We have spoken about this issue ad infinitum at Question Time on countless occasions in the past. There is still more work to do on agreeing and bringing forward the cohesion and sharing initiative, and I believe that we will manage to do that in the time ahead. I understand the criticisms that have been made about the delay; in my opinion, those criticisms are understandable.

We must recognise that there are tremendous opportunities for us. When I hear people, particularly on this side of the House, being rowdy and not being respectful in listening to answers that are being given, I detect an anxiety that the initiative in which we are involved is seen to be very much working in the interests of the people whom we represent. I obviously do not include the Alliance Party in that on this occasion.

I also failed to answer Dolores Kelly's question about the Hübner cabinet. We took up the offer of secondment; a civil servant was seconded for five months and has worked to advance our involvement in DG Regio. Danuta Hübner will not be a commissioner next time — she is standing as a candidate for the European Parliament. There will be a new commissioner, and we will continue to intensify our engagement as we go forward. However, that can only happen with the acceptance of the new commissioner, whoever that will be.

**Mr Weir:** I wonder whether the deputy First Minister will look again at the SDLP's offer to reconsider the

Hübner appointment. After all, it may be the only route by which Alban Maginness can get into Europe in the next few months — unless he enters the UEFA Cup next year.

One of the objectives of the Barroso task force was to identify existing funding programmes of which Northern Ireland could avail itself. Will the deputy First Minister comment on the efforts being made by the Executive to take advantage of schemes that deal with urban regeneration and small businesses, such as the joint European resources for micro to medium enterprises programme (JEREMIE) and the joint European support for sustainable investment in city areas programme (JESSICA)?

**The deputy First Minister:** We have been very interested in the JEREMIE and JESSICA programmes. There is no doubt that the Departments with responsibility for those areas will seek to take best advantage of what may be offered by the European Commission as we go forward.

Support for small businesses is critical. Even though we have had significant foreign direct investment, we understand the importance of indigenous businesses and the need to support them. All Departments, and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in particular, are aware of the opportunities available to us as a result of our intensified engagement with the European Union.

**Mr McLaughlin:** Go raibh maith agat. I welcome the deputy First Minister's statement. Given the current circumstances of global economic decline, it is quite clear that every region in the European Union will be clamouring for attention. The Assembly should genuinely welcome and validate the work of the First Minister, deputy First Minister and junior Ministers in securing what is a hugely significant beachhead.

The statement was comprehensive, so I will pick up on the meetings with Commissioners Ashton and McCreevy. What issues were discussed at those meetings, and what progress was made on those issues?

**The deputy First Minister:** To Commissioner Ashton, we explained the issue of the Bombardier state-aid application, as well as the importance of timing, the wider benefits of supplier contracts and the balance for the Netherlands and Italy. She understood the importance of those aspects clearly. Following that meeting, Baroness Ashton discussed the Bombardier application with the Commissioner for Competition, Neelie Kroes, and made her aware of the importance of the matter to us. It is too early to say whether that conversation will have a positive result. There are legal issues that have to be worked through, but Members can be assured that our views are being listened to.

We also highlighted our strength as an investment region with a young, well-educated workforce and a



competitive cost base in comparison with the rest of western Europe. Baroness Ashton said that it is important to raise our positive profile, because many other regions are represented in Brussels. She said that she would support future visits and expressed a desire to visit this region.

Commissioner McCreevy was also very supportive of the Bombardier state aid application for its CSeries project. He explained the importance of a full investigation into large-scale projects to ascertain whether they included elements that were incompatible with the single-market rules. However, he also undertook to raise the issue with the Commissioner for Competition's staff, to avoid the scenario whereby the project might be relocated to north America should the current application take an inordinately long time to be approved.

Commissioner McCreevy was less successful in predicting the winner of the Grand National; he offered the name of a horse that failed miserably in the race. By the way, Commissioner McCreevy is well noted for his knowledge of horse racing.

**Mr Elliott:** I will not comment on that last part of the deputy First Minister's response.

In his statement, the deputy First Minister said that President Barroso referred to the recent terrorist murders in Northern Ireland. Has the task force carried out any assessment of the impact that those murders might have had on the economy here and on European Union investment in particular?

**The deputy First Minister:** In our recent engagements with President Barroso, as well as with President Barack Obama and the US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, we dealt with the terrible events of last month in which three people lost their lives. It is significant that people in Europe are not fazed by any of that. Like their American counterparts, they were encouraged by the way in which all the political parties here came together to make it quite clear that that type of activity should stop and that it is totally unacceptable.

During our visit to the United States, the First Minister and I met key people who are involved in the film production industry. Based on our ability to reassure people about the situation here, Universal Studios announced recently that it will shoot a film in the Titanic Quarter in Belfast, with an investment of some £10 million and job opportunities for hundreds of people in Belfast.

Later today, the First Minister and I hope to make a further announcement that is even more significant, because it will demonstrate the willingness of another US company to make an even bigger film here in the future. If the project is successful and goes to plan, it will provide a much greater opportunity for longer-term jobs over a prolonged period.

Therefore, the leadership of all the parties in the Assembly has clearly reassured people in the United States of America. As a result, people have steadied, and film production companies have announced, and will announce, projects that will undoubtedly benefit people here in the time ahead.

Yesterday, the First Minister referred to the prospect of an announcement being made in the weeks ahead that is even more significant than that of Universal Studios and the announcement that will be made later today. That will be hugely significant, because it will involve a company from the United States of America that is also based in western Europe seriously investing in our project in the North.

Therefore, people are not fazed by what happened. They recognise that it was a real challenge for the institutions and that we have risen to that challenge. I believe that the European Union and the United States will continue to support us and that, in the end, we — the builders and constructors of our new society — will prevail over those who seek to destroy society.

**Mr A Maginness:** Despite Mr Weir's Cassandra-like prediction, I assure the deputy First Minister that when I am elected on 8 June 2009, I will engage fully with the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

It is proper and necessary that MEPs do that, and it is also proper that the Assembly co-operates with the European Union in order to develop relationships. My party certainly supports and welcomes today's statement, in so far as it goes. Although the statement is lacking in some detail, it is nonetheless a positive first step towards building that relationship.

The development of a relationship between ourselves and Europe is dependent on everybody's working together. That means not only those in the Assembly, but those in the Executive. How do the First Minister and deputy First Minister propose that all Departments be involved in the fullest development of policy and co-operation in the European Union? I see that as the key element in moving forward.

11.15 am

**The deputy First Minister:** We have a comprehensive action plan that the Executive supported unanimously. For the first time, our strategic priorities for Europe have been set out, and I think that the plan is a good indication of how this Administration is bedding down.

Our main challenge as a region is to achieve a step change in relations with Europe. I agree fully with what the Member said about the importance of that relationship. We need to speak with one voice, giving the same message across a range of European institutions on those matters that are of the most importance to our citizens.

We should engage in a positive, proactive and forward-looking manner that demonstrates our capabilities clearly. To achieve that, we need to mainstream European policy and government so that it is not viewed as an add-on matter. There should be seamless integration between local, regional and national approaches, as well as joined-up engagements across sectoral policy areas.

We need to progress our agenda through a period of institutional and leadership change in Europe that is set against the backdrop of global economic recession. As we all know, that will not be easy, but we have friends in Brussels, and we have the network and expertise to develop the relationships that are of the most importance to us.

Over the months ahead, the Barroso task force working group, which is chaired by junior Ministers Kelly and Donaldson, will refine our strategic approach to arriving at a set of key targets for the 2009-2010 financial year so that the progress that has been made already over the life of the current action plan can be built on. Of course, we expect that all Ministers will play a full role in trying to take as much advantage as we possibly can for the people whom we represent.

I know that the McGuinnesses all come from the same clan — they are descended from the Lords of Iveagh in County Down — so I do not think that even in his wildest dreams, the Member will imagine that I have any expectations that he will be returned as an MEP in the election. Certainly, the Derry McGuinnesses will vote for another candidate.

**Mr McElduff:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the deputy First Minister's very comprehensive statement. Will he define and characterise the main challenges ahead, specifically in the remainder of the 2009-2010 financial year? What are the real priorities that we should be knuckling down to work on?

**The deputy First Minister:** I explained in my previous answer that we have a comprehensive action plan, and I think that it is significant that the Executive supported it unanimously. It sets out our strategic priorities for Europe and indicates clearly how things are moving forward in this Administration.

As I said, our main challenges are to achieve a step change in our relations with Europe and for us all to speak with one voice, giving the same message across a range of European institutions. We have to recognise that the European Union cannot be an add on or an afterthought; it must be something that is taken very seriously indeed.

As we go forward, we will need to progress our agenda through a period of institutional and leadership change in Europe. It is a time of change here, and it is a time of change in Europe. I think that the greatest challenge that we face is the economic downturn,

which affects everywhere, not just here. I think that I stated before in the House that on a previous visit to Brussels, some very senior people in the European Union told us that they expected unemployment levels in Spain to reach around 20% by the end of this year. Therefore, ours is not the only region that is facing difficulties.

The economic downturn is a major challenge for us, but we have the Programme for Government, and a Budget, which will, obviously, be impacted upon to some extent by whatever comes out of the Budget in London tomorrow. The Executive will have to reflect on that and decide how best to take matters forward.

The big challenge, however, is the economic downturn, and we believe that building our relationships with the United States of America and the European Union is a hugely beneficial project in which to be engaged, particularly when we can see that there are opportunities that can bring assistance to our people at a time of economic difficulty.

**Mr McCallister:** The deputy First Minister said:

"European regional aid to western economies is being phased out and we will need to rely increasingly on our own resources."

Does that mean that nothing new is coming from the European Union; that we have only a limited window of, perhaps, the next four to five years in which to get some of that funding drawn down from the EU; and that we will have to rely much more on our own resources? Is that not a very worrying trend, in that, as Europe looks more eastwards, we can be almost forgotten about and sidelined?

**The deputy First Minister:** All of us are conscious of the fact that European Union enlargement has had a significant impact on funding and on the European Union's approach to the distribution of its funds. The EU has made it clear that it is prepared to continue its support for us until 2013. That does not mean that there will not be anything new or further for us.

Our job is, obviously, to continue to build our relationships and to intensify our engagement with the European Union. There are all sorts of future opportunities for us, and I believe that we can make important cases to the European Union that will be supported. However, that will depend on how innovative and imaginative our proposals and suggestions are, because we clearly know and understand that we will be involved in a rolling process. Our relationship with Europe will not continue until just 2013; it will continue well beyond 2013, and I believe that we will continue to take advantage of that relationship, even in the aftermath of the end of the funding stream, which is designated to end by 2013.

It comes down to making best use of the resources that Europe is making available to us, ensuring that they are invested in a way that brings real benefits to

the people whom we represent, but not for one minute accepting that 2013 is the cut-off point. We will continue to advocate, to make a case and to build the relationship, and I believe that we will continue to benefit from that relationship.

**Ms Anderson:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the deputy First Minister for the statement. The task force referred to a facility for peace-building and conflict resolution. The deputy First Minister, in his response to the Chairperson of the OFMDFM Committee, spoke of his efforts to assist others with peace-building and conflict resolution, and every now and again, he should know how much that is appreciated. We would like to commend the deputy First Minister for the work that he and many others are doing in that area. Will a conflict resolution facility be situated at Long Kesh?

**The deputy First Minister:** It is quite clear from speaking to people, not just in the European Union but throughout the world, that there is an intense interest in how conflict was resolved in this part of the world. When President Barroso came here two years ago, he clearly indicated that he regarded the establishment of a conflict resolution centre as important to the European Union.

As we go forward, we will have to do so on the basis that the Maze/Long Kesh site is of regional significance. In order to ensure its potential, we intend to develop to the full the site's economic, historical and reconciliation opportunities.

The delivery vehicle that will take the development forward will build on the work previously undertaken by the all-party Maze/Long Kesh consultation panel, utilising all elements of the site, including the listed buildings.

There is widespread European Commission support for the development of an international facility, which would take forward the key element of the EU strategy for promoting peace and transformation in member states, new joining states and internationally.

The peace-building transformation project would be recognised as a significant legacy to the European Union's peace investment here, and it has been increasingly shown around the world that sites that were previously linked with conflict are being recognised as key components of peace-building and reconciliation processes. Examples of that can be seen at Constitution Hill in Johannesburg, the World Trade Center site in New York and the ESMA space for memory and human rights in Buenos Aires.

The First Minister and I have indicated how we intend to move forward at the Maze/Long Kesh site in respect of putting in place a development commission to come forward to the Executive with proposals. I am as keen as anyone else to see what recommendations

are made, and, no doubt, when the commission is established, it will give serious consideration to how best to utilise the site in the interests of our economy.

**Mr O'Loan:** I, too, welcome the positive and very pro-European position presented in the report. It is not something that we have always seen from the deputy First Minister's party. There is a reference in the report to President Barroso's urging of the innovative use of public money to deal with the economic downturn and the barriers that EU rules on state aid may present to that. I am talking on a much wider front here than in the Bombardier C Series instance. EU rules on state aid already present a hindrance to certain measures that members of the Executive want to bring forward. Did Ministers go with a list of areas where there are such problems, and did they discuss the significant problem that state-aid rules may present if we use those innovative methods, as we need to do?

**The deputy First Minister:** On a number of occasions during this morning's contribution, I referred to the fact that we discussed the issue of Bombardier. However, more generally, we recognise and accept the challenge that has been put before us in respect of the need to use public money wisely.

President Barroso is obviously a politician of huge standing in Portugal and in the European Union, and he understands the importance of accountability and of people recognising their responsibilities as political leaders to ensure that that money, which is the people's money, is spent wisely and in the interests of the people.

Therefore, the issue was discussed in a general sense. However, as we move forward, through our intensified relationship with Europe, we need to continue to recognise that the issues that the Member articulated this morning are of concern to people here, as they relate to building our economy. As we go forward, we will continue our engagement with Europe in a fashion that will, hopefully, bring benefits to the people whom we represent.

The economic recovery plan being discussed by the Commission is about relaxing barriers. That is important, particularly in a time of economic downturn, not only in respect of our relationship with Europe, but in the context of how we work with our situation here. We must continue to reflect on that, and, hopefully, put in place measures that will see us being in a position to counteract the worst effects of the economic downturn. However, I agree with the Member that it is important that we deal with those issues in a way that will get us a result.

However, the European Union has its rules and competition regulations, and all member states must abide by those. At the same time, if those rules and regulations can be changed or refined, we, as an Administration, have a responsibility to make the case.



11.30 pm

## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

### Educational Underachievement

**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 to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes.

**Dr McDonnell:** I beg to move

That this Assembly recognises the threat to future prosperity and well-being posed by educational underachievement in many communities; and calls on the Executive, and the Minister of Education in particular, to produce a cross-cutting departmental action programme designed to tackle educational underachievement.

I thank the Deputy Speaker, the Speaker and the Business Committee for giving the House the opportunity to have the debate today. I also thank the Minister of Education for her attendance.

Educational underachievement is one of the most serious and important issues faced by society, and it is an issue that we must tackle and solve. Although an hour and a half is a good starting point, we need much more time to deal with the issue in its fullness.

Educational underachievement is one of the biggest challenges and threats to the political, social and economic stability of our society. Although the damage and the lasting effects of it may not be realised for 10 or 15 years, nevertheless, I believe — and many will agree with me — that it is a serious threat. Huge swathes of our children and young people are living in disadvantaged areas in predominantly, but not exclusively, loyalist working-class areas. They are being failed severely by our political system and with respect to educational achievement.

When many of those children are asked what they would like to be when they grow up, some as young as seven have told me that they want to be like former paramilitaries or drug dealers. That is because when they look around them they see that those who are living on the edges of crime have a lot of money and drive big cars. In other primary schools, principals have told me that children as young as seven are having suicidal thoughts. Furthermore, those principals are deeply concerned that an increasing amount of staff time is being taken up with social-welfare work, such as completing disability living allowance (DLA) forms for parents, rather than with teaching.

A tremendous amount of good work is being done in our schools, and I recognise the valuable work that is being carried out by principals, teachers and other school staff in supporting our children and young people. However, in spite of all of that good work, we still have the very serious problem of low educational attainment and underachievement, particularly in socially deprived areas. If we ignore the severity of that, we do so not just to the detriment of those children, but also to the detriment of our society 10, 15 or 20 years down the road.

Figures from the Department of Education show that 4,500 of our children leave primary school without adequate literacy and numeracy skills. Almost half of our young people — 47% — are unable to attain at least a grade-C pass in English or maths at GCSE level. The horrifying reality for those children and young people is that they face a very bleak economic future in which they are at serious risk of underemployment or of succumbing to crime and criminal activity.

The problem with educational underachievement and low achievement is that they are complex and multifaceted issues. If we are serious about tackling them, and about helping those children, we must have a multifaceted, cross-departmental approach that is led, I hasten to add, by the Department of Education.

Research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation clearly demonstrates that most children's school experience is determined by the level of disadvantage they face in the communities from which they come. On average, the higher the level of deprivation in the local community, the lower the proportion of school leavers who will enter further or higher education. All existing research confirms that there is a direct link between disadvantage and educational underachievement. Eligibility for free school meals, high levels of unemployment, single parent households and parents with low educational achievement are factors associated with children's poor educational achievement. Therefore, any cross-departmental action programme must have a strong anti-poverty element.

Attempting to address educational underachievement without taking cognisance of and addressing social deprivation is, in my opinion, a waste of time and effort. It is like seed falling on stony ground; it will not grow. It is like putting a sticking plaster on the symptoms without trying to deal with the root cause. If social deprivation, as one of the major causes of educational underachievement, is not addressed as part of a coherent strategy, we will be simply ensuring that the vicious circle of underachievement continues into the next generation and into the one after that unabated.

Getting to grips with educational underachievement in the home is a priority. In order to succeed, a cross-cutting departmental action programme must be



brought into every child's home. Otherwise, underachievement, or low achievement, will not be tackled.

The key is to identify children at risk from the moment they are born, or shortly afterwards, and to deliver an effective early-years support service to help parents improve parenting and early learning. The case for a proactive, interventionist support service is strongest in the case of young parents, particularly teenage parents — a high proportion of whom are, unfortunately, found in areas of severe social deprivation.

Time and again, active parental involvement in a child's education has been shown to improve that child's attendance and achievement at school and to encourage a much more positive attitude to school and learning. It is vital that we create the circumstances in which all parents are involved and engaged with their children's school and learning as much as possible. Schools should take steps to encourage parents, engage with them and make them feel welcome and at home in school. It has been proven that information evenings and coffee mornings have, in many cases, helped and encouraged parental involvement.

Where possible, when a child is having a particularly difficult time, schools should also have a home liaison officer to help teachers assess that child's level of development and build a positive relationship with the parents outside the school setting.

A lot can also be done in the school. The quality of a school plays a fundamental role in the fight against underachievement. I believe strongly that there is a need for a co-ordinated cross-departmental action programme throughout all our primary schools, because children's life chances are determined by the quality of education they receive. Elements of that action programme must involve better funding for primary schools, targeted and focused directly on disadvantaged low-achieving pupils. Indeed, it should not just be focused on low achievers, but on potential high achievers who are underachieving.

A crucial element for success is to have a better pupil:teacher ratio in disadvantaged areas and struggling schools — I cannot emphasise that point enough. No child in a disadvantaged area should be in a class with more than 20 pupils in it.

Another strand should be the implementation of a linguistic-phonetics programme to improve the literacy and numeracy levels of children who are struggling to reach even basic standards. Linguistic phonetics is a cost-effective alternative to reading recovery and has been proven to raise standards, particularly in schools in disadvantaged areas.

Better funding must be provided to help special-needs staff to provide the essential emotional and mental support that troubled children need, although that funding needs to be efficiently and effectively

targeted. Where it is needed, a safe cooling-off room should be provided in schools to ensure that children with severe anger-management issues and mental and emotional pain can find a secluded space.

Another suggestion is that schools could work with community health organisations to provide children with relaxation classes and support of that nature. The extended schools programme includes breakfast clubs and after-school clubs, where after-school activities provide children who live in unstable circumstances — such as unstable families — with some security and refuge.

I know that I am running out of time — I have a few seconds left. There is a lot to be done. I appeal to colleagues across the Assembly to make this issue a priority.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The Member should bring his remarks to a conclusion.

**Dr McDonnell:** Research shows that educational underachievement costs our community in the region of £1 billion each year in lost earnings. That should be enough of a reason to deal with this issue. The effects of underachievement in education lead right through to the failings and difficulties found in our economy.

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

**Dr McDonnell:** I urge others to support this motion.

**The Chairperson of the Committee for Education (Mr Storey):** My opening comments will be as Chairperson of the Education Committee, and then I will make some comments as a Member of the House.

In February 2008, the Education Committee received a briefing from the Department of Education about the consultation on a policy for school improvement, 'Every School a Good School'. The Committee provided an interim response to that consultation, which is available on the Committee's website. I will highlight some of the points that the Committee raised and the responses that were given at the time with regard to tackling educational underachievement.

The points that the Committee raised include the following concerns: not enough credence is given to socio-economic impact; there should be more encouragement of good practice and more effective use of existing school data; and there should be a proper balance regarding board of governors' interventions or non-interventions on failing school performance. Currently, the number of funding streams that are available to schools stands at 57 — that needs to be dramatically reduced so that there can be a reduction in the non-teaching time that we have in our schools. A needs-based analysis approach should be used to direct more funding to schools in disadvantaged areas.

At its meeting tomorrow, the Committee will question senior officials from the Department of Education

about how those and other points are reflected in the final school-improvement policy document, which I understand will be published very soon. That is well overdue, as the consultation period on the policy closed some 13 months ago. Similarly, the Committee awaits the Department's final strategy for raising achievement in literacy and numeracy. The consultation on that piece of work closed almost five months ago. Prior to that, the Committee questioned members of the literacy and numeracy task force that was set up following the Public Accounts Committee inquiry into the £40 million that was spent — or, I should say, misspent — on numeracy and literacy.

That is the factual position with regard to the Education Committee. I now speak as a Member of the House. I am sure that we will hear the Minister of Education saying how much she places the blame for poor educational performance in socially and economically deprived areas on academic selection and how she sees that as a conspiracy to prevent children from such backgrounds from attaining educational success.

11.45 am

However, we should refer to research that the Department carried out in 2008. 'Literacy and Numeracy of Pupils in Northern Ireland: Good Practice in Literacy and Numeracy in British and Irish Cities' records that out of seven suggested reasons for the long tail of underachievement in Northern Ireland, in only one is the transition between primary and post-primary education described as "problematic", and it does not identify specifically the transfer test. Indeed, the first key finding of the 2008 study concluded:

"The empirical evidence shows that there are clusters of underperformance, firstly in schools in Belfast, and, secondly, in the controlled sector. Care should be taken however in drawing conclusions from these high-level patterns as the factors impacting on attainment are complex and interactive."

The underachievement of boys is one area that must be addressed, and that was highlighted in the 2008 data. One way to address the problem would be to deal with the poor representation of male teachers, particularly in the primary sector.

Among other factors that militate against genuine improvements is the Department's apparent obsession with having positive-only reporting, in which platitudes are more important than achieving real standards in skills such as calculation and grammar. It is unfortunate that we have a Department and a Minister that do not want to standardise testing in all our schools. Instead, we have a patchwork-quilt approach, which, depending on which area people examine or which set of statistics they use, gives different answers at different times. That is not a standardised approach.

Other factors that militate against —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The Member should bring his remarks to a close.

**The Chairperson of the Committee for Education:** I have much more to say, but, undoubtedly, we will come back to this matter. Suffice it to say, the DUP supports the motion.

**Mrs O'Neill:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I speak in favour of the motion.

I shall begin by quoting from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) anti-poverty and social inclusion strategy, Lifetime Opportunities, which states:

"The most important factors that influence a child's life chances are education and skills. To enable all young people to take full advantage of employment opportunities, we need to target support and arrange appropriate interventions aimed at increasing opportunities for young people to gain knowledge, skills and/or experience."

Since coming into office, the Minister of Education has implemented and overseen many changes that are based on equality and on improving outcomes for the young people who are going through our education system. All young people should be given the best — and all — opportunities to succeed, as well as the support that is necessary to nurture their aspirations in life. Presently, too many pupils do not reach their full potential, and there are still schools in which performance could be better. That fact was borne out by the recent Education and Training Inspectorate report, which we discussed not so long ago in the Chamber.

Every school is capable of, and should be striving for, improvement in teaching and learning. In order to harness that further, the Minister will launch the 'Every School a Good School' policy, which is pupil centred and has equality and improvement at its heart. It will ensure that every young person has access to a high standard of education, and it will tackle the barriers that prevent some young people achieving their potential.

The policy mentions strengthening links with the community, and when moving the motion, Alasdair McDonnell talked about how important it is to get parents and the community involved. Some parents may not have had a positive experience in education, so we must work with them to raise their aspirations for their children and to maintain a positive engagement with learning.

Much good work is being done in the field of early-years education. As we all know, learning starts before a child enters formal education in primary 1. I visited recently the Little Flower Nursery School, which is in my area and which is an excellent example of the good work that is being done in that sector to prepare children for the formal education that lies ahead of them. I welcome the fact that the Minister is

developing an early-years strategy to provide a curriculum for our youngest students.

Other programmes —

**Mr Storey:** I welcome the Member's comments about the early-years strategy — the nought-to-six strategy — but does she not agree that by the time that we see it, it is probable that a lot of children will have left school and gone on to university? We have been waiting for that strategy since the Assembly came back.

The Committee for Education expected to receive a report at tomorrow's meeting, but we believe that we will receive only a two-page summary, and that nothing is happening.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The Member has an extra minute.

**Mrs O'Neill:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I thank the Member for his intervention, but, surely, it is more important to get the strategy right than rush it along merely to suit his own needs.

Other programmes that have been implemented by the Minister include the revised curriculum and the entitlement framework, which ensure that young people have access to a wide range of subjects. Those programmes have been implemented in conjunction with the Department for Employment and Learning in respect of students aged 14 to 19. Therefore, cross-departmental work is ongoing. There are a number of public service agreement (PSA) targets in the Programme for Government, and we look forward to them being met.

There is also a literacy and numeracy strategy, which aims to address the startling statistics that have been debated many times in the Chamber: that too many children are leaving primary schools without reaching adequate levels of literacy and numeracy. The strategy also deals with the fact that too many children leave formal education with five, or fewer, GCSEs.

Children with special educational needs — those children who need additional support over and above that of their peers.

**Mr Storey:** *[Interruption.]*

**Mrs O'Neill:** Who in the Executive is delaying it? The current special educational needs system is piecemeal and inconsistent. In fact, individuals in some board areas have to wait for up to four years for an assessment. I believe that the proposals that the Minister of Education has put to the Executive are being held up by the DUP.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order. I ask Members to not engage in exchanges across the Floor. Members should talk through the Chair, and they should challenge papers when they are speaking — not when another Member is speaking.

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Minister of Education has tabled proposals at Executive meetings, but the DUP is holding them up; it is holding up £25 million of additional investment for children with special educational needs.

**Mr Storey:** *[Interruption.]*

**Mrs O'Neill:** The truth hurts. The DUP should stop blocking those proposals and the changes for children who need additional support.

The changes that I have outlined briefly — as well as many others — are excellent initiatives that are being taken forward by the Minister, and they will assist in preparing children and young people for the challenges that they will face in life. They will tackle educational underachievement and put equality to the core of education. Go raibh maith agat.

**Mr Elliott:** I thank Dr McDonnell for proposing the motion. It reflects what we in the Ulster Unionist Party have been saying for some time: that the main battle in education in Northern Ireland is educational underachievement. The Assembly has wasted huge amounts of collective energy and time going round in circles on the transfer procedure, while most children are being failed by the system before they reach the age of 11.

It is clear that the Minister of Education, and others, have taken their eyes off the ball in the process. In pursuing an ideological crusade against grammar schools, the Minister has ignored the children whom she claims to want to help the most. However, as I am sure the debate will highlight; the removal of academic criteria and the destruction of the system that is in place will not be the golden ticket that will ensure that boys and girls from socially deprived backgrounds, and others, will not suffer educational underachievement and the lifelong difficulties that it brings with it.

Only a co-ordinated approach that tackles educational and social problems will solve the problem. We need to ensure that children are given greater support in the classroom, after school and in the home to increase opportunity and improve social mobility in Northern Ireland. However, it appears that in spite of the Minister of Education, the performance of schools in Northern Ireland has been improving, and it is true to say that our system, in many respects, is the envy of many other areas throughout the United Kingdom and further afield.

However, there is still a large proportion of children who leave school without adequate qualifications. Statistics show that that trend is linked to social deprivation. The more socially disadvantaged an individual's background, the more likely it is that he or she will fail. That applies to children who go to grammar or mainstream secondary schools. Only 37% of socially disadvantaged pupils achieve a level-2



qualification. In primary schools, test scores and attainment gaps between high and low socio-economic-status children widen as the children develop, with the most significant increase between the ages of five and 10.

By the age of 11, children who attend schools that have higher levels of deprivation are less likely to have reached level 4 at Key Stage 2, compared to 11-year-olds on average. However, those figures will not be changed by removing the use of academic criteria or by putting in place a postcode lottery system for our schools, which are two measures that the Minister has proposed.

We need a co-ordinated approach that provides support in the home; preschool facilities and opportunities; better primary-school funding; extended schools programmes; and raising the bar across post-primary education. In addition, the Executive must get their act together to tackle poverty, especially child poverty.

Unfortunately, very little of that has happened. Yesterday, we debated childcare strategy, which raised many issues that are relevant to today's debate — the two are almost inextricably linked. The nought-to-six-year-old strategy was specifically mentioned. I hope that the Minister will tell us today that that early-years strategy will soon be in place; that it is not simply another consultation document and that it will deal with areas that can be delivered as soon as reasonably possible.

The disparity in funding between primary and secondary schools has resulted in unacceptable standards in many primary schools. Early intervention is crucial to improving the life chances of many children. We need the comprehensive nought-to-six-year-old strategy that I talked about.

Professor James Heckman comprehensively highlighted that the life chances of individuals and the success of our overall strategy and economy in the long term is reliant on correct and consistent educational support being made available.

We need a co-ordinated approach to tackle educational underachievement, and we need to secure long-term funding for that plan. I call upon the Minister of Education to start to tackle the underachievement that she claims to care so much about. Furthermore, I call on her and others to make a commitment to social mobility and the improvement of life chances.

I support the motion.

**Mr Lunn:** The Alliance Party welcomes and supports the motion. However, I am sure that I am not the only member of the Committee for Education who, on seeing the Order Paper, had a quiet inward groan at the thought of another education debate. This one,

though, is timely and constructive. It goes right to the heart of the problem and covers all aspects of the education debate as it highlights that the outcome of our education system is educational underachievement, particularly amongst young boys.

The failure of our system to enable every child to realise his or her potential is at the heart of the problem. We constantly hear about the 25% of children who leave school without qualifications, many of whom, for various reasons, give up trying before they even reach school-leaving age. We also have the stigma of failure that is attached to the 11-plus, which, I hope, is now consigned to history.

I listened with interest to Mr Elliott's comments about our school system being the envy of the world. If that is the case, why are we having this discussion? He cannot have it both ways. The top end may be the envy of the world, but the bottom end is a national disgrace.

The extent of that failure has been highlighted in reports from the Audit Office, the Public Accounts Committee, the chief inspector of schools and a 2008 report by PricewaterhouseCoopers. That last report highlighted various issues, including the lack of parental involvement in children's education and the shortage of positive role models, which Dr McDonnell mentioned. It also mentioned the lack of male role models, including fathers and male teachers, which Mr Storey mentioned. The report's final comment was that there should be a more joined-up approach across the Executive and the Assembly to ensure that all Departments and related agencies work together towards improving literacy and numeracy skills. That is the thrust of the motion, and, as it comes from PricewaterhouseCoopers and the SDLP, it must be right.

The motion and the report point to the basic problem that if people cannot read and write to a decent standard at an early age, they cannot learn properly. If children cannot transfer from primary to secondary level equipped with those basic skills, they will struggle through secondary level into adult life. They also risk having difficulties with employment, social interaction and self-esteem. Dr McDonnell's motion refers to that threat existing in many of our communities.

*12.00 noon*

That is also the reason why so many of our employers had to recruit from abroad during the good times of the past few years, because suitably trained school leavers were not coming forward. Employers are not expecting graduates or Einsteins but people trained in certain skills to an appropriate level. One of our major employers set up a school to teach English to foreign workers and discovered, to his amazement and pleasure, that just as many local people were taking up the offer because, having obtained employment, they discovered that they were also lacking in basic literacy and numeracy skills.



I believe that the Minister recognises those problems and is trying to address them in her various initiatives to date. However, it is a slow process, and it will take time. One cannot do a handbrake turn when driving an oil tanker. There should be a gradual reallocation of funding to early-years provision and, perhaps, a re-evaluation of programmes such as Reading Recovery and linguistic phonics. Dr McDonnell thought that one was better than the other. I do not know, but both are underfunded, and we are not really doing a good job. Those programmes should be re-evaluated, with the major goal of improving standards at our secondary schools.

I acknowledge teachers' performances and efforts at all levels. Nothing that I say should be taken as a criticism of teachers, because they really do their best. However, we need to align skills, which should be taught with employment demands in mind. All those matters are on the agenda in addition to, I hope, the continuing nonsense of separate school systems and the cost of that division.

I agree with the proposer that there is a need for all Departments — notably DEL, DSD, DHSSPS and DE — to work up programmes to give every child the opportunity to realise his or her full potential. They cannot all become professors or Einsteins, but we should be able to ensure that they leave school with a sense of achievement that they have done their best and that the school has got the best out of them.

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

**Mr Lunn:** I support the motion.

**Miss McIlveen:** When I read the text of the motion, I was reminded of the debate held in the Chamber in March 2009 on a motion tabled in my name and in those of my colleagues Mr Storey, Mr McCausland and Mr Poots concerning the recent report from the chief inspector of the Education and Training Inspectorate. The text of that motion provided the Minister with what my party and I believe is readily achievable and absolutely necessary to address the deficiencies in our education system, deficiencies that the Minister chooses to ignore and that often worsen through reductions in funding in key areas.

The Minister deflects public attention away from those issues by playing a game of distraction with the issue of academic selection. In his report, the chief inspector states that we are failing substantial numbers of our children and their families, and he should be levelling the blame squarely with the Minister. When we discover that one fifth of our children cannot read, write and count to an appropriate standard after seven years of primary education, we know that action must be taken. Every school is not a good school if those are the results. Without the basics of reading, writing and numeracy, how do we expect those children to achieve

their potential? How do we expect those children to feel engaged in education, and how can we expect discipline, good attendance and good results when they are disadvantaged before they even begin their secondary education?

Time and again, I have referred to the lack of investment in early years. As Mr Elliott said, that was the topic of yesterday's debate on childcare, which is inextricably linked to today's motion. Many places offer excellent facilities, but funding is limited. I will not rehearse the statistics again, but it is widely accepted that early-years learning will improve a child's learning skills. However, it remains disappointingly low on the Minister's priority list. The chief inspector's report advises on nursery provision, half of which is deemed to be very good or better. However, in the voluntary and private sectors, that level drops to one third, which is hardly a ringing endorsement. What has the Minister of Education done to address that problem? She has been fighting the good fight against the post-primary elitist schools by using the politics of distraction. The problems can only be tackled pre-secondary school and by creating a good foundation for learning pre-primary school.

In the debate in March, the DUP called on the Minister to place greater focus on early-years and primary education and to address the low levels of funding and the pupil:teacher ratio. We suggested that she should encourage greater parental involvement and place greater emphasis on early intervention and on numeracy and literacy. I repeat that call today.

As other Members have asked, where is the strategy for children under six years of age? Why is the Minister not ensuring the capacity and capability of parents to support their children's education through an appropriately funded extended schools programme? Where are the proposals to address the problems with the teacher:pupil ratio at primary level and the chronic underfunding of primary schools?

When we discover that children who are entitled to free school meals are twice as likely to leave school without any qualifications, that care-leavers are 20 times more likely to leave school without any qualifications and that as few as 23% of pupils from the most deprived backgrounds achieve five or more GCSEs in contrast to 64% of pupils across Northern Ireland, we realise that, instead of tackling inequality, the Minister is exacerbating the problem through her failure to address those issues. I wonder how many debates we must have on this issue before the Minister will take the appropriate and necessary action.

I am happy to support the motion, because the Minister clearly cannot tackle the issue by herself. As the Education and Training Inspectorate's chief inspector said in his report:

"It is the least we can do for the generations of children and young people who will succeed us and judge us by our actions and not our words."

**Mr O'Dowd:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I also support the motion. I apologise to the House, because I must leave the Chamber to return to a Committee meeting after I speak.

This debate is welcome, and, as Dr McDonnell said in his opening remarks, it is unfortunate that only one and a half hours was scheduled for it. However, this topic is not only being debated in the Chamber, it is being debated in the Committee for Education and in the Department. In my view, every piece of policy and legislation that goes through the Department is about tackling educational underachievement and ensuring that we build a world-class education system.

As a Member who spoke earlier said, we do not have a world-class education system. The Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone, Mr Elliott, stated that we have an education system that is the envy of the world. People are not flocking to our shores to learn from our education system. I may have missed seeing such people on my travels, but, judging by my experience in dealing with education over the past year or so, they are not coming here to study our education system. We are looking at examples of education systems from around the world that have moved on or that are using educational methods that are about tackling educational underachievement and which, in turn, are tackling social disadvantage.

As the motion states, we need a cross-cutting response to educational underachievement but not because, as Ms McIlveen said, the Minister cannot deal with or "chooses to ignore" the issue. I simply cannot understand that statement. Why would any Minister choose to ignore educational underachievement? Ms McIlveen may disagree with the way in which the Minister is dealing with the issue or with the policies that are being brought forward, but she cannot stand over the statement that the Minister "chooses to ignore" the issue. She cannot stand over that statement — that is political, not educational, underachievement.

As regards the co-ordinated response that is required, education is somewhat like health. If you wish to improve the health of the nation, you must deal with all aspects of people's lives, such as housing, the environment, safety measures, employment, etc. The same applies to education. If we are to improve the educational outcomes of disadvantaged societies, we must improve the daily lot of people in those societies in order to give communities and individuals the momentum to move forward and ensure that they have the skills and advantages that are necessary to improve their educational outcomes.

I represent one of the most disadvantaged wards in the North: Drumgask, in the Craigavon area. In that ward, there is an estate called Ardowen, which was built around 40 years ago. Only a small number of children from that estate has ever gone to university. The local community came together and set up a homework club using funding from Europe, DSD, the council and other sources. That homework club is staffed by volunteers and is held every night of the week. It serves children from that disadvantaged community and the local Travelling community, many of whom are receiving help with homework at night for the first time. The advantages of that club for that society will be seen in 10 or 15 years' time, and such schemes should be promoted across disadvantaged communities.

Neighbourhood renewal is another way to offer co-ordinated assistance to disadvantaged communities. Therefore, work is being done. We should do whatever we can to co-ordinate work to ensure better educational outcomes for those in disadvantaged communities.

I also recognise the work that is being done by our educationalists. Many primary schools and post-primary schools in disadvantaged communities have given advantages to thousands of children through education. Those schools have given children the chance to develop into everything that they can become, and they have given them the light and hope of education. *[Interruption.]* I am more than happy to let the Member speak, if he so wishes.

**Mr B McCrea:** I am struck by the dichotomy in the view that the Member puts across. On the one hand, he says that our education system is failing, that it is not world-class and that it is not good. However, on the other hand, he says that there are really brilliant people in education who are doing really brilliant things. I challenge the Member to tell me which schools in his constituency are failing and what he is doing about it.

**Mr O'Dowd:** We are always engaged in lifelong learning, and, if the Member could learn to listen to the whole debate, he would find out what I am going to say. I am on record as saying in previous debates that we do not have a world-class education system but that we have world-class educationalists who have created many opportunities for many children in the system. Schools that are failing our children need to be challenged —

**Mr B McCrea:** Name them.

**Mr O'Dowd:** Thankfully, I could not name one school in my constituency that is failing.

**Mr B McCrea:** Are there are no failing schools?

**Mr O'Dowd:** Mr Deputy Speaker, is there a possibility that you could intervene?

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Members are given time to speak and to have their questions answered. It is important that we do not have an exchange such as this across the Chamber. Mr McCrea, you will be given time to speak at a later stage.

**Mr O'Dowd:** I am glad to say that the schools in my constituency have strong leadership, and that is important. However, I welcome the fact that the education and skills authority will challenge schools that do not have strong leadership and that are failing our young people, because those schools deserve to be challenged. Those schools also deserve to be supported, but, if they continue to fail our young people, the leadership in those schools should, and will, be changed. Go raibh maith agat.

**Mr K Robinson:** First of all, I declare an interest as a governor in two primary schools in Newtownabbey. Educational underachievement is a subject about which many people, including the Minister of Education, profess a concern. However, that concern is nothing but empty rhetoric unless we, as an Assembly, and particularly those charged with executive responsibility, do something about it.

We in the Ulster Unionist Party have consistently argued that the Education Minister has had an obsessive interest in post-primary transfer to the exclusion of all other issues and that it is an unhealthy preoccupation with little or no end product other than total confusion. That pursuit of a political agenda that stands little chance of achieving broad consensus has led to the lack of adequate movement on educational underachievement, which we in the Ulster Unionist Party consider to be the most pressing issue.

Educational underachievement needs to be tackled at its root — in the early years of schooling and, indeed, even before that. Getting the issue right at that stage will do away with the need for expensive and piecemeal remedial action to be undertaken later at primary, post-primary and third-level education and into adult life. That action has not always been the success that it should have been.

It is true that the performance of schools in Northern Ireland has been improving. The number of post-primary schools in which fewer than 40% of pupils obtain five GCSEs at grades A to C — or the equivalent qualifications — has reduced significantly, and the number of schools in which fewer than 20% of pupils achieve that level has reduced by half. However, in 2005-06, 63% of year 12 pupils obtained five or more GCSEs, or equivalent, at grades A to C, which is a level 2 qualification. This means that, in the same year, 37% — 9,158 pupils — did not achieve five or more GCSE passes or equivalent at that level.

12.15 pm

Five or more GCSE passes at grades A to C, or the equivalent, is recognised as the qualification that puts an individual on the employment or further education ladder. Without that level of qualification after 12 years of compulsory education, young people are left at a disadvantage, both in education and in the labour market. Reports by the Northern Ireland Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee also show that the problem of poor literacy and numeracy in schools has not been addressed effectively. Too many young people are leaving school without having achieved the appropriate level of performance.

As was said by Members who have spoken previously, the issue of educational underachievement is complex. Dr McDonnell is to be congratulated on bringing this issue before the House. The motion rightly identifies the need for cross-cutting action by the Government. UK statistics for 2005-06 show that 29% of children in Northern Ireland — 122,000 of them — live in families whose incomes are below the poverty line, that is, 60% below the median income level. Moreover, around 10% — 44,000 children — live in severe poverty.

Educational disadvantage begins at an early age. The Department of Education's research indicates that preschool children from higher socio-economic backgrounds in Northern Ireland already show signs of higher cognitive behavioural abilities than children from poorer backgrounds at that early stage. Young children who live in areas of high deprivation, in inner cities and in the massive relocation estates in the towns around Belfast, score less well on verbal skills, early number concepts and general cognitive skills. They also show less progress in sociability and co-operation. Therefore, even before disadvantaged children start their formal education, they are already playing catch-up with those from more affluent backgrounds.

As the proportion of children entitled to free school meals increases, the proportion achieving grade A decreases. Pupils of schools which have the lowest proportion of children entitled to free school meals are over two and a half times more likely to achieve a grade A than those in schools with a band of the highest proportion of children in receipt of school meals.

A wide range of issues must be confronted, including an end to composite classes. I recently received a report from the Minister which showed that we have a horrifying number of composite classes, particularly in primary schools in built-up areas. Managing school budgets without ring-fencing teachers' salaries — they can account for over 90% of the budget — forces schools to artificially reduce their teaching workforce in a way that is detrimental to the educational attainment of children who most need that



help in those schools. We must reduce class sizes, and we must therefore give children greater individual attention. That at least will be a start in addressing educational underachievement.

Unfortunately, I have run out of time.

**Mrs M Bradley:** I support the motion.

Underachievement is currently defined by the Department of Education as the non-attainment of five GCSEs, including English and maths. There is a huge spectrum of possible reasons for underachievement, including the low aspirations of pupils and their parents, who may not encourage their children to succeed. Home problems and learning difficulties are perhaps the most common factors accounting for underachievement. I discussed the problem with the principal of a primary school in my constituency, and I was shocked to learn that there is a strong likelihood that even departmental guidelines can contribute to underachievement among pupils. The constant changes in the educational system and the rigid dictatorial guidelines are not conducive to providing stability and allowing effective and consistent measures to be put in place and monitored.

The ever-present black cloud of behavioural difficulties that plagues our classrooms proves that there are not enough proper resources to tackle those problems. Behavioural difficulties filter down through the classrooms, causing problems for teachers and pupils, while creating and nurturing, through avoidance, a difficult educational future for the disruptive child.

Yesterday, we debated the need for a childcare strategy. Today's debate is similar, in that investment in the early years of our children lives is vital if both aspects are to be developed and improved on. If we are to make progress, it is essential that the causes and the issues surrounding underachievement are given due consideration and properly constituted for. That will entail, in particular, an absolute commitment from the Minister of Education to work with all the relevant Ministers to tackle the problem head-on and, in order to dispose of the problem, to invest where required.

Professor James Heckman is a firm believer in early-years intervention, and that is where the remedy to the issue of underachievement lies. Many social problems, such as crime, teenage pregnancy and school drop-out rates, together with adverse health conditions, can be traced back to low skill attainment and poor academic ability. According to Professor Heckman's research, lack of investment in early years shows:

"early interventions ... have much higher economic returns than later interventions, such as reduced pupil:teacher ratios, public job training, convict rehabilitation programs, tuition subsidies or expenditure on police."

Underachievement and early intervention cannot, and should not, ever be divorced when confronting this topic.

I stand firmly with my colleague Dr McDonnell, and I thank him for bringing such an important motion to the House. I fully support his call for an action programme to deal with the serious issue of educational underachievement.

**Mr K Robinson:** Does the Member agree that another element that contributes to underachievement is the lack of stability in the teaching profession in inner urban areas, where, because of financial constraints, schools do not know what their budget will be, other than for one year? The ability to attract high-level young teachers to those areas and to retain them is being diminished as a result of that.

**Mrs M Bradley:** I thank the Member for his intervention, and I agree with what he said. That was a very important intervention.

I feel that it is important to add that when — if — an action programme is produced, it will be incumbent on the Minister of Education and, indeed, the Minister of Finance and Personnel to provide the appropriate funds to facilitate the recommendations therein.

As a member of the Committee for Education, I have listened to witnesses, many of whom are school principals, tell us some of the problems that they face. Let me tell you, Mr Deputy Speaker, that I felt very sad about the situation when I went home. I really believe that educational underachievement is one problem that we must face head-on and seriously tackle. I urge the Minister of Education to come up with an early-years programme quickly, so that we might do whatever we can to alleviate the problems that exist.

**Mr B McCrea:** We have talked about educational underachievement many times, and, I must say, I do not expect anything to change. The Minister of Education has spoken, and no one has listened. She is now largely irrelevant, isolated and alone, with no one to listen to what she has to say. However, the problem of educational underachievement, as outlined by my colleagues on the SDLP Benches, is still with us. There have been Sinn Féin Ministers of Education for some time now, and very little progress has been made. Those people who say that something is not right with the schools estate must ask where the responsibility lies. I hear repeatedly from the Minister of Education that it lies with her. She has failed the people of Northern Ireland, the children of Northern Ireland, and the Assembly.

I take issue with some of my colleagues' comments. Some Members say that we do not have a world-class education system. I want those Members to name names from their constituencies. Does Mr Lunn think that Wallace High School, Rathmore Grammar School, Fort Hill Primary School, Lisnagarvey High School,



Friends' School or Dromore High School is failing? Name names if a school is not working. Perhaps it is not the schools but the teachers who are not working. If that is the case, let us say which of our teachers are failing children. The teachers whom I know are working really hard. Perhaps it is not the teachers but the headmasters that are failing. Let us point the finger and say what the problem is. The argument that we do not have a world-class education system is completely incoherent. The reason why those schools are oversubscribed is that they are very successful. Northern Ireland produces better results than anywhere else in the British Isles, and, although I do not have the exact criteria to hand, we are told that the top end of our schools do really well on a world-class scale.

Educational underachievement has nothing to do with the 11-plus. The problem lies at the 11-minus stage. The problem is not to do with primary-level schools or teachers; it is to do with the trouble that people face in their early years. Nowhere is that more obvious than in the provision of funding for primary schools. The Northern Ireland Primary Principals' Action Group has said that for the Minister of Education to acknowledge that there is a huge problem but to do nothing about it is unacceptable. That group argues that the strain and stress on its members, who work in primary schools, is unacceptable, and the Minister ought to be making an argument about that.

That argument can be extended to nursery and pre-primary education. Proper intervention is required, and people must be gathered together to try to tackle the issues. We get a deathly silence from the Minister, and it has got beyond a joke. I heard a good joke the other day about the Minister of Education who wanted to get of rid one 11-plus and ended up with two. What is that all about?

**Mr Storey:** The Minister is very good at lecturing us — for instance, she uses Scotland as an example of a place that moved away from a selective system some time ago. However, only last week, the Scottish Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, Fiona Hyslop, said that an estimated 30% of second-year senior school pupils were classified as being well-established or better at the expected level of maths. Therefore, the Scottish Government have failed, even though they changed their system. All we have heard from the Minister is that all will be well if we change the system. Basil McCrea is right: Sinn Féin has had responsibility for education since 2000, and it has delivered the abolition of the 11-plus but not the abolition of academic selection.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The Member will have an extra minute.

**Mr B McCrea:** I agree with the Chairperson of the Education Committee. The facts destroy all of the

political rhetoric and ideology that comes from Sinn Féin. Sinn Féin has no notion about education because its members did not bother to understand the facts. They come out with some standard Marxist line about equality as if that is the answer to everything. Equality does not work in this context because, although all children are valued equally, they are not all equal. What we need is intervention, where people —

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** *[Interruption.]*

**Mr B McCrea:** I am happy to give way if the Member wants to stand up on her feet to say something. The point is that the Member, her party and the Minister are failing the people of Northern Ireland. They are unable to come up with —

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr B McCrea:** I will.

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I will not take up much of the Member's time. I simply want to remind him that the Ulster Unionist Party signed up to section 75 and to the equality implications of the Programme for Government. Is that party changing from that position, as part of its new journey into conservatism? *[Laughter.]*

**Mr B McCrea:** The Member fails to understand the problem. It is not that all children are equal; it is that all children have needs that must be provided for. Children should be treated equally, but they are not all equal. The mindless following of the idea that all children are equal is the problem with Sinn Féin's entire education strategy. That is doomed to fail. It is a failure. Your party is a failure. The people of Northern Ireland will see that, and they will rue the day that they put Caitriona Ruane into that role, because she is an absolute, utter joke.

**Ms Purvis:** Follow that, as the saying goes.

I support the motion. The Programme for Government and the Budget have been the subject of much discussion in the Chamber in recent weeks. Many, including the Progressive Unionist Party, advocate revisiting the Programme for Government to adapt it to the current economic realities.

Therefore, it is important to have a quick look at the Programme for Government's vision for educational achievement. The current goal is to ensure that, by 2011, 68% of school leavers achieve five or more GCSE passes at grades A to C, including maths and English. That seems to be a somewhat modest and realistic goal, but those figures require closer analysis when put in the context of where we are now. Currently, 63% of students achieve five or more GCSE passes at grades A to C, but only 51% of those include English and maths. That is a gap of 17% from the Programme for Government's goal, which is a sizeable difference. More significantly, the Department of Education tells us that only 37% of pupils from socially disadvantaged

backgrounds will reach that level of educational achievement. That figure is horrifying. If children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds alone needed to achieve the Programme for Government's target, there would have to be a massive shift of 31% within two years. I do not doubt that those children are capable of achieving such a goal. However, I wonder whether the current education system could ever get them there.

12.30 pm

The point is not to condemn the Programme for Government's targets for educational achievement; they are decent targets. The point is that, once you scratch the surface, start to examine the details of why educational achievement levels are so low and examine closely who is failing and being failed by the system, you must call into question some of the policies that are advocated by parties in the Executive, which appear to completely contradict the Programme for Government's goals for education.

I speak specifically about other unionist parties in the Chamber and their undying allegiance to academic selection. For years, some unionists in the Chamber have called for unionist unity. I ask those Members where their sense of unity is. Where is their sense of responsibility for the whole unionist community, not only the privileged few? How can any form of unity ever be possible when the two largest unionist parties in the Chamber — those who have a responsibility — insist on maintaining a system of severe division in the unionist community, a system that impacts on every level of life for the members of the unionist community, especially young men? That is the tragedy.

**Mr Storey:** Will the Member give way?

**Ms Purvis:** The Member will have his opportunity to speak.

Boys and young men are being left behind in shocking and dangerous numbers by the current education system. Young Protestant men are top of that table. Despite all that those young men have to offer the world, that is where unionist leadership has left them.

**Mr Storey:** Will the Member give way?

**Ms Purvis:** The Member will have his opportunity to speak.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** It is clear that Member does not want to give way.

**Ms Purvis:** It leads them to fail and to fail for life. That is not only unkind and hypocritical; it is unsustainable. The Programme for Government puts the economy in the top spot; it is the number one priority. How can one square that circle if one happily condemns the majority of kids from disadvantaged backgrounds to leaving school without qualifications

or skills? How will those children participate in the grand new economy? What will be their role and their job?

The Assembly cannot hope to build a thriving local economy without an equitable society. Inequality is not only wrong; it is expensive. The current practice of academic selection institutionalises inequality. The problem has become so severe that it has bled well beyond the boundaries of the education system and now, as the motion rightly states, the only way to address educational underachievement in young people — especially young men — is through a comprehensive, genuine, well-resourced and rapid multi-departmental action plan.

I support the motion and call on my colleagues in the Chamber to do the same, particularly those who are members of other unionist parties. I urge them to stop supporting a system that undeniably prevents all young people from achieving their full potential.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately upon the lunchtime suspension. I therefore propose, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm, when the next Member to speak will be the Minister of Education, who will respond to the debate.

*The sitting was suspended at 12.34 pm.*

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

*2.00 pm*

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** We return to the motion on educational underachievement. I call the Minister of Education, Ms Caitríona Ruane, to speak when she is ready.

**Mr K Robinson:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Are we allowed to continue? Is the House quorate?

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** My understanding is that we are allowed to continue until my attention has been drawn to the absence of a quorum.

*Notice taken that 10 Members were not present.*

*House counted, and there being fewer than 10 Members present, the Deputy Speaker ordered the Division Bells to be rung.*

*Upon 10 Members being present —*

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Now that we have a quorum, we can proceed. For the second time, I call the Minister of Education, Ms Caitríona Ruane.

**The Minister of Education (Ms Ruane):** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. As Members know, since becoming Minister, I have made it an absolute priority to tackle underachievement and to raise standards and equality in all our schools.

Díríonn an rún seo aird ar na hiarmhairtí dochracha a bhaineann le tearcghnóthachtáil, don pháiste, don teaghlach, don phobal, don gheilleagar i gcoitinne agus don tsochaí. Sa lá atá inniu ann agus dúshláin eacnamaíochta romhainn ar fad, tá sé níos tábhachtaí fós go gcuirtear deireadh le tearcghnóthachtáil.

The motion highlights the damaging consequences of underachievement for children, their families, their communities, and for our whole economy and society. The proposer of the motion, Dr Alasdair McDonnell, outlined that situation graphically. In these challenging economic times, raising educational standards and eliminating underachievement are more important than ever. I look forward to continuing to work with Executive colleagues on our Programme for Government — and with all those who are involved in education — to deliver an education system that provides the skills that all our children and young people need.

My Department works with the Department for Employment and Learning, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Department for Social Development. We know that the issues that we face are complex and cross-cutting, and work has started — led by the Executive — that will tackle those problems in a cross-cutting way. I am determined to press that work forward.

New political structures are in place to make decisions that will address those issues. The issues of educational underachievement and raising standards are top of the agenda in the Assembly, the North/South Ministerial Council, the British-Irish Council and other fora in which I work. The North/South literacy and numeracy working group will meet tomorrow to take that work forward, because, as I have said on many occasions, underachievement is an area of co-operation and concern across this island.

We have much to be proud of in our system. I say that consistently. Our system provides top-end qualifications to our most able pupils. However, too many children leave school without reaching high levels of achievement, and too many do not have the qualifications that they need.

We have heard that getting five good GCSE grades, including maths and English — or maths and Irish, depending through which language one is studying — is recognised as one of the keys to entering further and higher education and to getting well-paid jobs. However, almost half our young people — 48% — do not achieve those grades. What is more, children from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to achieve at that level. Some 27% of them get five good GCSEs, compared with 60% of their more advantaged peers. That is a statistic of which we have to take note. However, the problems begin much earlier.

Bionn páiste as gach cúigear ag fágáil ár mbunscoileanna gan an leibhéal litearthachta agus uimhearthachta tuartha a bhaint amach. Go bunúsach, níl sé sin sásúil ná maith go leor.

Almost one child in five leaves primary school without having achieved the expected level in literacy and numeracy. That figure is simply not good enough.

Our system has been described as being world-class. Yes, we have some world-class practice and some world-class practitioners. However, when we benchmark ourselves internationally, using the programme for international student assessment (PISA) survey, our performance is average, and our international ranking appears to have slipped in recent years.

I note selective quoting by Members who refuse time and time again to acknowledge the damage that academic selection has done to our education system. I will not even try to respond to some of those Members. Dawn Purvis responded to them, and I hope that they will listen to what she said.

Ag ardú ionchas, ag ardú caighdeán do gach dalta, agus ag déanamh cinnte de go mbíonn gach scoil ina scoil mhaith: sin é an fócas atá ag mo Roinn.

Raising expectations, raising standards for each individual pupil and making every school a good school — that is my Department's focus. This morning, I met



with governors from all over the North of Ireland. I stressed again and again, as did Will Haire, the importance of raising standards for every child, and putting equality at the core of our education system.

I believe passionately in equality, and in equality for all children: no matter what community they come from; no matter what race or sexual orientation they are; and no matter what their ability or disability is. Equality must be the cornerstone. It concerns me when I hear some Members make glib statements about equality. I thought we had moved far beyond that. Let those Members explain to the people whom they represent why they are opposed to equality.

I will shortly publish 'Every School a Good School', our new school-improvement policy. My officials and I, along with education leaders, had the opportunity to talk to principals about the new policy at a recent series of school-improvement conferences in Derry, Belfast and Armagh. A real sense of passion and commitment was evident at those conferences. People from all sectors and from all types of school attended. Ultimately, we all need to work together — preschools, primary schools, post-primary schools and community organisations — if we are to deal with these challenging times.

Trevor Lunn is absolutely right when he says that we cannot change the education system overnight, but we can at least turn the oil tanker around. We must get the system on the right track, because unless we make the necessary changes, it will continue to go down a cul-de-sac. As always, Trevor made a very thoughtful contribution, which I wish to acknowledge.

What we need to do — *[Interruption.]*

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order, please.

**The Minister of Education:** We need to ensure that our children are learning in settings that are characterised by good leadership, an ethos of aspiration, excellent teaching, and strong links among schools, parents and the community. Dr McDonnell spoke about the role of parents, which is absolutely crucial in all this. It is very important that parents form part of the solution. Schools should be settings that are committed to excellence, equality and inclusion, and to tackling the barriers that prevent young people from achieving their full potential.

I want every school to be a good school, but we cannot accomplish that goal without making the radical reforms that our system needs. Those who do not understand the links between our current selective system and underachievement have failed to see the major problem in the system. It is only one of the problems in our system, and of course we need to start earlier, but it is a major problem, and it must be tackled.

When I was appointed as Minister of Education, I inherited a system that was designed 60 years ago. It

was a selective system that put the needs of 40% of children above the needs of all the rest and is clearly not fit for the modern world. In condemning the majority of our children — many of whom are already strongly disadvantaged — as failures, it is unjust and fundamentally wrong.

How did the 11-plus serve this year's admissions process? For the benefit of those who defend academic selection, let us look at some of the statistics. If some Members have heard them before, I will repeat them, because they are obviously not listening closely enough. Look at — *[Interruption.]*

It is interesting that a party that is so committed to dealing with disadvantage and underachievement has two representatives —

**Mr Storey:** Will the Member give way?

**The Minister of Education:** I will not give way. The Member has already had his opportunity.

There are 13 post-primary schools in Derry. I will look at Derry City, Fermanagh and Belfast. *[Interruption.]*

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order. I am sorry, Minister; please take your seat. I have already asked Members to make their remarks through the Chair. I do not mind the odd intervention; I understand the cut and thrust of politics, but this is well beyond it.

**The Minister of Education:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. There are 13 post-primary schools in Derry, of which four are grammar schools and nine are secondary schools. The four grammar schools educate 43% of post-primary pupils who attend schools in the county; the nine secondary schools educate the remaining 57%. In the grammar schools, 13% of children are entitled to free school meals, compared to 41% of the children in secondary schools. In the grammar schools, 28 children have a statement of special educational needs; the secondary schools educate 300 children with statements of special educational needs. Those figures do not even take demographic decline into account.

What about Fermanagh? The situation is even worse there. There are 14 post-primary schools in Fermanagh: four grammar schools and 10 secondary schools. Pupil numbers in Fermanagh have fallen to such a degree that its four grammar schools now educate half the county's post-primary pupils. The 10 secondary schools educate the other half. As a result, one quarter of the desks in the non-grammar schools are empty.

Some 7% of children in the grammar schools in Fermanagh are entitled to free school meals. In the secondary schools, that figure is 20%. Nine pupils in grammar schools in Fermanagh have a statement of special educational needs. There are 109 such pupils in the secondary schools. Thanks to the 11-plus test and the selection process, Fermanagh has a fundamentally



divided post-primary-school system, in which 10 schools absorb all the various challenges in the area. The story is the same across the North.

In the 2008-09 school year, 77 out of 135 children in Holywood's four primary schools transferred to grammar schools. In the seven primary schools serving the Malone Road in Belfast, the corresponding figure was 214 out of 235. However, in the three schools that largely serve Belfast's Sandy Row area, 11 out of 79 children transferred to a grammar school. In the three primary schools that largely serve the Shankill Road, the corresponding figure was 10 out of 104. In the seven schools that serve the Falls Road, 49 out of 284 pupils transferred to a grammar school.

We can look at those statistics and do something about them, or we can pretend that they do not exist and pretend that we are dealing with underachievement. We must deal with the issues in our system if we are to make change. Some say that change will damage our system; some say that it will create chaos and confusion. Thirty years ago in Finland, opponents of change said the same thing. Finland is now top of the international standards rankings. Poland has been able to change its education system within a very short period, and it is shooting up the international rankings — not just for a few children, but for all its children.

Primary schools will no longer be seen as stepping stones to post-primary schools. They can now get on with their job — one of the most important jobs in society — of educating our young children.

2.15 pm

I agree with every Member who said that preschool education and primary education are fundamentally important — of course they are. Learning starts long before formal education begins: it starts in the womb. The first three years of life are critical, and proper care, nutrition and stimulation are essential for successful learning in the future.

From the age of three, children become more aware of their place in the community. They need to develop social skills, as well as early literacy and numeracy skills. My Department is developing an early-years strategy. We have also made changes to the curriculum. Members on the Benches opposite were very critical of that revised curriculum. However, I notice now that there is little criticism of it; people have heard that teachers like it.

My Department is working with the Department for Employment and Learning to bring about a more co-ordinated approach to learners who are aged between 14 and 19. We have a literacy and numeracy strategy, the aim of which is to deal with levels of literacy and numeracy in the most disadvantaged communities.

Tá an straitéas seo bunaithe ar an dea-chleachtas atá inár scoileanna, le teagasc den chéad scoth a chur ar fáil do gach páiste. Agus, má tá an páiste ina díth, gheobhaidh sé nó sí tacaíocht phearsantaithe sa bhreis.

We know that, too often, underachievement in literacy and numeracy is linked to social disadvantage. I commissioned the achieving Belfast and achieving Derry initiatives because of the serious problems with underachievement in some urban areas. Those programmes were introduced in September, and I am determined that they will bring about real improvements.

We have also commissioned a review of special educational needs and inclusion, and I look forward to those matters being discussed by the Executive. Violence against women and children, sexual violence against girls, disability, and disadvantage are some of the barriers that may exist in children's lives outside school, and some children go to school without having had those problems addressed.

Therefore, it is important that we deal with such problems early and that we have that inclusion agenda as part of our education system. The reform programme ensures that those barriers are addressed early in order that children can fulfil their potential.

Last week, I launched a policy to support newcomer children, so that they, too, have a fair chance in our society. It was a wonderful launch, and I pay tribute to Botanic Primary School, which is doing such tremendous inclusion work. Also we have set up a task force for the Travelling community, which faces some of the worst outcomes in society. Recently, in Newry, we had a good North/South conference that focused on Traveller education and the lessons that can be learned from dealing with those issues.

I thank Dr Alasdair McDonnell for tabling the motion. He mentioned extended schools, and I welcome the support from all sides of the House for the extended schools programme.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The Minister's time is up.

**The Minister of Education:** I am delighted to say that we can continue with that programme, because it is very important. Go raibh maith agat.

**Mr D Bradley:** Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Tá an-áthas orm páirt a ghlacadh sa díospóireacht seo faoi chúrsaí oideachais, go háirithe faoin bhaint atá idir an tearcghnóthachtáil oideachasúil agus an bochtanas.

I am pleased to be taking part in this debate on the important issue of the link between educational underachievement and social deprivation. I thank my colleague Dr McDonnell for tabling the motion.

Dr McDonnell described the issue as one of the biggest challenges — socially, politically and economically — that faces us at present. I agree with that point.

He quoted several interesting statistics. For example, he said that 4,500 children leave primary school with poor standards of literacy and numeracy and that 47% of post-primary children are not achieving a C grade in English and mathematics. He also referred to the research of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation that clearly shows that there is a strong link between levels of deprivation and educational underachievement.

Dr McDonnell said that a strong anti-poverty approach to the issue is needed. He also said that there is a need for a cross-departmental effort to stop this vicious circle from continuing. Dr McDonnell mentioned several actions that he thought could be effective as part of that cross-departmental effort: the positive effects of active parental involvement in children's education; better funding for primary schools targeted at areas of social deprivation; a reduction in the pupil:teacher ratio; the use of linguistic phonics programmes; and the continuation and enlargement of the extended schools programme. He also mentioned that around £1 billion is lost to the economy in potential productivity each year because of educational underachievement.

Mr Storey, speaking on behalf of the Education Committee, referred to the Committee's scrutiny of the school improvement policy 'Every School a Good School'. Although there are many positive elements in the policy, I contend that we must look beyond schools if we are to raise standards. School-based actions alone will not have the required effect of improving educational achievement.

When one examines the complexity of social deprivation, one can see that many elements are involved. Quite often, those include poor health; low income; parental unemployment; poor housing; family size; lone-parent status; ethnic grouping; and lack of fluency in English or Irish. Those are only some of the many factors that contribute to social deprivation and educational underachievement.

Schools alone are not in a position to address all those problems. They can contribute towards the solution, but they cannot be the final solution. It is abundantly clear that a cross-cutting strategy is needed — as the motion states — with the Department of Education taking the lead, working in conjunction with other relevant Departments: the Department for Social Development, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, the Department for Employment and Learning and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

Although academic selection may not be the sole cause of educational underachievement, as some Members have

pointed out, there is strong evidence that it compounds the problem. A Queen's University study by Gallagher and Smith pointed out that academic selection tends to produce a disproportionate number of schools that combine low ability and social disadvantage in their enrolments. That compounds the problem of educational disadvantage.

It is unfortunate that we still have academic selection, albeit that it is an unregulated and privatised version. Despite the fact that the Minister has told us, on many occasions, that the 11-plus has come to an end, academic selection continues. We must work to reach agreement on that issue and ensure that the negative effects of academic selection are removed from our education system. I believe that there is possibility for agreement around age 14 and that that particular possibility has not yet been properly explored or exploited.

Mr Elliott referred to the work of the Nobel economics laureate James Heckman, whose name is becoming one of those heard most frequently in the House. Nonetheless, his work is important and relevant to this particular debate. Professor Heckman's work indicates the very clear educational and economic benefits of early intervention and of early childhood education. His work highlights that persistent patterns have strong effects. He states that the benefits are not limited to intellectual gains; that there are benefits in social performance and general lifetime achievements as productive adults.

The early-years workforce deserves maximum investment, and I hope that the Minister's nought-to-six strategy, when she brings it forward, will reflect that. A transformation fund, such as is available in England, is needed in order to ensure that we have the best-qualified early-years workforce possible.

We are all aware of points that were made in Northern Ireland Audit Office and Public Accounts Committee reports, and those issues need to be addressed. So far, we have not heard from the Minister about how she intends to tackle those problems. We need a literacy and numeracy strategy, because the system is not delivering. Although a literacy and numeracy strategy would address those problems, the need for such a strategy is evidence that our system is not working as it should be. Mr Robinson said that that type of action was expensive and piecemeal. It might be a solution in the interim, but in the long term, we must work for a system that produces results that mean that we do not need add-ons such as literacy and numeracy policies.

Dr McDonnell and others clearly outlined the measures that are needed in order to raise achievement, and they could form the basis of an effective strategy. One element is proper investment in pupil:teacher ratios and in early-years and primary education. We need a strong and highly co-ordinated cross-departmental approach

that engages all the relevant Departments that I mentioned earlier. Actions should not be solely school-based but directed towards family and community, and they should help to raise the value that families and communities in socially deprived areas place on education.

It is also useful to link local schools with industry in order to help to reinforce the links between education and employment. We need to tackle poverty, and we also need to secure employment for socially deprived areas. We need to break down the silo mentality in some Departments in order to ensure that we are in a position to tackle the multifaceted nature of complex problems such as educational underachievement.

In the words of the OFMDFM anti-poverty strategy:

“Policy must break the cycle and the process that results in children who are born into poverty developing into underachieving young people”.

That work must come from the Department of Education but must be backed up, where necessary and relevant, by the work of other Departments.

I obviously support the motion, and I thank all those, including Dr McDonnell and the Minister, who contributed to the debate. I hope that we will see co-ordinated action on this issue in the very near future. Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

That this Assembly recognises the threat to future prosperity and well-being posed by educational underachievement in many communities; and calls on the Executive, and the Minister of Education in particular, to produce a cross-cutting departmental action programme designed to tackle educational underachievement.

## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

### Social Housing

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

**Mr Cobain:** I beg to move

That this Assembly notes, with concern, the Department for Social Development's recent priority change which gives greater emphasis to the refurbishment of social housing, as opposed to redevelopment; further notes the huge detrimental effect this will have on the most vulnerable people in our society; and calls on the Minister to provide social homes fit for the twenty-first century throughout Northern Ireland.

I believe that this issue ranges somewhat further than social housing, so I will spend the first couple of minutes explaining the context of the motion.

*2.30 pm*

A number of weeks ago, the DUP tabled a motion on the Rates (Regional Rates) Order (Northern Ireland) 2009, and its members praised their Minister for bringing forward proposals to freeze rates for the next three years. However, there was no mention of the people who are so poor that they do not need to pay rates: the working poor, near-benefit level families, pensioners and people on disability living allowance. I was never taken with that scheme, which basically uses pensioners to subsidise multimillionaires. Nevertheless, the movers of the motion identified what the Executive were doing for the community — not for the whole of it but for part of it.

I will now talk for a few moments about what the Executive are doing for people who do not pay rates, because they are socially and economically deprived; in other words, the poor. The Executive identified a number of targets in the Programme for Government to deal specifically with poverty: severe child poverty was to be halved by 2010; child poverty was to be eliminated by 2020; and pensioner poverty was to be dealt with over the incoming years. That is all drivel.

The number of children living in severe poverty is rising, the number of children living in poverty is rising, and the number of pensioners living in poverty is rising. On average, 70% of boys who are eligible for free school meals leave school with five GCSEs or less. We spend day after day arguing about academic selection — and we did it again today — but there has never been a debate about children who are marginalised in schools and who have been failed by the education system.

More than 1,000 people die every year from cold-related illnesses; in other words, they freeze to death.



However, the Executive cut the warm homes scheme, and they are spending less on warm homes this year than they did last year.

We were told in the Programme for Government that 1,500 new social and affordable homes were going to be built. A number of weeks ago, the Minister corrected me to tell me that we did not need 2,500 new homes, as I had said, but that we needed 3,000 new social homes.

**Mr McQuillan:** Does the Member realise that his party has two Ministers on the Executive? What are they doing to uphold what he is saying?

**Mr Cobain:** If the Member was interested in people who are living in poverty, he would challenge his Ministers to see what they are doing for those people; however, he is indulging in point scoring. People in our community are living in poverty. This is about point scoring, not about facing the issues.

We were told that we needed 2,500 new social homes, and the Minister told me that we needed 3,000 new social homes to meet the need. We are now in an economic crisis, and those numbers are going to rise, so there will be more housing pressures and growing numbers of homeless people. That is what is going to happen, and the Executive are doing nothing for those people.

The point that I want to raise today relates to the issue of building new homes and refurbishing homes. I am old enough to remember the previous period of refurbishment in the 1970s and 1980s; instead of knocking down the slums in Belfast, the Housing Executive refurbished them. The slums that were refurbished in the 1970s and 1980s are the same slums that people are living in today. In the Woodvale area and the Shankill area, which the Minister visited, people are living in slums.

The Housing Executive carried out an economic appraisal, which concluded that those houses needed to be knocked down and rebuilt. However, the Department, together with the landlord in that area, has been dragging its feet for almost three years. Naturally, the landlord does not want to knock those houses down, as he will only be able to put back 40% of what he knocks down. Therefore, he wants to keep the slums up, with people in them, so that his revenue streams can continue.

Older people live in those homes who cannot climb the stairs. Therefore, they sleep, wash and toilet downstairs. Those are the conditions that we have in the twenty-first century in Belfast, and the Department, instead of knocking them down and building proper twenty-first century homes, wants to refurbish them.

An environmental architect now works in the Department for Social Development (DSD). That architect wants to retain some of those houses because of their environmental advantage, in some sense. Of

course, he does not live in one of those houses; he probably lives in a £400,000 house elsewhere. No one will refurbish homes in the Woodvale area. The Department and the housing associations will knock those homes down and build proper twenty-first century homes for the people who live in that area.

The people who live in that area are not rich. Many of them are on benefits, and many are pensioners. However, those people deserve the same as everybody else in our society. This is not an Executive for the haves and not for the have-nots.

Members talk about social justice, but do nothing about it. I have said that before. Individuals and Back-Benchers must stand up and be counted on these issues. The people who we are talking about today do not have a voice and are dependent on those in this Chamber standing up and speaking on their behalf. We must break this politburo-type Executive.

People like Mr McQuillan talk about the fact that the UUP has two Ministers on the Executive. I do not care about how many Ministers the UUP has on the Executive. If it is wrong, it is wrong, and this is wrong. The reason why it is wrong and the reason why people like Mr McQuillan do not care about it is because those people are poor and come from a generation that is poor. However, the days of those people not having a voice in this Chamber are over. I am speaking to people here —

**Mr F McCann:** On the back of the issue of refurbishment versus newbuilds, there are elements that must be taken into consideration, particularly the recent decisions to cut multi-element replacements and maintenance. Does the Member agree with me that if those issues are not dealt with, more and more houses will fall into disrepair and will need more money spent on them in the long-term?

**Mr Cobain:** I thank the Member for his point. It was one of the issues that I missed, and I am sorry for that. Indeed, there are no cyclical maintenance schemes any longer. The warm homes scheme and disability adaptations have also gone. We may be getting 1,500 new homes, but we will not be getting any further maintenance or adaptations. That is the sort of society that we are living in.

In conclusion, there is a historical precedent for not carrying out refurbishments on homes. It is a waste of public money. It was a waste of public money 30 years ago and it is a waste of public money now. However, and more importantly, what one is left with is a tarted-up slum, not a lifetime home —

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



**Mr Cobain:** As far as those of us in the Chamber with a social conscience are concerned, the days of refurbishing slums are over.

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

**The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development (Mr Simpson):** The Social Development Committee received a ministerial briefing on 26 March 2009, in which the Minister advised the Committee of the budget constraints that she faced and of the impact that they would have on housing-related maintenance and refurbishment programmes and the social housing development programme.

We are all aware that the funding of housing programmes was based on an expectation of significant capital receipts from house and land sales. The majority of the Committee agrees that the funding difficulties that those programmes now face are the inevitable consequence of the so-called credit crunch and the collapse in house and land values. The Minister has advised the Committee of her plans to deal with those difficulties.

The Committee understood that funding was to be concentrated on the delivery of the social housing development programme, with a view to achieving the relevant public service agreement (PSA) target to provide 10,000 social and affordable homes by 2013. In order for the Minister to live within her budget, she decided to cut back on maintenance and refurbishment programmes, such as the decent homes programmes.

The Committee welcomed the Minister's decision to deliver on the social housing development programme in 2009-2010. Having said that, the Committee sought details of where houses are to be built or bought under that programme. The Committee is also seeking clarification on procurement issues that, it is understood, may affect the social housing development programme.

Needless to say, the Committee was greatly concerned about the impact on householders and contractors of the decision to reduce housing maintenance and refurbishment programmes. The Committee supports the view that all social housing should be fit for the twenty-first century and should be healthy homes that comply with the decent homes standard. Social homes should also be energy efficient to ensure that income-poor tenants are not also fuel poor.

Finally, the Committee believes that social homes should set a quality standard that the private-rented sector follows. In that way, it is hoped that the greater number of families and individuals who are dealing with homelessness or housing stress, or living in unfit accommodation, will experience the benefit of better housing.

The Committee has sought further information on how the Department will maintain stability between

redevelopment projects and refurbishment and maintenance programmes. Nevertheless, the Committee welcomes the debate. The House should be aware that the Committee recognises the difficult decisions that the economic situation has thrust upon the Minister and the Executive as a whole.

**Mr F McCann:** I think that the Member will agree that, over the past two years, there have been lengthy debates in the Committee on social housing, and that questions have been asked. Councillor Cobain — rather, Assembly Member Mr Cobain; that was another of his hats — mentioned the situation in Woodvale. There are other areas throughout the North in which residents are pushing for old homes to be demolished and more modern ones to be built. However, does the Member agree that the present approach seems to favour refurbishment, which means that in 30 years' time we will be back in the same situation?

**The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development:** Yes, I understand where the Member is coming from. I agree that we do not want to be back in the same situation in 30 years' time. We do not want to be in that situation in the first place, but, unfortunately, that is where we find ourselves.

The Committee is also concerned about changing priorities within the social housing programmes, and it awaits with interest the report on the housing conditions survey, which I understand is due to be published this May.

2.45 pm

That report will allow the Committee to evaluate the impact of those changes. The Committee will scrutinise the Minister's plans in the light of the survey and assure itself that all reasonable alternatives have been considered and that mitigating measures are employed to limit the impact that the changes will have on householders and the employers.

**Mr F McCann:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a chur in iúl do na Comhaltai sin a thug an rún os comhair an Tionóil inniu.

I thank the Members who moved the motion. This issue goes to the heart of housing provision. Three weeks ago in the Chamber, my colleague Carál Ní Chuilín moved a motion on the redevelopment of a number of streets in north Belfast that are known locally as upper long streets. The houses in those streets have outlived their usefulness as units of accommodation by many years, and residents and tenants' associations have campaigned actively to have them replaced with modern housing. I understand that the Minister has met representatives from the upper long streets in the past several days, and I hope that their representations and considerations are taken on

board. Their campaign has been long, and we hope that their vision and dreams come true in the near future.

I spoke to one of the proposers of this motion when that debate took place, and I learned that he was concerned about the direction that the Minister and her Department were going in and the decisions that they were making. That direction and those decisions condemned residents to living in outdated accommodation. Her decision flies in the face of her recent assessment of the Village area of Belfast, when she rightly said that redevelopment was the only course of action. I commend those from the Village who fought a lengthy campaign to have their area redeveloped and the houses there replaced with decent housing. Perhaps the Minister will explain the difference between her stance on that area and her position on others.

I remember that some years ago I was involved in the campaign to have the Divis Flats complex demolished. I also remember the efforts of the Housing Executive to force refurbishment, rather than redevelopment, on residents. Residents resisted those efforts, just as they did in areas such as the Rossville Flats in Derry, the "Weetabix" flats in the Shankill, and the Unity Flats in Carrick Hill in Belfast.

One argument against refurbishment is its long-term cost. That is because it does not represent good value for money. In fact, the lifespan of a refurbished unit is only half that of a newbuild house. There is clear evidence of that in my own area of the Falls. Two old streets were totally rehabilitated over 20 years ago, but they are now in need of major works again. That calls into question how the Department for Social Development's housing policy and budget are operating, particularly when one takes into account the recent decision to cease multi-element housing-improvement schemes, including work on kitchens and other replacements. The decision to not allocate money to such schemes will cost more in the long run when continued deterioration has an impact on other parts of those houses.

Not only could that freeze put 1,000 people on the dole, but much of the work that was to be carried out in that sector was being done for health and safety reasons. I question whether the Minister is taking that fact into consideration when she makes decisions that will have an impact on the health and well-being of many tenants.

Will her decisions on those issues start to erode the good work that has been done over the years in creating decent house standards and energy efficiency? What will be the cost of picking up the pieces here? The Minister said that social housing newbuild is her number one priority. If that is the case, why does she insist on refurbishing outdated housing over constructing newbuilds?

Sinn Féin has always argued that more resources are required to address the serious shortage in social housing, but we also believe that the direction that the Minister has taken — which has caused many schemes to be delayed or suspended — is storing up trouble for the future. She refers constantly to newbuild social housing and to putting the construction industry back to work, but she then buys houses on the open market and buys apartments from developers who have difficulty selling them. That was demonstrated when the site of the Curzon cinema on the Ormeau Road was purchased — that matter was mentioned in the media recently. Was that cost-effective? Did it provide the type of family accommodation that is required for the area, or could the money have been better used to redevelop those areas to which the motion refers? Perhaps the Minister will explain that situation to the House.

Many of the areas that ask to be redeveloped do not make the decision to do so lightly. It is usually when an area has been neglected over many years and has fallen into decline that people ask that demolition and redevelopment be considered. In all instances of redevelopment that involve inner-city areas, many of the places to be redeveloped are socially deprived. It is of prime importance that the wishes of residents and their representatives are taken into consideration. We need to communicate with those residents, rather than telling them that we know what is best for them.

We should listen to their concerns and ideas for the future because, after all, many of them have invested a lifetime in their areas and have a good understanding of the type of housing and infrastructure that is required and that many of us take for granted. Ultimately, we have a responsibility to provide the type of housing that people require, and that is what we must do.

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

**Mr F McCann:** I am finishing off now. We should not be persuaded into taking what is on the developers' shelves, and then have to spend more money trying to make those fit the requirements of the waiting list. Ultimately, if housing is of poor standard, it is impractical to refurbish it.

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

**Mr F McCann:** I support the motion.

**Mr Burns:** I agree that we must provide social housing that is fit for the twenty-first century: no one disputes that that is what everyone wants to see. People have the right to have a roof over their heads, no matter who they are or where they are from. However, the motion seems to suggest that the Minister does not want to demolish old houses, redevelop rundown areas or build new homes and that she prefers to give a few houses a coat of paint. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The motion also states that the Minister is getting her priorities wrong and has made bad choices. That is totally untrue. The motion, as it stands, misses the point. I make that very clear. The Department for Social Development does not have enough money to do what needs to be done. The Minister is doing her best to make savings within her budget, but the fact is that, for the most part, the DSD is a spending Department. More money must be found for the DSD budget. I do not mean that the Minister should wait for a few handouts from the monitoring rounds; I mean that there must be a review of the entire Budget and of the Programme for Government — and I am sure that I do not have to dwell on that subject too much.

I am not trying to blame the Finance Minister for the global economic downturn. In fact, he is probably feeling the pressure most within his Department. However, the DSD will face a £100 million shortfall this year and a £100 million shortfall next year, mainly due to the collapse of land and property sales. There is no way that the Minister for Social Development will be able to make up that shortfall on her own. If the Finance Minister does not come up with more money, very tough choices will have to be made. A £100 million shortfall could mean that thousands of planned new homes will not be built and that badly-needed redevelopment and regeneration will not take place in some areas.

In addition to cutbacks in newbuild and redevelopment, what other cutbacks might be required? Will we have to cut back on the co-ownership scheme, the warm homes scheme and the mortgage rescue scheme as well? If we are serious about hitting the Programme for Government's targets, the DSD must have more resources.

Although we all know this, I will repeat it anyway — building new social housing and repairing existing houses not only helps people in housing stress and homelessness but is by far the best way that the Assembly can help the construction industry and give the local economy a boost. The Minister should not be asked to choose which policy to implement; she needs enough money to implement them all.

The Assembly and the Executive must see that there is a black hole in the housing budget, and something must be done about it quickly; it cannot be ignored.

**Mr Lunn:** The Alliance Party supports the motion, because there is nothing in it with which we profoundly disagree. However, we would like to hear more about some aspects of the motion, if the opportunity arises. We think that the clash between redevelopment and refurbishment depends significantly on local circumstances.

We want the Minister to provide social housing that is fit for the twenty-first century, as the motion requests. However, it would be a major surprise to me if that

was not her plan. The Alliance Party does not accept that refurbishment will have a detrimental effect on the most vulnerable in our society. Surely, that depends on circumstances. Housing is not only about the present; the future sustainability of housing is another major issue.

We cannot escape the implications of the Budget. Although a higher budget allocation would enable her to pursue redevelopment rather than refurbishment in more cases, the Minister must operate within her allocation.

To achieve a higher allocation now, the Alliance Party has stated on more than one occasion that it would raise more revenue from the public to invest in public services. That could be done by raising rates in line with inflation and not running with the £400,000 rates cap, for example. We have also stated frequently that we would make our case for funding to the Treasury by accepting a need to cut the cost of division over the current Assembly term. That would include making some hard decisions on such issues as the closure of leisure centres, the amalgamation of schools and the shifting of funding from urban roads and into public transport.

The electorate may judge whether it wishes to invest in public services now or accept underinvestment alongside low rates, but one cannot have both. The other parties continue to advocate more spending, but they continue to fail to explain from where the money for that would come.

Not everyone is convinced by the neighbourhood renewal concept. It is, undoubtedly, well intentioned, but it seems to be a policy that has been transferred from England and that will not necessarily work in all of our local circumstances.

Part of the argument for neighbourhood renewal and for opting for increased refurbishment over redevelopment is that it helps to preserve the identity of local communities. However, it is noted also that it saves money. Ultimately, refurbishment is often used as a cost-cutting measure — that is implied in the motion, and we agree with that being done in many cases.

**Mrs Long:** I accept the Member's comment about maintaining the coherence of local communities. I am sure that he will agree that that can also be achieved by the careful decant and relocation of residents during rebuild programmes. That has been done — albeit with more success in some situations than in others — and should be a top priority when those issues are being considered.

**Mr Lunn:** I do not disagree with that. There is no one-size-fits-all solution to the issue; every case is different. However, there are undoubtedly cases when refurbishment is not only the cheaper option, but the better option. There are parts of Northern Ireland where the character of an area very much exists in its



heritage, and it is in such instances where the people who live in an area do not realise what they have until it is gone.

The preference for redevelopment should not be seen as universal. It is possible to refurbish properties in such a way as to make them fuel and carbon efficient.

I would like clarity on the “huge detrimental effect” that is mentioned in the motion; however, I see that the proposer of the motion has left the Chamber. It is assumed that those words apply to vulnerable people. There will always be cases in which a whole area can be regenerated — partly through redevelopment and partly through refurbishment. It may be that that requires strong community leadership that is able to explain why refurbishment is acceptable for some properties and redevelopment is suitable for others.

The Alliance Party will support the motion; we will live with it. We would like to hear a lot more about the universal detrimental effect on vulnerable people and about how the proposers of the motion intend to finance the redevelopment that they are calling for. Although we welcome the issue being raised, we would have preferred a motion that does justice to the complexities of how social housing priorities should be reformed within current budgets.

3.00 pm

**Mr Shannon:** Everyone in the Chamber is well aware of the issue of social housing; it is not the first time that the topic has been debated. I spoke before of the fact that some 3,000 people in Ards are on the waiting list for social housing, 900 of whom, in the town itself, are in priority need. Need will not be met simply by renovating existing buildings, although that is still necessary, but by investing in long-term solutions, and the Minister knows that.

The Minister attended a sod-cutting ceremony at a social housing development on the Donaghadee Road in Newtownards in January. That development consists of 40 units and will take a number of people in the Ards area off what are extremely long waiting lists. As the Minister and I know, what makes that development even more special is the fact that Sky Developments, the company responsible, has ensured that the units will be carbon-neutral. Therefore, that company is doing its part to provide homes and to help the environment. Energy saving, which is part of the issue, is involved. Legislation that is in place puts us ahead of many other EU countries, and such developments point to the fact that we in the Province are aware of our environmental responsibilities and try to face up to them.

The homes are designed to perfection, and, although it was a long time coming, the sod-cutting was certainly worth the wait. The benefits are there for many to see, and they will be realised through the allocation of the properties later this year. Sky Developments has a

reputation for building superior housing at affordable costs. Through its work, we can see that houses that save energy can be built keenly, and that is something that the Minister should be promoting. More such housing would lead to a reduction in waiting lists in that area, and that could be replicated everywhere else. The desire and the need is there, and companies such as Sky Developments have the know-how and the ability to produce superior, environmentally friendly housing at affordable rates, and the Minister must tap into that market.

Las week A wus aa a plennin maetin aa Airds Cooncil where thair wur 38 options tae pit aff oan the schedule – monie o’ thaim wur plens fer hoosin schemes at wur provisionally maarked fer social hoosin – hits gyely important at the Meenester’s Depairtment waarks wi’ the Plennin Service fer tae mak siccar at social developments ir gien aa needfu’ hefts tae mak’ siccar at the plens ir wi’ in what bes acceptable tae the Plennin Service an’ at they ir passed.

Last week, wearing my councillor hat, I attended a planning meeting. The schedule for the meeting had 38 options to defer, which was the largest number for a long time. Many of those options involved plans for housing developments that were provisionally marked for social housing. It is of great importance that the Minister’s Department liaise with the Planning Service to ensure that social developments are given all the necessary help to ensure that the plans are acceptable and that they are passed.

A large amount of the work that is handled in my office concerns the Housing Executive. In my area, some families have waited for years to be housed, and there is no hope of that happening in the current climate. Others are in homes that are badly in need of upgrading, and I understand that the Minister is trying to deal with those issues. Those people cannot afford mortgages or private rental taxes. On their behalf, I ask that the Minister ensure that newbuilds become a priority.

I also want to comment about extensions for people with disabilities. I was in touch this morning with the Housing Executive grants office in Dundonald, which covers Ards, north Down and Castlereagh. I was informed that that office has been unable to pay for any of the extensions that have been completed for people with disabilities. Some 60 such extensions are on the books, and the office has no idea of what to do. There is a meeting tomorrow, so perhaps the Minister can tell us whether it will result in that money being made available so that grants for those extensions can be paid out, allowing the scheme to continue.

I have questioned the Minister on many occasions about funding for grants for extensions for people with disabilities. It is now becoming clear that new methods can be used to resolve such issues. A good method is



the pod scheme, which is a ready-made extension that can be attached in two parts. It takes three weeks to complete, instead of the normal 12 weeks. That scheme demonstrates that other ways of producing extensions at a suitable price are available.

The Minister has other options, and she must look at them. This is a serious issue and one that will not be resolved without serious consideration. The Minister must ensure that homes are built and that everyone is looked after. She has a budget, and she must do the job.

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Although Fred Cobain is not in the Chamber, I thank the proposers for tabling the motion. Fra McCann has already mentioned and the Minister already knows that Gerry Kelly and I met two residents groups here yesterday. Refurbishment and redevelopment are needed in those areas.

Trevor Lunn referred to preserving the identity of local communities. There are a lot of Victorian properties in North Belfast. In the past, it was often the community and the tenants who fought to preserve the character of some of those old houses and buildings. However, in this case and in many other cases, we are talking about houses that are over 150 years old. They were refurbished in the 1970s, and that refurbishment was meant to last for 20 years. However, matters have moved beyond that. We are talking about quality-of-life issues, rather than maintaining the Victorian character of a street. Mr Lunn took an intervention from his colleague that clarified that issue. Quality of life is the main concern. The motion deals with the social-justice issue of ensuring that those in need of social housing are placed in homes that are fit for purpose and fit for the twenty-first century.

The other important aspect that needs to be clarified by the Minister is the confusion around special adaptations for vulnerable tenants and people with disabilities. Jim Shannon referred to that matter. I understood that those adaptations would be honoured and that outstanding contracts would be carried through. The issue was raised in the Committee for Social Development and, perhaps when the Minister is replying to the debate, she will clarify the situation.

Thomas Burns referred to the Minister building brand new homes, as opposed to bland homes. I think that the Minister would take exception to that. However, I understand that he was talking about trying to boost the construction industry.

Small and medium-sized enterprises have hardly been mentioned — the small contractors whose livelihoods depend on Housing Executive contracts to maintain and repair houses. Those contracts will go, and that is hugely disappointing. That should be resisted, and all MLAs should make more of that issue. We are talking about small businesses that have been at the heart of

communities, although very few are taking on apprenticeships.

**Mr Shannon:** Does the Member agree that part of the problem is that many of those small developers diversified from building houses to building extensions for disabled people to keep themselves going through this lean time? The key issue is the importance of the flow of money.

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** That is a key issue. Fra McCann said that, if there were no maintenance and repair programmes, houses would eventually fall into even greater disrepair and we would be left with a bigger bill. Setting aside the issue of money, it is not just the bill at the end; it is the quality of life for the people who have to live in the houses. If repairs are not carried through, we will not nudge but push more people into fuel poverty, and that is a big concern.

There can be no contradiction of the fact that there is a connection between poor housing and ill health, poverty and inequality; those factors are all interlinked, and that is no accident. Most members of the Committee for Social Development have raised that issue on various occasions, especially during our inquiry into poverty.

All Members will acknowledge that the Minister has inherited a Department that has seen underinvestment and one that has not done much for social housing. However, the Minister now has responsibility, and she must meet the challenge of ensuring that social homes are built, that houses are maintained and repaired and that they are suitable for the twenty-first century. That is why I struggle to understand the Minister's actions. She said:

“give me the money, and I will build the houses.” — [*Official Report, Bound Volume 22, p134, col 1*].

We gave her the money, and she handed £90 million back. That is a circle that cannot be squared. The money was surrendered.

As Fred Cobain said, this issue is all about people who cannot speak for themselves. It is about people who live in poor housing in some of the most deprived communities in our constituencies, and we need to stand up for them. If we cannot provide people with housing that is fit for the twenty-first century, we are relegating those people and creating a legacy of poor housing, poor health and poverty. That is a legacy that I am not prepared to carry for Margaret Ritchie — or any other Minister, for that matter. I thank Fred Cobain and Billy Armstrong for tabling the motion, and I support it.

**Mr Craig:** I will not rehearse the reasons why social housing is important, but there are some interesting statistics that I will outline. For example, there are 38,000 households on the waiting list, 20,000 of which are in urgent need of housing and 7,500 of which are classed as homeless. That tells us everything that we

need to know about social housing — a huge demand for it exists.

Until the recent credit crunch or economic crash — whatever one chooses to call it — house prices here were among the fastest rising in the whole of the UK. Speculators were buying up land left, right and centre, and housing associations could not afford to buy it. That situation has completely turned around since the crash. However, that change has brought equal pressures to bear. There is now huge pressure on Government spending, and sales of existing Housing Executive houses have also crashed, as people face the twofold pressures of difficulties in obtaining mortgages and, due to job uncertainties, a lack of cash to spend on purchasing homes. That has led to huge difficulties for the Housing Executive, as a whole income stream has disappeared off the radar almost overnight.

A large portion of that income was being used for maintenance. There is a hole in the budget and there is no point in sitting here and denying it; it exists, and we must re-profile Government expenditure to allow for it.

The economic crash has unexpectedly brought some strange opportunities. Land prices are at an all-time low, and now is the perfect time for housing associations to purchase land, even if only to bank it for the future development of social housing.

**Mr F McCann:** The issue of land has been raised in the Social Development Committee a number of times. Committee members have asked about whether, rather than buying more land, the Department could build houses on strategically placed land that is owned by the Department or the Housing Executive. That would certainly have a great impact on the price of each unit built.

**Mr Craig:** The Member has raised an important point. Do all Government offices own land that could be used for building social housing? I do not know the answer to that on a Province-wide basis. I know that in my constituency there is, unfortunately, no such land. That has been a massive issue for the past five to seven years. That is why the opportunities for housing associations to purchase new land are so important in my constituency.

Other issues exist as a result of the huge downturn in the market. All of a sudden, developers are falling over themselves to build social housing. In fact, they are trying very hard to offload their existing housing stock as social housing. Some of that housing is suitable, and some of it is not. However, those are huge opportunities for social housing that have been brought about by the economic downturn, and the Department ought to cash in on them.

3.15 pm

However, there are huge challenges ahead. How do we fund all of this? Do we refurbish or rebuild? That is not a terribly important question. I welcome the fact that we are debating social housing, but the thought occurred to me that a house has to be brought up to the latest building specifications and regulations, regardless of whether it is refurbished or rebuilt. That mechanism will take care of a lot of the fuel poverty issues anyway.

It is an interesting debate, and only the Minister can answer the question of how we move forward with a restricted Budget and meet the social housing targets that were agreed by this Government and — let us face it — this House.

**Mr Armstrong:** The motion addresses issues surrounding how our regional Government and we as a society help the most socially deprived people. The Ulster Unionist Party is dedicated to helping people from socially deprived backgrounds and ensuring that they are given the opportunities and capabilities to improve their situations. The current economic climate shows that circumstances can lead people into poverty and deprivation. Unfortunately, it can often be very difficult for people to get out of that situation.

There are areas in Northern Ireland with cycles of deprivation, and we must work together to break those cycles. This morning, we heard how educational underachievement can create a cycle of underachievement. Similarly, cycles of people living in unfit accommodation can have an impact on families' ability to get out of poverty. The Ulster Unionist Party recognises that there are arguments for refurbishing houses which take into consideration sustainability and heritage issues. However, there are many houses in Northern Ireland that are not fit for purpose.

Our roads have many potholes and are in a desperate situation, and, just as we need new roads, we need new houses. Furthermore, we must look at the heritage that our parents left for us. If they had merely repaired old houses, we would not have been left with the good houses that we have today. Regardless of how much refurbishment they receive, some houses are too old and are inappropriate for families to live in in the twenty-first century — they are not fit for purpose. The situation in many areas of Northern Ireland is acute, and we can no longer ignore the plight being endured by too many families.

I recognise that the Minister for Social Development is facing a very difficult Budget position. However, in the face of that pressure, we must not revert to policies that will potentially fail the people who are most in need of our help. Northern Ireland has some of the most socially deprived areas in western Europe, which is a statistic that we should no longer accept. Adequate and appropriate housing is crucial to regenerating

deprived areas. I urge the Minister not to revert to the wrong policies as the financial pressures increase, because that approach could be more expensive in the long run.

**Mr P Ramsey:** As an SDLP Member, I welcome today's debate. The people here are committed and passionate about social housing, because we all represent many constituents who have a high dependency on it. As other Members have said, the Minister who is responsible for social housing has a poisoned chalice at times of crisis and when, as Jonathan Craig said, the Budget is so restricted. However, a lot of those comments do not reflect the terminology of the motion.

The SDLP cannot support the motion, because it is based on three inaccurate assumptions. Number one: the SDLP does not accept that there has been a "priority change" with respect to demolition and newbuild versus refurbishment. Number two: the motion assumes that redevelopment is always a better option than refurbishment, but we all know that, in real life, it depends. Number three: the SDLP also takes issue with the motion's implication that the Minister is not providing social homes that are fit for the twenty-first century throughout Northern Ireland. I will talk about those assumptions for a few moments.

First, it is the SDLP's understanding that there has been no change in policy or priority with respect to newbuild housing or refurbishment. There is, however, as many Members have said, a major hole in the Budget, caused by the collapse of the housing market. That means that people are not purchasing their Housing Executive properties as they did previously. As a result, Housing Executive revenue was down £80 million last year. That is a serious amount of money that the Minister could have spent on modernisation and refurbishment. Revenue will fall by a further £100 million in the next two years. Given those circumstances, which affect other Departments as well, one might have expected that there would have been a new Budget or, as was said by a Member on the DUP Benches, a "re-profiling" of the existing Budget and a re-profiling of the Programme for Government and a new investment strategy. The SDLP has been making those points for months.

On the second point, the SDLP is concerned at the assumption that redevelopment is better than refurbishment. Is it always better from social, economic and environmental points of view? The answer to that question is that it depends on circumstances and on what the people in those areas want.

**Mr Craig:** The Member has misinterpreted something that I said earlier, and I would not like the Minister of Finance and Personnel to give me a clip round the earhole outside the Chamber. *[Laughter]*.

I said that we might need to re-profile the Minister for Social Development's budget. Whether we have to re-profile the entire Government's Budget to readdress the issue is something that only the Executive can decide. It is not something on which I would dare to comment. They have the wisdom to make up their own minds on that. However, as Mr Lunn said earlier, we need to look closely at how we should re-profile the DSD budget. That is what I was getting at.

**Mr P Ramsey:** I accept the Member's point, although I clearly understood that he called for re-profiling. Anyway, that is beside the point.

From a social point of view, redevelopment can mean the break-up of communities and friendships. From an environmental point of view, one must take into account many factors, including the embedded energy content of an existing home; the energy savings that can be provided through refurbishment and retrofitting; and the energy consumed during refurbishment. Those considerations must be set against the energy used in demolition and in producing building materials in new development. Of course, there is also a consideration of cost: which gives better housing return per pound spent, retrofitting or redevelopment? All those considerations are complex. As Trevor Lunn said, the complexity of housing is immense because it affects people in so many different ways. The decision on whether to refurbish or redevelop needs careful, case-by-case consideration, especially when money is so limited.

The third point is the quality of new homes. I have seen newbuilds being constructed. They are built to a very high specification as regards quality, energy conservation and micro-generation. They are probably of a higher specification in building quality than most private-sector homes built across Northern Ireland at present. The Minister provides very high-quality newbuild homes in Northern Ireland and squeezes every pound that she can out of her budget.

As to the economy, there is no doubt that refurbishments, newbuilds and rebuilds can create employment in dire circumstances, when unemployment is high. At the same time, it creates long-term, high-quality housing infrastructure. However, for the Minister to do that, she clearly needs more money. That will require a new Budget, a new Programme for Government and a new investment strategy. I ask why the DUP and Sinn Féin are so opposed to doing that, but the answer is no great mystery.

**Mr G Robinson:** There is no doubt that social housing is one of the most critical issues in Northern Ireland today. The Housing Executive acknowledges that in the 'Northern Ireland Housing Market: Review and Perspectives 2009-2012', in which it states that:



“there is an annual requirement for ... 3,000 additional new social dwellings ... to meet both ongoing need and address the substantial backlog which has arisen since 2001.”

Those words show just how great the need for additional homes — I stress the word “additional” — is in Northern Ireland today.

The best way to address that backlog is through a combination of newbuilds and redevelopment. Refurbishment is not the entire solution, but it does, to a lesser extent, play an important role. The Minister's Department has placed a great deal of emphasis on the receipt of house and land sales in order to increase her Department's spending power. We must learn that those receipts cannot be a dependable source of cash flow in future. However, we must deal with the need of today. The motion calls for more emphasis to be placed on the redevelopment of our housing stock. Without that emphasis, I cannot see the Housing Executive being able to make the necessary moves forward to provide housing stock.

I am sure that every MLA has had the same experience as I have in dealing daily with constituents who require housing. Too often, I have had to inform constituents that, because the waiting lists are so long, the prospect of their acquiring accommodation is remote. Too often, I have had requests for help owing to difficulties with what is, thankfully, a very small number of private landlords. It is true, as the motion states, that those same constituents make up what could be termed vulnerable groups. As a matter of urgency, the Minister must seek solutions to the social housing problems. I support the motion.

**Mr McLaughlin:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Assembly has expressed its commitment to supporting the Minister in her endeavours to tackle the shortfall in social housing. That shortfall is one of the many legacy issues that the Assembly and its Executive have inherited. We should recognise that, in the past financial year, substantial additional finance was allocated during the in-year monitoring rounds, and I expect — indeed, I hope — that that will continue. Improving the standard of the existing housing stock is a related issue, and it calls for massive expenditure from the Minister and the Housing Executive. Even in the best of circumstances, those would be very difficult issues to resolve.

Members referred today to the fact that, in many debates, the Minister has pointed out that, even with the incremental additions gained through the monitoring process, her budget does not and cannot stretch to meet her targets as set out in the new housing agenda. The explanations for that should be considered objectively. It is neither reasonable nor sensible to blame the Minister for the collapse in the housing market, the credit crunch, the collapse in the sales of Housing Executive properties, which have sunk to such negligible levels,

or the wider issue of the collapse of land and property values, which has impacted on the receipt of surplus asset projections.

As has been said repeatedly, social housing is a priority for all the parties. Given the current financial and economic realities, it is one sector in which last year's aspirations and targets are unlikely to be met. An ultimately sterile blame game could emerge as one, perhaps predictable, response to the difficulties. However, the people who are in need of housing and the people who are affected by the related crisis in the construction trades are entitled to a measured and strategic response from the Assembly to those challenges.

The motion addresses a concern around the Minister's approach to the financial and economic realities — realities that, I think, cannot be denied. As I said, she did not create those realities, but they have an impact on her ability and that of other spending Ministries to deliver on the Programme for Government targets.

I support the motion; however, I do so to be constructive. The Minister is entitled to our critical support in dealing with a very challenging brief and Department. Therefore, I urge her to consider how best we can maximise the value-for-money aspect of what are very finite resources under tremendous pressure. That might be the concern behind the motion, and that was reflected in some Members' comments. I do not agree with all the comments that were made, but a thread of concern ran through them that the Minister and perhaps the Assembly are not responding to the crisis in the most appropriate fashion.

*3.30 pm*

There is an inextricable link between the difficulties in the housing sector and the provision of new social housing stock. It is an absolute requirement, as far as we can afford it, to deal with the existing and growing waiting list. The modernisation or redevelopment of existing housing stock is also a priority, as is the refurbishment of social housing stock where appropriate.

All that costs money, and while factoring those arguments into the financial equation, we should also factor in the direct benefit to economic well-being. The issue has cross-departmental implications, which have been absent from the debate. I describe it as an investment in recovery, and we must familiarise public opinion with the direct benefits to the economy of maintaining in employment those in the construction industry and allied associated trades. If those two issues were linked, perhaps people could see the opportunity for a more collaborative and supportive approach. That is a win-win scenario.



I commend the motion, and I commend some new and strategic thinking in addressing the problems. Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

**The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie):** I thank all the Members who contributed to the debate. I welcome the opportunity to respond to each of the contributions, not least because it gives me the opportunity to clarify and correct some of the issues that were raised. I shall try to address all the questions and points that Members raised, and I assure the House that I will study the Hansard report and write directly to any Member who raised an issue that is not covered in my response.

The motion refers to a “recent priority change” in my Department that favours refurbishment over redevelopment. I must admit that I was not aware of that change, and I thank the Members for bringing that phenomenon to my attention. It is, of course, a nonsense. There has been no priority change or policy shift. From my first day in office, my priority has been to address housing need wherever that need exists. I have already brought forward change that will deliver the most modern social housing ever seen here, and I have re-prioritised my budget to ensure that we provide housing solutions that support those in greatest housing need.

However, it is too simple to say that, in meeting that need, we must adopt a singular approach. That is my fundamental difficulty with the motion, which suggests that redevelopment is the only answer to the housing problems that afflict many communities. That suggests that our only option is to demolish old homes and build new ones. Everyone knows that, when one demolishes, one can put back only a proportion of what was taken away.

**Mrs Long:** Will the Minister give way?

**The Minister for Social Development:** Let me continue.

At a time of record long waiting lists and record high housing stress, I wish to increase the supply of housing across the North. Therefore, I will not sign off automatically on demolition orders simply because it is convenient to do so. Houses should be demolished only if they are no longer fit to live in and cannot be brought back into use. Unfortunately, that has not always been the case, and demolition has often been sought without proper consideration of alternatives through refurbishment and regeneration.

Recently, I met representatives from the Royal Society of Ulster Architects, and I was impressed with what they had to say about the restoration and retrofitting of existing homes. In January 2009, the Government launched a retrofit for the future competition, which is specifically aimed at improving energy efficiency and the environmental performance of the housing stock. In fact, a conference on that very

subject will be held in Belfast in May 2009. We must not close our minds to the new opportunities that it might bring.

Fred Cobain — who, I note, is no longer in his place — is supposed to be the demolition and newbuild enthusiast. I ask him whether he recognises the expression:

“It is old but it is beautiful”.

Members will be aware that refurbishment is often dismissed as being a sticking-plaster solution that buys only a short-term reprieve from the inevitability of demolition. That is not necessarily the case. There can be significant refurbishment that is more akin to rebuilding, such as when external facades are maintained, but all internal structures are restored and replaced. In such a scenario, three old houses can become two new houses, and their historic appearance is retained, which is not a sticking-plaster solution. That has yet to be tried in Northern Ireland, and I am minded to pilot it in a suitable area.

I also recognise, however, that full-scale redevelopment is often the only realistic way forward, and, in some cases, that involves total demolition. Usually, redevelopment involves a combination of demolition and refurbishment. The motion fails to recognise that it is not simply a case of redevelopment or refurbishment, because one can complement the other.

I refer Fra McCann to what is happening in the Village area of south Belfast. Plans there include proposals to demolish 580 homes, refurbish a further 730 and put back 270 new homes. That is a perfect example of how refurbishment and redevelopment can be delivered side by side.

There are also plans to refurbish the seven tower blocks that are known as the “Carlisle multi-storeys” in the north of the city. Plans there will certainly not all involve the demolition and redevelopment of those seven blocks. I fail to see how the refurbishment of those seven blocks will have a huge detrimental effect on tenants who live there. Perhaps the Members who proposed the motion will clarify that matter.

We must also listen carefully to people who live in communities where major improvement works are planned. We must ensure that the proposed work will support and develop those communities rather than disperse and break them up. We must examine the long-term benefits and sustainability of our work. There can be no doubt that better housing leads to better communities. We must not lose sight of the wider benefits that our intervention can bring about, particularly in many of those areas that already suffer from high levels of poverty and social exclusion.

Setting aside the debate on refurbishment versus redevelopment, I think that Members need to be aware

that the resources that I need to deliver those improvements are simply not available at present. Currently, there are 15 separate economic appraisals with my Department, each of which seeks approval to deliver a wide variety of work throughout those areas, many of which have been mentioned during the debate: for example, Tigers Bay, which was mentioned by Mr Cobain. Only a few weeks ago in the Chamber, the Assembly debated plans to improve the housing stock in the upper long streets.

The combined cost of all those improvements is over £125 million and is, undoubtedly, rising. I understand that more economic appraisals are heading my way. Members will, by now, be aware that, because of the collapse of the land and property market, the DSD budget had a shortfall of £80 million in 2008 and faces a further shortfall of £100 million in 2009 and 2010. That has created huge pressures in the housing budget, which Members must recognise will impact directly on many of those proposed improvement plans.

I am not sure that people have got their heads around the housing budget shortfall. Even if we play with newbuild targets and squeeze maintenance budgets, little money will be left to fund redevelopment. Furthermore, people need to get real about the unit costs associated with some redevelopment proposals that come my way. I can build three, or, perhaps, four, newbuild homes on a greenfield site for the cost of a single home in some of the north Belfast redevelopments that have been recommended to me. That factor alone — and I recognise that there are many others — brings the Girdwood Barracks site increasingly into focus as part of the overall solution in lower north Belfast.

During the economic downturn, we have a wonderful opportunity to support the local economy and, at the same time, address housing need by funding a programme of improvements to our housing stock. I have made that case to my ministerial colleagues, and I welcome Members' words of support today. I heard the comments of Jonathan Craig and Mitchel McLaughlin and those of my party colleagues Pat Ramsey and Thomas Burns. Without funding, the whole debate on refurbishment and redevelopment is, in many respects, meaningless.

Mr Cobain and Mr McCann mentioned the warm homes scheme, disability adaptations and multi-element improvement schemes. This year, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive will have over £140 million available for maintenance, improvement and refurbishment programmes. Moreover, the warm homes scheme has not been stopped. Anybody who makes that assertion is wrong.

Mr Cobain referred to the environmental architect —

**Mr Cobain:** Will the Minister give way?

**The Minister for Social Development:** I will continue, because I have started. The Member was not present at the beginning of my response and missed most of the contributions.

DSD has no environmental architect. The Department receives professional and technical advice from Department of Finance and Personnel colleagues from the Central Procurement Directorate. David Simpson referred to energy-efficient homes. The new housing agenda introduced the most environmentally friendly housing ever built in the social sector. Code 3 sustainable homes are now 25% more energy efficient than ever before. That links clearly with my work on fuel poverty.

I want to re-emphasise that the Village is in line for refurbishment and redevelopment. As I said earlier, Mr McCann seems to miss that point. I want to make it clear that I support redevelopment and refurbishment wherever that meets the need. The two concepts are not mutually exclusive. Trevor Lunn highlighted the debate about refurbishment versus redevelopment, and he wanted to hear more about that matter. I agree entirely with Pat Ramsey; there is no one-size-fits-all approach. We must assess each scheme on its own local merits. The motion is fundamentally flawed, because it does not allow for local solutions to local housing problems.

Jim Shannon and Carál Ní Chuilín referred to disabled grant extensions. Yet again, the Housing Executive has been given its budget, and it must prioritise how it will be spent. Disabled facilities grants are awarded on a statutory basis, and, if the applicant meets the criteria, the Housing Executive will have to consider how to meet that need within its budget. I have not stopped those grants.

Other Members mentioned reprofiling the budget. I agree with Mitchel McLaughlin; we must do our best with what we have. However, I currently have a significant amount of economic appraisals before me at a cost of £350,000 per unit. If we demolish and build new homes, I will be confronted with those costs, which, given my budget, are simply too high at the minute.

3.45 pm

The wording of the motion is unfortunate. There has been no policy change. In fact, I do not think that there is any disagreement between the Members who have expressed their views today and me. I will support demolition and redevelopment when that is the best way forward. Equally, I will support refurbishment when that is the best way forward. Each set of proposals must be assessed on its merits, and we should not be constrained by a one-size-fits-all approach.

I am proud that social housing across Northern Ireland today is among the best in these islands. I pay tribute to those who have worked tirelessly over many years to raise standards. Of course, there is still much

more to do. If the resources are available to me, I will invest them wisely in the sort of improvement programmes we have discussed here today. I am already committed to delivering the most modern social housing ever built here, and to meeting the needs of those in greatest housing need. I will not rule anything out in my desire to deliver on that.

However, there is an argument to be won about putting housing on a proper financial footing, and I hope that the proposers of the motion, when winding up the debate, will recognise that housing redevelopment does not lend itself to quick-fix solutions or ill-tempered slogans. A mature discussion is required; one that is grounded in the reality of our financial situation. I look forward to the support of every Member in the House, and every Minister around the Executive table, to put housing on a sound financial footing once and for all.

**Mr McCallister:** It has been an interesting and useful debate — although the Minister may not entirely share that view.

My colleague Mr Cobain opened the debate by setting the scene of the entire social-justice agenda and outlining the areas in which the Assembly and Executive are failing to address many issues and some targets. Other Members backed that up. We are not going to meet our targets for the alleviation of child poverty, fuel poverty and pensioner poverty. Some of the Programme for Government targets are simply unrealistic. Reference was made to the need for up to 3,000 social homes, and the difference between redevelopment and refurbishment.

Mr McQuillan, in an intervention, asked Mr Cobain what our party's Ministers were doing about this. In the area that I am most involved with, the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety supported schemes such as Home Start, which actually make a real difference in the most deprived communities. Perhaps Mr McQuillan will take that on board and begin lobbying his own party's Ministers for more finance, resources and action on the social justice agenda.

Mr Simpson outlined the view of the Committee for Social Development, and set out some of the issues relating to the collapse of property values. He commended the real effort being made to make newbuilds energy efficient, which, as the Minister pointed out, is having a major impact on helping address fuel poverty.

Mr McCann spoke about residents living in outdated accommodation. He mentioned the long-term costs of refurbishment, and that that is probably not always good value for money in the longer term. Buildings end up being refurbished for 20 years, and 30 years later they need to be completely rebuilt. It is not useful for public money to be spent in that way. Redevelopment tends to be a better outcome.

Mr McCann criticised the DSD budget: of course, more resources are needed. He also criticised the purchase of some homes from the private sector for social housing, and supported the view that, in deprived areas that need social housing, there must be consultation with residents and local elected representatives.

Mr Burns did not support the motion, but he made some useful points about the pressure that the housing budget is under. We all accept that that pressure will continue and that the housing budget will be a major issue as we move forward, and, in particular, into the next comprehensive spending review period. Mr Burns and the Minister mentioned shortfalls of £80 million rising to £100 million against a fall in receipts to the Housing Executive. That will have a major impact on the housing budget, particularly in light of the vast sums of money that will be available to the Minister, and on meeting housing need.

Trevor Lunn spoke about redevelopment and refurbishment for local circumstances; Mr Ramsey spoke on a similar theme. Mr Lunn mentioned the Alliance Party's desire to make the hard choices of raising taxes, closing leisure centres and amalgamating schools. In doing so, however, as my colleague said at the start, he would hit some of the families that we most want to help. Closing leisure facilities, for example, could increase problems in health inequalities.

**Mr Lunn:** We were talking about a priority change that might involve some hard choices about, for example, the cost of division. Will the Member address the point that although the motion refers to a recent priority change by the Department, the Minister clearly stated that a priority change is not involved? That would cause us to change our view of the motion.

**Mr McCallister:** I was about to address the Minister's comments. I was relieved to hear the Minister say that there was no priority change, but I was concerned when she later said that she was not opposed to refurbishment and that in some cases it was a much better alternative. It sounded slightly as if she wanted the best of both worlds, and that is what concerns us.

Mr Shannon said that 3,000 homes are needed in the Ards area and that refurbishment alone would not help to reach that goal.

**Mrs Long:** I thank the Member for giving way; I will be brief.

I am slightly concerned because the debate was about refurbishment versus redevelopment, but then expanded into how to provide new homes, which is a separate issue. Redevelopment leads to less housing stock than would be the case with refurbishment; that has been the experience across Belfast, and it has caused major problems. Increasing the number of social housing units is a separate discussion about newbuild.

**Mr McCallister:** Those issues are linked to how we address the entire social justice agenda. Overall, a better quality home can be obtained in a newbuild development, which will be more energy efficient and will help to reduce fuel poverty. A newbuild home is the best long-term option for spending public money. That is what the motion is about.

**Mr Craig:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr McCallister:** Well, all right. *[Laughter.]*

**Mr Craig:** I thank the Member for giving way. Perhaps he can answer some of my questions.

I would have thought that whether a property is refurbished or demolished and rebuilt is for the architects or builders to decide; ultimately, it is a financial decision. Is it cheaper to refurbish or to knock down and rebuild?

I am at a bit of a loss as to why we would do away with refurbishment, especially of historic homes. That worries me. For 30 years, I lived in Hillsborough, which has lots of historic buildings, and I do not want those types of houses to be demolished; rather, they should be refurbished. Whether the Minister gives a direction on the matter is academic, given that it is the architects and the engineers who surely make the decision.

**Mr Shannon:** Your time is up.

**Mr McCallister:** I see that Mr Shannon is trying to replace you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

**Mr F McCann:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr McCallister:** Oh, all right. *[Laughter.]*

**Mr F McCann:** Mr Craig's argument is an interesting one. However, the quality and standard of houses in some areas of Belfast are far different from the quality and standard of houses in Hillsborough.

**Mr McCallister:** One would certainly hope so, because Hillsborough is a very different setting. *[Laughter.]* Mr Craig is probably in enough trouble with his party after calling for the reprofiling of Government spending, which almost bordered on calling for the Budget to be redone. He might have clarified what he said, but I think that Mr Ramsey heard him correctly; he called for the reprofiling of Government spending — that was the phrase that he used. Mr Craig may eagerly await a clip on the ear from the Finance Minister.

Members generally agreed that we need to do much more to address the need for social housing. The Minister assured the House that she did not change the priority as regards refurbishment or redevelopment. However, we definitely support the building of new homes. That should be the priority, because it is the best use of public money.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I am terribly sorry, Mr McCallister, I cannot give you any extra time after all those interventions.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

That this Assembly notes, with concern, the Department for Social Development's recent priority change which gives greater emphasis to the refurbishment of social housing, as opposed to redevelopment; further notes the huge detrimental effect this will have on the most vulnerable people in our society; and calls on the Minister to provide social homes fit for the twenty-first century throughout Northern Ireland.



*Motion made:*

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [*Mr Deputy Speaker.*]

## ADJOURNMENT

### Dunclug Action Plan

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I remind Members that the proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes in which to speak. All other Members who wish to speak will have approximately 10 minutes.

**Mr McKay:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I wish to speak about the Dunclug action plan, which is close to my heart. I have grave concerns about it at present, because of the failure of its implementation. The action plan was launched more than two years ago, and many people had looked forward to its implementation as an opportunity to turn the area around and to address the high levels of crime, antisocial behaviour and other problems in the area.

The present design of the estate is in no way ideal. The action plan rightly states that the present layout — coupled with litter, debris, vacant and derelict properties, vandalism and graffiti — creates a sense of danger in the heart of the estate. When the plan was launched, Dunclug was ranked as the fourth worst area for crime and disorder in the Six Counties. In a survey that was carried out at that time, almost one quarter of the estate's residents said that they did not feel safe living in the area. Even more concerning is the fact that 50% of those living in the area said that they did not feel safe when they ventured out at night.

Following the murder of Michael McIlveen in May 2006, Dunclug estate received unprecedented media attention. Media outlets highlighted the physical, social and community cohesion problems that existed there. Numerous interviews portrayed a community living in isolation, fear and deprivation. The images from the estate also confirmed the poor physical condition of the area.

For many years, the Dunclug residents' association had called on the Department for Social Development to intervene. It finally received a response from the then British direct rule Minister, David Hanson, who paid a visit to the estate in August 2006.

He made a return visit in November 2006, when he announced the Dunclug action plan. During his engagement with local community workers and volunteers, Minister Hanson promised that there would be ministerial ownership of the action plan's implementation. That followed previous announcements by the Housing Executive of large-scale actions or projects to enhance the physical condition of the estate, which never

materialised. The action plan involves DSD and the Housing Executive providing at least £5 million of new money for Dunclug from 2007 to 2011.

*4.00 pm*

The Minister for Social Development has promised that she will take ministerial ownership of the Dunclug action plan. Following her visit to the estate on 26 September 2007, which I welcomed at the time, she met with local stakeholders from the voluntary sector and impressed on them her commitment to drive forward the actions in the plan. Those actions seek to address key concerns about the physical condition of the estate, crime and antisocial behaviour, community cohesion, and, centrally, youth issues in the Dunclug estate.

The plan was formulated in a manner that was meant to instil confidence in a community that had, until then, been given no hope whatsoever. The 21 actions in the plan were put together in a co-ordinated fashion; not by accident, but in a sequence that could be seen to deliver tangible results to residents in the area. That, in turn, would have seen a gradual improvement in the quality of life, as well as a considerable improvement in life chances for residents of the estate.

Area-at-risk funding was used for social impact projects. A dedicated youth officer and a drugs outreach officer were tasked to Dunclug for a two-year period. There was also the successful parents and kids together (PAKT) project, which was to be continued for a further two years. The youth officer used his post to win over the hearts and minds of some of the most at-risk young people in the area and carried out sterling work, which I have seen.

Many other aspects of the Dunclug action plan were used to incentivise the youth to buy into the scheme, including the physical regeneration of the area that those children call home. Unfortunately, the youth officer's post ran out in March 2009, with precious little of the high-visibility work in the action plan being carried out.

The new play park could have been the catalyst for change. However, it has failed to materialise on time. Even though the action was to be implemented by June 2008, the play park is still not in a position to be put in place. The residents' association, along with the youth development officer, worked together to gain the support of local youths with the promise of the delivery of the action plan. That was a difficult task. According to community workers, the youth now feel betrayed by their own community leaders and those responsible for delivery. That is an unfortunate situation.

The drugs officer was tasked to help those suffering most from drug-addiction, and to help their long-suffering families and friends. Qualitative information from the officer, the most reliable of sources, suggests that between 8% and 12% of the people residing in Dunclug could be

using heroin. The post is due to end on 31 October 2009. The drugs problem and subsequent crime associated with the area is due to resurface on a much more significant level if that post is allowed to elapse.

The PAKT programme, which ran prior to the action plan, has also now expired. It was used to help those most vulnerable in the community. Parents were helped to gain skills to improve the quality of parenting. Single mothers gained much-needed support and security through more hands-on tasks with their own children in a safe environment. Those most at risk in Dunclug gained significant confidence from those projects.

The action plan was truly an excellent piece of work, with a design to improve the estate with the help of the voluntary and statutory sectors. The community bought into the plan over the past three years; in particular, the improvements to street lighting, the demolition of a number of problem properties, and the areas-at-risk package, which provided some signposts for hope.

The question now is whether the Minister and the Department have missed the best opportunity, in over two decades, to make one of the most deprived areas in the North a place where residents could feel comfortable and safe and be proud to live. Phase one is a key part of the plan, and its desired outcomes, as stated in the plan, are:

“To create a stable and pleasant environment free from graffiti and flag flying in which all residents can feel safe.”

That phase was to be completed by the end of this month, and there is now a great deal of disillusionment in the community, as well as doubt about whether that vital work will be implemented at all. The Minister for Social Development must deliver on those commitments as a matter of urgency. She promised action, and we need to see those social problems addressed. Excuses are simply not good enough in this quite dire case.

The first part of the action plan is vital, as it deals with the physical condition of the estate and is key to creating a stable and pleasant environment for the people of the area. That is why it is so important that phase one of the plan is implemented. The flats need to be demolished, and a new link road between Dunclug Gardens and Dunclug Park would facilitate a new public transport route, which would radically change that environment and reduce the sense of ghettoisation that exists. Importantly, it would also reduce the opportunities for antisocial elements to carry out criminal acts.

Those who work in the community and voluntary sector in Dunclug are at the end of their tether. Youth work is being cut back significantly, the action plan — or, rather, the “inaction plan”, as locals call it — has been hampered by delays, and the major problems in

the area such as vandalism and antisocial behaviour continue unabated.

We have a duty to ensure that that part of Ballymena is given the support that it so desperately needs. A common complaint that I hear is that there are not enough facilities and amenities at the top end of the town, and that the Ballymena North Business and Recreation Centre is a white elephant as far as people are concerned, because no one can afford to use it. The cinema, the bowling alley and fast food restaurants, etc, are all on the other side of town, and many young people simply do not feel safe going to those places. That is a fact, and there is an onus on us all, as elected representatives from all sides, to try to bring about a situation whereby no young Protestant or Catholic person feels intimidated by going into certain estates in the town.

Even over the weekend, a number of houses were attacked in the Millfield area, just beside Dunclug. The majority of those houses have Protestant residents, and I have serious concerns that certain elements are trying to make inroads into that area. The implementation of the action plan would go some way towards ensuring that those elements do not create the social problems that they have already visited on the area in recent years. All in all, that is a significant piece of work, and a lot more needs to be done on all sides to bring down those social barriers.

If the media crews that swarmed over Dunclug in 2006 were to revisit the estate, they would probably conclude that its physical condition has deteriorated further. They would also confirm, through interviewing residents, that little or nothing has changed for the better in the years since the Dunclug action plan was announced.

Barry Gordon, who was chairman of the Dunclug Partnership, greeted Minister Hanson and Minister Ritchie when they last visited Dunclug. He praised them both, and stated that he believed that change would be implemented. After Mr Hanson’s visit, he said:

“The Minister came to Dunclug in August. He saw for himself the problems that the area is facing. Now, he has delivered. ... I am looking forward to seeing the Action Plan being delivered on the ground and making a difference to Dunclug.”

The failure to deliver on key aspects of the action plan has now seen Mr Gordon and his family being driven from their home in Dunclug by the very people from whom Mr Gordon tried to protect that community.

Barry Gordon’s belief that the full implementation of the action plan would disarm criminal elements in the estate was probably correct. The abysmal failure to implement the plan and create a safer and more stable environment in Dunclug has resulted in his family having to leave the estate due to intimidation. His story

demonstrates that the Dunclug action plan has failed to deliver real social change in the area.

I conclude by urging the Minister to look again at that piece of work and to prioritise it, because there are a number of social problems in the Dunclug area. It is one of the most deprived areas in the North. However, there are criminal elements trying to get a foothold there, and if we do not nip the problem in the bud now, the havoc that those elements will wreak on that community will be ten-fold in a matter of years. Therefore, it is important that the issue is nipped in the bud, the action plan is implemented, and the people in Dunclug are given the better quality of life to which they are entitled. Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

**Mr Storey:** I am glad that the Member has clarified what his Adjournment debate is really about: it is about the action plan and, even more, it is about creating a political opportunity to have a go at a Minister.

That is regrettable. I am always the first to stand up in the House and have a go at most Ministers on any issue; however, it would be more responsible for the Member to work with the Minister to overcome the problems that Dunclug faces.

Before I get into the detail of what I want to say, I listened to the Member continually make reference to others and to outside elements and other people coming in; it is always someone else who is doing something. It is as though he and his colleagues have lily-white hands in all that has gone on in Dunclug. When you create a monster and you use and abuse people's fears, and other people then decide that they are going to muscle in, you cannot, like Pontius Pilate, wash your hands and walk away, saying that it is nothing to do with you and that it is not your problem.

I wish that the Member opposite would start to show some courage and leadership and face up to the reality that things that were done in the past created the environment for the very people about whom he is now complaining about having come into the area. If the Member and his colleagues had not set that context, there might be a different situation in Dunclug today.

I want the plan to be implemented, and I will come to some of the details of it in a moment. Unfortunately, Dunclug has endured some dramatic headlines in the past, and some incidents have cast a sinister, sad and sorry cloud over the residents who have to live in that area. Let us not forget about the people who live in Dunclug who are committed to it. Unfortunately, many others have had to leave that area of Ballymena, and reference was made to one individual in particular.

When I was researching for today's debate, I thought that it would be useful to search some of the recent headlines about Dunclug; I read of drugs-related stories, dissident republican activity, parading controversies, and many others. Furthermore, Dunclug has had to

contend with issues relating to its physical condition, such as crime, antisocial behaviour, community cohesion and youth activities. Indeed, the draft Dunclug action plan referred to it as a community in crisis. That is how it was when we began to look at the problems in the area.

I do not deny that Dunclug has had its difficulties and has faced many challenges. It was built in the 1970s, and the estate suffered from the beginning. There was an absence of access for cars between the different parts of the estate, and traffic and traffic flow causes us concern. That was compounded by the presence of parking courts, framed by the rear of houses with high fences, which created a feeling of neglect and of being hemmed in. That feeling of neglect was, in turn, intensified by litter, debris, vacant and derelict properties and by evidence of vandalism and graffiti. That fostered the crime and antisocial behaviour problems in the estate, which, unfortunately, led to decline in many areas.

In November 2006, I wrote a joint letter, along with my North Antrim colleagues Ian Paisley Junior and Dr Paisley, to the then direct rule Minister, David Hanson. In that letter, we said that we believed that it is essential that the package addressing the physical condition of the estate, crime, antisocial behaviour and youth community development be brought forward as a single package and not piecemeal.

We raised other issues, including the play park, street lighting, vandalism, policing, CCTV, school projects, school clubs, partnership with local churches and youth work, and we spoke of the need to ensure that projects should be local, viable and credible. All those points remain as valid today as they did then.

As I have said, I will not try to deny that Dunclug has had problems to contend with. There remains much to be done, and that brings me to the issue of the action plan. We must keep a sense of perspective about the mammoth task to be undertaken in respect of that plan.

When we received the most recent update from DSD on that plan, it was interesting to see on page after page that many measures are "being delivered". However, one matter is described as "non-deliverable", and it is unfortunate that the Member who secured the debate ignored that because he happens to be in a position to do something about it. Sometimes, it seems that he lives in a state of denial about being a member of the Policing Board. Perhaps he lives in some type of tent, because when one raises policing issues with him, it seems as though it is not his responsibility, but someone else's, even though he sits on the Policing Board.

What is "non deliverable" in respect of Dunclug? According to the most recent DSD update on the action plan, an Assistant Chief Constable:

"has clarified that due to the shortfall in the comprehensive spending review (CSR), the Chief Constable presented a number of



options to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. A number of these have been agreed including the decision not to recruit the PCSOs during this CSR 3 year period up to March 2011.”

What has the Member opposite done as a member of the Policing Board to bring about the policing that we have asked for and desire in Dunclug? There is no point in simply singling out the Minister for Social Development.

**Mr McKay:** I have raised that issue with the local police commander. We have undertaken a lot of work on policing in the area. For example, I recently attended a meeting about drugs in the north of Ballymena, and I will continue to raise such issues at the Policing Board. I ask the Member whether his party colleague for the area Ian Paisley Jnr has raised that issue.

**Mr Storey:** I do not live in Ian Paisley Jnr’s pocket, but I know the hard work that he does and has done in North Antrim, I am sure that he will continue to raise all such issues in relation to not only Dunclug, but Ballymena and the entire constituency. However, we must ensure that we not only have rhetoric, but delivery. That is the real issue, and that is where we must focus our appeals to the Minister.

There is another matter where the Member opposite could use his influence. The Department of Education holds responsibility for funding the North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB). However, there was a delay in the granting of the board’s budget, and there has been a subsequent delay in making the allocations that the board will have to fund the Youth Service. Gordon Topping, the chief executive of that board, wrote to me at the beginning of March and made it abundantly clear that because of that situation, the board is still awaiting a decision on a funding application for two paid leadership staff at the drop-in centre in Dunclug for two nights a week for 48 weeks a year, and paid leadership for the Young Ones youth support scheme for one night a week. Mr Topping added that there would be an opportunity to apply for funding when the Department of Education confirmed the budgets for the Youth Service community relations scheme and intervention schemes.

Therefore, the Member should ask his colleague the Minister of Education what she can do to help to alleviate the problems in Dunclug. Although I am saying to the Minister for Social Development that we need to progress and deliver on the action plan, I am equally saying that we need action from the police, the NEELB, and all political representatives of North Antrim. Such action will ensure that the efforts of those who have a different agenda and who would pull Dunclug down — and have done so over the years — are minimised.

Let us, as the Member opposite has said, offer a signpost for hope. That is what leadership is about. I

challenge Mr McKay, the elected representatives of Ballymena, the Minister and other representatives in the House to ensure that we can deliver on the Dunclug action plan.

**Mr O’Loan:** It is unfortunate that an Adjournment debate on a constituency issue should be acrimonious, but that is not of my making. I find it most unfortunate that the real social problems of Dunclug are used for what I regard as political opportunism, which is, fundamentally, what has happened this afternoon.

There are serious problems in Dunclug. It is a run-down estate with significant social disadvantage. Every indicator says that. A couple of years ago, a very stark statistic found it to be the fourth worst area for crime in Northern Ireland — the estate has a history of decline.

Unlike any Member here, I lived in Dunclug some time ago and know it well. I have been in many houses in Dunclug. I have seen its decline. Like others, I have found it very sad to witness the estate going into decline without any serious attempt in the original stages to arrest it.

A tendency then developed for many of the most settled and upwardly mobile families to move out. The result has been that many families and households in Dunclug have significant social problems. Therefore, we see many of the problems associated with a disadvantaged area — unemployment, health problems, educational underachievement, a lack of social cohesion and social capacity, and significant drug use and dealing. We are all aware that there have been a number of deaths due to serious drug use in the estate. There is graffiti that is generally political, and flag-flying that is associated with marking out territory.

That is why we all welcomed the Dunclug action plan that was originally launched by the then Minister, David Hanson MP, who visited the area and took the situation seriously, for which he is due credit.

As has been said, that plan was announced at the end of 2006 and includes 22 actions that were scheduled to happen by March 2011. There was a total investment of £5 million that — contrary to what the instigator of this debate said — did not all come from DSD; other bodies were involved. The action plan involves physical refurbishment, particularly the Housing Executive estate strategy, which represents about half of that total expenditure, and social projects.

The current Minister has given her full support to the plan. She visited the estate very soon after her appointment. She heard of the problems directly, and it was clear that she understood and sympathised. She has given her full commitment to the implementation of the plan, which gave new hope to Dunclug. The Housing Executive told me that it could let houses in Dunclug that it had previously been unable to.



Much has been done. The Minister wrote to me on 22 February to say that five actions had been completed and 13 were being implemented. As I said, it is important to note that funding was coming from other bodies. The Police Service has been mentioned, but Ballymena Borough Council is also heavily involved. Two actions are not proceeding, one of which was to be funded by the PSNI. As Mervyn Storey rightly pointed out, the police could not find that funding. Sadly, and to my regret, Ballymena Borough Council's application to the re-imaging communities initiative failed.

I pay tribute to many of the projects, but — and I will probably refer to this again — the physical side is difficult in Dunclug, and the social side even more so. Therefore, projects that do good work on the social side must be especially lauded, and I want to pay particular tribute to the parents and kids together project that has done tremendous work with families most in need of support. I also pay tribute to the choices youth project, which has also done invaluable work. It must be recognised that it is part of their design that some of these projects are time bound and that they are intensive initiatives that, in due course, hand over to the statutory agencies.

It is not the case that nothing is happening. Two major actions are about to start — the refurbishment of Dunclug community centre and the provision of a new play area. The total value of those projects is well over £300,000. To say that the magnificent Ballymena North centre that was created through a council initiative, with the involvement of a considerable number of other partners, is contributing nothing is an abuse of the facts and contributes nothing to the debate.

There is genuine concern about the progress of the Housing Executive's estate strategy, which, as I said, is the major physical refurbishment of the estate involving the housing and streetscape. As far as I know, it could start by the end of this financial year, but only if the money is available. If Members want to help in relation to that matter, there is something that they could do in their own parties. They could make a contribution in the political system to ensure that the housing budget in DSD is made a reality. It is absolutely contradictory to call for Dunclug's physical state to be dealt with and not do what can be done, which is to give real political support towards making that money available.

I will take no lessons from Sinn Féin in relation to supporting Dunclug. Its role has been significantly divisive in that area, particularly its history through the residents' association, and — in years gone by — putting up flags in the estate, which started a considerable number of years ago.

That role has now been taken over by others, and there is a section of the youth that is not responsive to Sinn Féin or to any political leaders — certainly none

in this House. Those youths cause enormous hardship and difficulty, but it is right to say that the role of Sinn Féin over the years has been far from constructive there. The leadership that it provided has not been good, and the party knows very well that it has significant difficulties with personalities.

**Mr McKay:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr O'Loan:** If I thought for a moment that this debate had a serious purpose, I would give way. However, the person who called for the debate is simply attempting to use the problems of Dunclug for his own political pretext. For that reason, I will not give way to him for an instant.

It is due, in part, to Sinn Féin's activities that the atmosphere in Dunclug has become significantly uncongenial for many Protestant families. I regret that a number of them have left the estate.

There is a huge amount of work to be done in the estate. The ending of some of the social projects is regrettable. However, the PAKT project is seeking further funding, and I hope that it will be successful. Although the current phase of the youth project may have ended, the North Eastern Education and Library Board has stepped in and is offering significant support. To say — as was said in the initial speech — that nothing has been done or improved is a travesty of the truth.

The physical part of the work needs money, but even that, difficult as it is, is the easy bit — getting the social fabric right is the hard bit. I would love to see some sensible political co-operation on the plan rather than simple point scoring, which is how this debate started.

**The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie):** I thank all Members who contributed to today's debate. I welcome the opportunity to respond to each of the contributions that were made; not least because it gives me the opportunity to clarify and correct some of the issues that were raised. I will try to address all the questions or points that Members raised. I will also study the Hansard report, and if I have left any questions unanswered, I will write to the Member concerned.

The Dunclug estate in Ballymena faces many challenges, not only in housing and regeneration, but in health, environment, drugs, crime, community division and general deprivation. If we are going to address those challenges successfully, all the agencies will have to work together along with the community and public representatives — the very point that was raised by Mervyn Storey and Declan O'Loan. Therefore, it is very disappointing to hear the promoter of the Adjournment debate turn Dunclug into a solely DSD issue around which Mr McKay engages in cheap party-political point scoring. Dunclug deserves better than that.

The action plan for the Dunclug estate in the north of Ballymena was launched in November 2006 and covers a four-year period between January 2007 and March 2011. The plan seeks to improve the physical condition of the estate, address crime and antisocial behaviour, and improve community cohesion and facilities for young people in the area.

4.30 pm

As the Minister for Social Development, I have reviewed the Department's priorities, and during a visit to the Dunclug estate in September 2007, I stated my commitment to ensuring that the actions in the plan are implemented. I welcome the significant progress that has been made, and I assure Members that my officials and I will remain committed fully to working with other Departments and stakeholders to ensure that the plan is implemented in full.

I am pleased to advise Members that nine actions in the plan have been completed. Those include new entrance features for the estate; a full-time community beat officer for the area; the extension of activities that are offered by the council's community sports programme; a minority-ethnic needs audit; the establishment of a Housing Executive housing support and regeneration office in the estate; and the extension of Sure Start activities into the area.

Through the areas at risk programme, my Department has provided funding of more than £139,000 to deliver a youth outreach programme in the estate. As Members will be aware, that programme is time bound. However, I am glad that the North Eastern Education and Library Board has made an offer to the local community to continue delivering that service in the area.

In addition, more than £106,000 has been provided to deliver a parents and kids together project in the estate, and more than £103,000 has been provided for drug and alcohol outreach support. I am also pleased to report that a further 10 actions are being implemented. Those include a youth-justice agency; an early intervention programme and a parents' support service; a school-based initiative to develop greater collaborative working between schools in the area; and a peripatetic support teacher for children from the Travelling community. Also included are additional community development work; a refurbishment of the community centre; new street lighting and footpaths, at a cost of more than £1.5 million; a new play park for the estate; and a £5,000 fund for community-based projects. To date, 13 projects, at a value in excess of £219,000, have been approved through the fund.

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive has started work already to demolish a number of properties that were blighting the estate. So far, 48 units have been demolished, and work to demolish a further 28 is well

advanced. The completion of that work will support the wider regeneration of the estate.

With regard to further phases of the NIHE estate strategy, a detailed economic appraisal has been prepared. That has the potential to deliver real improvements to 264 homes that are in both private and public ownership throughout the estate. The proposed works include a range of internal and external repairs and renovations to homes; enhanced access to courtyards; improvements to main spine routes in the estate; and some general restructuring that, when delivered, will cost more than £2.6 million and will bring real improvements to the lives of those who live, work and play in the area.

The economic appraisal is still being assessed, and I understand that the Housing Executive is working to address queries that the Department of Finance and Personnel raised. I am assured that answers will be forthcoming, and I look forward to having the necessary approval for that work as soon as possible thereafter. However, even with approval, we must try to find the resources that are required to deliver the work.

By now, Members will be all too aware of the funding shortfall that is facing housing as a result of the collapse of the land and property market. Over the next two years, housing will be left short to the tune of £200 million. That loss of revenue means that the Housing Executive must reprioritise its work and start only those schemes for which funding is available.

Although the next phase of work at Dunclug has been identified as a high-priority scheme, the funding for its delivery is not yet secure. Without additional resources, the Housing Executive does not believe that it will be in a position to deliver the work before next March.

I assure Members that I will continue to press my ministerial colleagues for additional resources to make up for the massive shortfall in the housing budget, and I will continue to make the case that investment in housing is needed — not only for vital social reasons, but for strong economic reasons.

Members will be aware that I am not merely calling for more money. Recently, my party published proposals on how to find the extra money that is needed for housing and other priority areas. I invite Members across the House to explore those proposals further.

I regret that the lack of funding has affected other actions in the action plan. The piloting of police community support officers has been delayed due to a shortfall in PSNI funding, and Ballymena Borough Council's application to the Arts Council's re-imaging communities programme to remove political graffiti in the estate was unsuccessful. The proposal to provide closed-circuit television on the estate may not proceed either without the necessary funding.

Progress has been made on 19 of the 22 actions. Despite funding difficulties, that represents a remarkable start to making a difference in the estate and in bringing about the sort of improvements that Members have talked about today.

I will touch briefly on some of the issues that were raised by Members, particularly those raised by Daithí McKay. However, my response may simply be a re-emphasis of what I have said already. The areas at risk programme, through which the youth worker, the drugs outreach worker and the PAKT worker were funded is time-limited. All parties were made aware of that from the outset, and, as stated previously, I welcome the effort of continued youth support in the area. I encourage Mr McKay to work with the community to ensure that the offer of support from the North Eastern Education and Library Board is taken up.

The funding package for the play park is in place, planning permission has been received, tenders have been advertised and work will proceed as soon as possible. I am pleased to say that my Department has been able to provide funding of more than £138,000 to ensure the completion of the play park.

Mr McKay referred also to the lack of facilities in the north end of Ballymena, and he said that the Ballymena North project is a white elephant, because it is too expensive for locals to use. The Department recognises the need for good-quality facilities in Dunclug — that is why we have committed £138,000 for the refurbishment of the community centre in the middle of the estate. If there are concerns about the Ballymena North project, they should be addressed to Ballymena Borough Council.

I restate to Members and to the people of Dunclug my commitment to ensuring that all actions in the Dunclug action plan are implemented. I want to complete the much needed housing improvements in Dunclug — and in similar estates — as soon as possible, so I will continue to press my Executive colleagues to put housing on a firm financial footing.

I thank those Members who contributed positively to the debate. I assure them that my Department, the Housing Executive and I will continue to work closely with the local community and with all the other stakeholders to keep them up to date on progress with the proposed improvements for the Dunclug estate. That is the best signpost for hope that the Assembly, the Executive and all the agencies can give to the people of Dunclug, because that is what they deserve.

*Adjourned at 4.40 pm.*





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# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Monday 27 April 2009

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

*Members observed two minutes' silence.*

## MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

### North/South Ministerial Council

#### Tourism Sectoral Format

**Mr Speaker:** I have received notice from the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment that she wishes to make a statement regarding the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) meeting in tourism sectoral format.

**The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs Foster):** In compliance with section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I will make a statement on the North/South Ministerial Council meeting in tourism sectoral format, which was held in Dublin on 1 April 2009. Michelle Gildernew MP MLA and I represented the Northern Ireland Executive. The Irish Government were represented by Martin Cullen TD, Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism. This statement has been agreed with Michelle Gildernew, and I am making it on behalf of us both.

The Council considered a report from Tourism Ireland's chairperson, Mr Hugh Friel, on the work that that body's board has done since the previous NSMC meeting in tourism sectoral format, which was held in May 2008. The Council noted the issues that were raised at the six board meetings that were held in the interim, as well as the board's views on the impact on business of the current and emerging economic climate.

The Council noted Tourism Ireland's draft business plan for 2009, which sponsor Departments are considering in line with budgetary processes in the two jurisdictions. Both sponsor Departments will work together to finalise the business plan and to bring it forward for approval at a future NSMC meeting. A paper that reported on progress from Tourism Ireland's chief executive, Paul O'Toole, was considered. The Council noted that the worsening economic and travel

environment will have a bearing on the final visitor numbers for the year.

The Council received a presentation on Tourism Ireland's review of European markets, and it was noted that, following that review, the key strategic approach will refocus on and prioritise those source markets that offer the best potential for Ireland to increase visitor flows.

The Council also considered a paper on tourism statistics, and it welcomed the decision of the Central Statistics Office (CSO) in the Republic of Ireland to continue the household travel survey on an updated basis.

The Council welcomed the ongoing co-operation between the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and the CSO on the Northern Ireland country of residence survey and the establishment of a new tourism statistics liaison group with representatives from tourism and statistical agencies from both jurisdictions and looked forward to being kept informed of the group's work.

Tourism's Ireland's annual report and accounts for 2007 were presented and noted. The Council accepted the resignation of Mr Tom McGrath from the board of Tourism Ireland Limited and thanked him for his contribution to the work of the board. It approved the appointment of Mr Howard Hastings as a director.

**The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mr Durkan):** I thank the Minister for her statement and for her work and that of her colleagues at the meeting.

The statement referred to the issues that have been raised at the various board meetings held since the last meeting. Are those issues subsequently reflected in the statement as regards the downturn? Can the Minister give any more indication of what is expected by way of final visitor numbers?

The Minister referred to the draft business plan for 2009 which is under consideration. How long will it be before it is finalised, and are there any particular issues that the Minister can talk about that will help us today?

As regards wider marketing, the Minister referred to the review of European markets and said that there will be a strategic approach that will refocus on and prioritise those source markets that offer the best potential for Ireland to increase visitor flows. Can the Minister say whether there is a shortlist of those source markets? Are any of them being identified as being of particular interest to this end of the island, as opposed to the island in general?

Speaking on behalf of Committee members, I am sure that they join the Minister and the Council in thanking Tom McGrath for his work at Tourism Ireland and the Tourist Board. We wish Howard Hastings all the best in his service at that level as well as on the Tourist Board.

**The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:**  
I thank the Chairperson for his comments and questions.

As the Member can imagine, most of the meeting on 1 April in Dublin centred on the economic downturn and similar issues, which were reflected back from the board meetings that had taken place in the interim since the last tourism sectoral meeting. From my perspective, we are trying to deal with the issue by giving Northern Ireland stand-out in tourism markets. The Member will note that I referred to the chief executive, Paul O'Toole. He will also be aware that Paul O'Toole has resigned as chief executive since that meeting. Mr O'Toole and his colleagues were working hard to give Northern Ireland stand-out in relation to European markets, particularly the competitive advantage that we have in Northern Ireland with the sterling/euro differential. Tourism Ireland has been working hard on that issue, and I will continue to support it in that work.

As regards the business plan, the Member is no doubt aware that there has been a budget in the Republic of Ireland, which has put severe pressure on all Departments. As a result of that, we are at a latter stage than we should be in relation to the business plan for Tourism Ireland. Obviously, there is a need to make efficiency savings across the piece, and that, I imagine, will include Tourism Ireland from our perspective and that of the Republic of Ireland.

There is a shortlist for European markets; from memory, Germany, the Netherlands and France are on that shortlist. I had the opportunity to go to the Berlin travel show, and when I was in Germany I was able to talk to colleagues in the industry there. We talked about areas such as cruising holidays, which we have good stand-out on, particularly in Fermanagh, which will be —

**A Member:** Hear, hear. *[Laughter.]*

**The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:**  
There is no self-interest at all; the matter was raised with me, and obviously I was keen to encourage it. As the Member knows, a lot of Germans come to Northern Ireland for cruising and fishing. That has fallen off a bit, and we want to encourage them to return to Northern Ireland, especially now that we have that competitive advantage.

**Mr Newton:** I thank the Minister for her statement on this important sectoral interest. I join the Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment in thanking Tom McGrath for his work on the board of Tourism Ireland over the years.

The Minister referred to the chief executive, Mr Paul O'Toole, stepping down. That is a key position. Will the Minister tell us when Mr O'Toole's replacement might be sought, how long the process

might take and when we might expect a replacement to be in post?

**The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:**  
I thank the Member for his comments in relation to Mr Tom McGrath, who has resigned as chairman of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and, as a result of that, as a director of Tourism Ireland. I pay tribute to Tom's leadership of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and for representing Northern Ireland in his own robust way on the board of Tourism Ireland. I very much welcome the fact that Howard Hastings is the new chairman of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and will represent Northern Ireland's interests, among others, on the Tourism Ireland board.

As I said, Paul O'Toole has resigned as chief executive of Tourism Ireland. In particular, I wish to pay tribute to him for his work on the Northern Ireland tourism economy. He has done that very well. Under the constitution of Tourism Ireland, the board will appoint his replacement. Having spoken with Mr Hugh Friel, the chairman of the board, I understand that a recruitment process to replace Paul is under way. A new chief executive must be in place as soon as possible, because this is a crucial time for tourism. Therefore, we urge Tourism Ireland to proceed with haste.

**Mr P Maskey:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle, agus go raibh maith agat, a Aire. I pass my best wishes for the future to Paul O'Toole, and I congratulate Howard Hastings on his appointment as a new director on the board of Tourism Ireland and as chairman of the Tourist Board.

Visitor numbers may be lower this year as a result of the economic downturn: has the cost of that to the local economy been worked out? There may be financial costs, and potential revenue might be lost. Are job losses foreseen as a result of the economic downturn's effect on tourism?

**The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:**  
At the meeting in Dublin on 1 April, Paul O'Toole was able to tell us that the forecasts for visitors were being looked at monthly. It is like a rolling forecast, because it is almost impossible to say what the situation will be in six month's time, never mind a year's time. Therefore, it is very difficult to find statistics for visitors at this time. However, I take heart from the fact that some hotels in Northern Ireland have good booking figures, and I know that the Member will do so too. Just last week, I noticed that the management of the new hotel that has opened on the site of the former Belfast Superbowl say that they are very impressed with the number of bookings that they have received from out-of-state visitors. That is very good.

We need to send a confident message to visitors, and I have been working on that with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and Tourism Ireland. We want to

say to people that, if they have never visited Northern Ireland before, this is the best time to do so, because it is extremely good value for money. However, the corollary is that we must have a good product in place for the people who do come to Northern Ireland: they must have a good experience. That is why I have been encouraged by the number of new hotels that have opened in Northern Ireland. We will continue to support them in their marketing, whether it is through the Northern Ireland Tourist Board or Tourism Ireland.

**Mr Cree:** As usual, the Committee Chairperson has mopped up all the questions for the rest of us. I return to the business plan, which was late this year: will the Minister tell the House whether it will contain any new strategic initiatives that will extend beyond the current year?

12.15 pm

**The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** We are basing our strategic plan and our forecasts on statistics, which is incredibly difficult, given that Tourism Ireland officials bring us rolling statistics. The business plan and the decision on how much money will go to Tourism Ireland has been delayed by budgetary problems in the Republic of Ireland. Therefore, we need to know how much money will come from the Republic of Ireland before we can set out a plan for the future. Given our budgetary pressures, we also need to be aware of the need for efficiencies, which must be worked into the plan.

**Mr Neeson:** I thank the Minister for her statement. Like other Members, I appreciate the work that Tom McGrath has done, and I wish Howard Hastings all the best for the future.

Is the Minister aware that a visitor survey that was published at the weekend seemed to be very critical of pricing in the Republic of Ireland? Will she ensure that Northern Ireland is not associated with that survey? Will the Minister also ensure that Tourism Ireland promotes Northern Ireland fairly?

**The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** Since I became Minister with this portfolio, I have been very aware of the need to make Northern Ireland stand out as a tourist destination. Tourism Ireland has been working very closely with me and the Department on that, and it is even more important now that we have a competitive advantage in the euro/sterling exchange rate. I think that the Member was thinking about that when he made the point about pricing in the Republic of Ireland. Some operators whom we met when we were in Berlin some time ago talked about coming to the Republic of Ireland. Those people said that the Republic of Ireland is a beautiful place to come to but had become very expensive. It is important that value for money, not cheapness, is written right across the Northern Ireland tourism

brand. Along with Tourism Ireland, I am determined to do that, and that organisation knows that we need to continue to concentrate on that type of issue.

**Mr Hamilton:** My point follows on from the theme that Mr Neeson introduced. The recent cross-border retail phenomenon has impressed us all. Indeed, figures that one supermarket released last week estimated that it is worth in excess of £40 million to the Northern Ireland economy. That is obviously very welcome, although I am not sure whether Minister Cullen would have shared that view at the North/South Ministerial Council meeting. Will the Minister tell us how she is working to ensure that the very welcome tourists who come from the South to shop in Northern Ireland are not merely day trippers but that they add further to our tourism economy by staying overnight or even longer?

**The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** I thank the Member for his question. The Northern Ireland Tourist Board is very much engaged in that work. I am very encouraged by the fact that some of our hotels along border areas have reported big increases in visitors from the Republic of Ireland. Lough Erne Hotel in Enniskillen, for example, reported somewhere in the region of a 25% to 30% increase in visitors from the Republic of Ireland.

We need to continue to look at that and find ways to promote short stays in the first instance so that people who come up for retail therapy may decide to also have spa treatment and stay over for a night or for a weekend to avail themselves of our very good tourist facilities. That is a job of work for the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, which is very much taking it on board, and we will continue to support it in that work. The Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau is also working to attract people to Belfast as a shopping destination through, if I remember correctly, a festival of shopping, which we are helping to promote. The aim is to increase visitor numbers and the number of nights that tourists spend in Belfast. Therefore, a great deal of work is ongoing in that area, and we will continue to concentrate on that.

**Mr Molloy:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her statement on the tourism sector. It is very timely, given the economic decline. Was there any discussion at the North/South Ministerial Council meeting or in the Tourist Board about the potential for expanding the promotion of tourist attractions? I refer specifically to the likes of Lough Neagh and the Fermanagh lakes, which could be promoted together to attract people from all over Ireland who have an interest in lakes and fishing.

**The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** Nothing specific was raised in relation to Lough Neagh, but it was the subject of an Adjournment



debate in the House. That debate may have been introduced by the Member; I cannot recall. We are very much aware of the potential of Lough Neagh. We want to work with the district councils surrounding Lough Neagh, of which there are many, and that is a part of the difficulty. However, we need to promote inland waterways somehow for the German visitors. We must ensure that there is product available when they come to Northern Ireland to enjoy themselves.

**Mr Wells:** Like the Minister and other Members, I congratulate Tom McGrath on his work. Does the Minister accept that a unique situation faces Northern Ireland? The ducks are well and truly in line: there is a greater emphasis on holidaying at home because of the economic position; there has been a reduction in VAT; and the sterling/euro exchange rate is favourable. The circumstances are unique. Is the Minister content that her officials in the Tourist Board are ready to seize that unique opportunity, which may never recur, and to bring in a welcome influx of visitors, similar to the influx of shoppers referred to by Mr Hamilton? That sustained Newry, Strabane and Londonderry at a very difficult time. Are her officials ready to seize this opportunity to avail ourselves of those unique economic circumstances?

**The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** I thank the Member for his comments. He will have gathered from my initial comments that we are concentrating on this area, be that the Northern Ireland Tourist Board in the internal Northern Ireland market or the ROI market. The Member and other Members are aware of the successful Northern Ireland Tourist Board advertising campaign carried out recently in the Republic of Ireland. It is so successful that we have received requests from people who want to know where they can buy the music that goes along with the advertisement. It has been most successful.

I also want to look at the GB market. Like Northern Ireland, it is a sterling zone. More people on the mainland will want to stay within the sterling zone for their holidays. Therefore, we should market Northern Ireland as a place to which they should come. They may never have been to Northern Ireland before, and this is an opportunity for them to go somewhere different for their holidays within the UK. We are working with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, and we also need to work with TIL in relation to our GB marketing campaign.

**Mr McFarland:** On behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party, I pay tribute to the work of Tom McGrath and welcome Howard Hastings to the board of Tourism Ireland.

Why are passengers who pass through GB airports bombarded with Tourism Ireland billboards encouraging them to visit Dublin? In this time of economic hardship,

when we need every tourist that we can get to visit Northern Ireland, we should encourage our fellow countrymen and countrywomen to visit Northern Ireland instead of the Republic of Ireland.

**The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** I am surprised at that comment. The advertisements that I have seen suggest the reverse. From the Republic of Ireland, there have been some rumblings that Tourism Ireland spends much too much of its time encouraging visits to Northern Ireland, rather than to the Republic of Ireland. That is what the industry in the Republic of Ireland says.

I give the Member this assurance: when I leave the House today, I will ask Tourism Ireland for statistics on its advertising campaigns to ensure that it is giving Northern Ireland the available stand-out. The Member will realise as well as I do that some visitors to Northern Ireland come here having first spent some time in the Republic of Ireland. The important thing is that we get visitors to come to Northern Ireland, and I will continue to do that. The Northern Ireland Tourist Board and Tourism Ireland are looking at facilities in Dublin Airport to ensure that, when people land there, they know that they can visit Northern Ireland for a tourist break here as well. That is an important job of work.

I listen to what the Member says, and I will come back to him with statistics on advertising. It is an important issue, and we must respond.

**Dr McDonnell:** I thank the Minister for her statement. I, too, thank Tom McGrath for his outstanding contribution and welcome Howard Hastings to the board of Tourism Ireland. I have confidence that Howard will do the job equally well.

What are the Minister's expectations for tourism in Northern Ireland, particularly for this year? Owners of guest houses tell me that they notice a significant decline in advance bookings in recent months. I have no clear information on how the hotels are faring or the level of group bookings that may have been made months in advance. If there is a decline, is there anything that the Assembly can do to boost bookings to keep owners of guest houses and others alive until better days?

**The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** I thank the Member for his point. He is right that various types of accommodation exist in Northern Ireland, and experiences in each sector may vary. I am hearing mixed views; some hotels, as I said earlier, are doing well, but others are not doing as well. In determining the way forward, we must work with the industry, specifically to ascertain statistics.

I heard some anecdotal evidence of fewer advance bookings. However, when compared with the same time last year, there is little difference. People are not booking in advance, but they are still coming to Northern



Ireland and spending nights in bed and breakfasts and hotels. It will be interesting to see a like-for-like comparison later this year. I grant the Member that there is a difference in the number of advance bookings, but the long-term differential will be interesting.

**Mr Poots:** I thank my colleague Mr McFarland for highlighting the deficiencies of Tourism Ireland, which is an all-Ireland body that has been established. Will the Minister ensure that sterling's weakness against the euro and, indeed, the dollar gives Northern Ireland a key marketing advantage over the Republic of Ireland and the rest of Europe? Will she ensure that Northern Ireland has an identifiable marketing niche that will be used to enhance the tourism product and thus its saleability?

**The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** Yes; I give the Member that assurance. One would not choose to start from the current position, but we are where we are. That is why I am working hard to ensure that Northern Ireland is in a stand-out position to boost visitor numbers in markets such as Germany, France and elsewhere. People must know that Northern Ireland is a sterling zone in which they will receive a good product that is value for money.

Many people will have seen that places in the Republic of Ireland have recently been marking down prices drastically to attract visitors. However, on arrival, that value for money for visitors drops off. Therefore, we must present a tourism package to ensure that visitors to Northern Ireland experience value for money, not only in accommodation but across the board, from buying coffees to going out for an evening. It is a big job, and my Department will continue to work on it.

**Ms Anderson:** Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for her statement. Given that the Minister referred to Fermanagh, she will not be surprised by my reference to Derry and its lack of international chain hotels. Will the Minister, when refocusing on and prioritising source markets, as she mentioned in her statement, take that into account? Their introduction into Derry could help to increase the future flow of visitors.

**The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** The signature project in Londonderry makes the city a stand-out. I am keen for it to be finished, because the Walled City has a unique character that must be marketed aggressively. I want people to visit the Walled City and to travel from there to the rest of the west. Indeed, I also want them to travel across to the east; I will also give that area a few visitors.

The Walled City will be marketed aggressively in conjunction with the other signature projects. To assist visitors in moving around Northern Ireland, it is important that all those projects be linked.

**Mr Shannon:** I thank the Minister for her statement, in which she referred to the need to:

“prioritise those source markets which offer the best potential ... to increase visitor flows.”

I think that the Minister will agree that Londonderry has great potential to do more around the Apprentice Boys of Derry parade, and that more people and their families could be encouraged to come. What engagement has the Minister had with the Orange Order to discuss the potential that quite clearly exists? Was there any talk of the 12 July parades being developed as tourist events? There has been some discussion around the development of the Boyne site. Was there any comment on that?

12.30pm

Four flagship parades have been outlined for Belfast, Tandragee, Dromara and Coleraine; of course, I could add Bangor to that. What engagement has there been with the Orange Order to promote the tourism potential of those parades?

**The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** The Member will know that I believe that cultural tourism, in its totality, is a great hook to get people into Northern Ireland. It will come as no surprise to him to hear me say that I think that the flagship Twelfth parade is in Lisbellaw this year and not in Bangor.

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board and Tourism Ireland are in regular contact with representatives of the Loyal Orders to discuss how to promote the 12 July parades. I pay tribute to the Orange Order for its ongoing commitment to work with Tourism Ireland and the Tourist Board. Through the flagship parades, Tourism Ireland has helped to raise the profile of this year's parades, and that work will continue. I understand that considerable interest was generated last year and that, for the first time, there was a facility for people to watch the parade online. That should be very much welcomed.

## MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

### Swine Flu Outbreak in Mexico and USA

**Mr Speaker:** I have received notice from the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety that he wishes to make a statement regarding the swine flu outbreak in Mexico and the United States.

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr McGimpsey):** I wish to make a statement to the Assembly on the swine influenza virus, which has been identified in seven districts in Mexico, in Canada, and in California, Texas, Kansas and New York in the United States. Possible cases are being investigated in other parts of the world, including the UK. The outbreak, which involves the swine influenza virus AH1N1, is a matter of considerable concern for public health authorities worldwide. In Northern Ireland, my officials have been working on the issue throughout the weekend. Further work is ongoing, particularly in regard to surveillance, advice to the health sector and communication with the general public.

The reported events in North America are unusual, and therefore warrant further investigation and vigilance on the part of other countries. Investigation and testing is ongoing to determine the severity of the disease and the ease with which it can spread. Those investigations are currently being undertaken by Mexican and US authorities, with the support of the World Health Organization. At this stage, however, there has been no change to the World Health Organization's pandemic alert level, which remains at level 3. It is not the case, therefore, that a pandemic flu has been declared.

Given the concern about this development, my Department and the Public Health Agency are monitoring the situation extremely closely to assess the implications, if any, for public health in Northern Ireland. There is very close liaison with the UK Health Protection Agency and UK Government Departments, particularly the Cabinet Office and the Department of Health. Officials are also working closely with the Department of Health and Children in the Republic of Ireland.

Over the weekend, I was fully briefed on the situation by the Chief Medical Officer and senior officials from the Public Health Agency, and I participated in a meeting with key health professionals. Northern Ireland has robust plans in place for dealing with situations such as this. We have worked, and are working, extremely closely with the rest of the UK and the Republic of Ireland to ensure that we are prepared and that the public is protected to the maximum level possible.

Flu activity in Northern Ireland is currently at a very low level. However, systems are in place to ensure early identification of the new strain, should it arrive in

Northern Ireland. At present, no cases of swine flu have been confirmed in the UK, but some travellers who recently returned from Mexico are under assessment in Scotland.

Testing has shown that human swine influenza can be treated with antiviral drugs, which, I am pleased to say, we have already stockpiled in Northern Ireland. I cannot emphasise enough, however, the simple, and potentially extremely effective, steps that members of the public can take themselves. Good hygiene, especially frequent hand washing, is very effective in combating this type of infection. That is particularly important for anyone who exhibits flu symptoms. People can also protect themselves and their families by using tissues to cover their mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing.

Although the condition is a variant of swine influenza, I wish to state strongly that people are at no risk from eating pork or pork products. Properly handled pork and cooked pork, and pork products, are safe, because the virus is not transmitted through food. There are no current travel restrictions being placed on those who plan to visit the affected areas of Mexico or the United States.

**The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mrs O'Neill):** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. He said that no travel restrictions are currently being placed on those who plan to visit the affected areas. Are talks taking place, or is work being done, with representatives of the travel industry to provide advice for people on things to look out for when travelling to those areas? Is any advice available about when to seek advice? Furthermore, is there a preventative vaccination that people who are travelling to affected areas can take?

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** No vaccination is currently available. It is a new strain, so it will take between three and six months to identify it and to start to produce a vaccine. Antiviral drugs are available, and they can be taken as soon as someone experiences the onset of the flu symptoms.

As I said, there are no travel restrictions at present. Anyone who has a concern about that should consult the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website for advice. People who are suffering from flu-like symptoms should stay at home and contact their GP, who will further advise on what should be done. The advice is what one would normally expect for flu. People should stay in their house so as not to risk infecting the public, and they should follow good-hygiene procedures such as hand washing. They should adhere to the old adage from when we were small: "Coughs and sneezes spread diseases."

Therefore, handkerchiefs and tissues should be used when coughing and sneezing. That is simple advice.

In the United States and elsewhere, the flu symptoms have, so far, been mild, as had been anticipated. In Mexico, a number of fatalities has occurred, and the World Health Organization (WHO) must understand what is causing that. It must find out whether there is something underlying that people are not noticing.

**Mr Buchanan:** I thank the Minister for his statement and for his reassurance that his Department has robust planning in place to ensure the population of Northern Ireland is afforded the greatest possible protection. Does his Department intend to provide any guidance to GPs and surgeries on what to expect if some patients present at surgeries with a flu-like virus so that, if such a contagious virus comes here, it can be stemmed at the outset?

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** As I emphasised in my statement, it is not a pandemic. We are at phase 3 on the current WHO phase of pandemic alert, but that is as a precaution. We will prepare for the worst and hope for the best, and that is always the best way.

The Department, in carrying out its robust plans, has had a series of conversations and is working closely with other health Departments in the UK. This afternoon, I will have a conference call with other health Ministers. As I said, the Department is also working closely with authorities in the Irish Republic.

As far as guidance is concerned, robust plans are in place. Guidance is available and will be provided to GPs if it is not already with them. I do not want to say that they already have the guidance; however, if they do not have it at present, they will have it shortly. Of course, GPs are the first line of defence. As the winter flu period has passed, the level of flu consultations is currently low. Therefore, the best thing that people who experience flu-like symptoms can do is ring their GPs and talk to them. GPs will provide advice.

**Mr Gardiner:** I thank the Minister for his statement and for being proactive on the issue during the weekend. If required, will he liaise with his colleagues in the NIO and the Department for Regional Development (DRD) to ensure that any resources, over and above those that are already in place at ports and places of entry, are provided to protect the people of Northern Ireland?

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** My private office has contacted the Minister for Regional Development's private office to apprise it of developments. As regards the NIO, I have already had a conversation with Paul Goggins. He has offered any assistance that he can provide, should I require it. I was grateful for that conversation with him.

As I said, I will also have conversations with my counterpart Ministers in the UK. Later today, we will have a conference conversation to ensure that all of the UK population gets a consistent message and that we deal with the matter as players of the same team. I will also have close contact with the Republic's Department of Health and Children.

**Mrs Hanna:** I thank the Minister for his prompt statement. Certainly, we all hope that the outbreak will not progress beyond level 3.

As regards treating swine influenza in humans with antiviral medicines; will the same medicines treat the virus when it has been transmitted through human-to-human contact, as may be the case at present? To clarify what I mean: obviously, the outbreak started through swine-to-human contact. There is now concern that the virus may be passed from human to human. Can the antiviral drugs that treat the virus that is passed from swine to human also be used to treat the virus that is passed from human to human, as that may be the stage that the disease has now reached?

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** I understand the Member's question. The virus is transmitted from animal to human and also from human to human. There are sufficient antiviral medicines in stock to protect the population. Those drugs would be administered within around 48 hours of the onset of flu-like symptoms.

**Mr Ford:** I also thank the Minister for his prompt and reassuring statement, and for the work that he and his officials have done during the weekend.

First, I want to follow up the point that was raised by Mrs O'Neill. During the weekend, there were suggestions in the media that the current flu vaccine would provide some protection against this particular strain of the virus. However, the Minister appears to be saying that that is not so. Will he clarify that matter?

Secondly, the Minister talks about stockpiling antiviral drugs. Will he tell the House what proportion of Northern Ireland's population can be covered by the stockpile that his Department holds?

Thirdly, accepting that the primary concern is prevention at primary care level, with the GP, will the Minister assure the House that there are adequate resources, particularly adequate staffing in hospitals, if there were to be — and we trust that there will not be — a large number of people who require secondary care?

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The Member has raised three points. The Department believes that it is unlikely that the winter flu vaccine will give adequate protection against swine flu. However, we will be better informed on that matter after work that is being carried out in the United States has been completed.



This year, uptake of the flu vaccine was high, but it could be higher, and we want to increase the uptake rate. However, even if the rate had increased, it is unlikely that that vaccine will protect against this virus.

12.45 pm

The Member asked about stockpiling. In the worse-case scenario, the flu will affect 50% of the population, and I have planned for that. Therefore, I have stockpiled and purchased to ensure that we have that order of protection, although I reiterate that that is the worst-case scenario; I do not anticipate that we will need that amount of vaccine. However, it is always better to destroy excess unused vaccines than to allow people to be struck down by the virus and to get into trouble because of an insufficient number of vaccines.

We have a strong GP network that will receive the resources that it requires, because GPs are our front line of defence. If we need to use hospital beds, the entire hospital network is in place and able to respond as necessary.

**Mr Easton:** I welcome the Minister's announcement and credit him and his Department for their work at the weekend. Will he advise whether anyone from the Department will contact the USA, which is on the front line, for up-to-date advice on the flu epidemic? Are we using the Tamiflu drug or other virus vaccines?

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** We do not have vaccines. They will take three to six months to produce. We will use antiviral drugs; people who contract the flu will receive the Tamiflu antiviral drug.

A strong network operates in the US that emanates from the World Health Organization. All countries, including ourselves and the United States, are part of that organisation and network through it. We will use that organisation as a channel of communication. As I said earlier, the existing flu vaccine, which several hundred thousand people currently enjoy, is unlikely to protect against this virus. However, we will be better informed in due course. The World Health Organization, the Department of Health in London and the devolved Health Departments will address the matter.

## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE BUSINESS

### Presumption of Death Bill

#### Final Stage

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

That the Presumption of Death Bill [NIA 23/07] do now pass.

The Bill has reached its Final Stage in the Assembly, and, if it is passed today, I expect the legislation to be fully operational by some time in the autumn. The legislation will give the families of missing persons in Northern Ireland the opportunity, for the first time, to have the presumed death of their family member confirmed by the High Court and to have a certificate of presumed death made available to them by the General Register Office. Although a piece of paper cannot erase or even ease the suffering that families of all missing persons endure, it may help in the grieving process and bring some small measure of comfort.

The Bill that I introduced to the Assembly on 1 July 2008 is, on the face of it, not markedly different to that before the House today. However, the present Bill is better and now contains provision that allows the High Court to order the disclosure of relevant information to the court. Moreover, we have now put beyond doubt the availability of the new legislation to the families of the disappeared. The ordinary jurisdictional rules that relate to domicile or habitual residence will not apply to applications from close relatives of the disappeared. We have also made several technical adjustments to the insurance provisions that will, I hope, simplify them and allow the public to understand their operation more easily.

The Bill has improved thanks, in no small measure, to the careful and through scrutiny that it received over several months in the Committee for Finance and Personnel. I thank the Chairman, the Deputy Chairman and all Committee members for the sensitive manner in which they undertook and prioritised scrutiny to ensure that the Bill could reach the statute book as quickly as possible.

I also thank those few organisations and individuals who responded to the initial consultation paper on the draft Presumption of Death Bill published by my predecessor in January 2008, and those who submitted evidence or appeared before the Committee.

I do not intend at this stage to spell out in any great detail what the Bill does or how it does it. We have been over that ground previously, but to recap very simply, the Bill confers a new statutory jurisdiction on the High Court to make declarations in relation to missing persons, including the disappeared. The High Court may make the declaration if satisfied that the



missing person is thought to have died, or has not been known to be alive for a period of at least seven years. If the High Court makes a declaration of presumed death, the Registrar General will enter the details of the missing person in a new register of presumed deaths. The family of the missing person may then obtain a certificate of presumed death.

The effect in law of both the High Court declaration and the entering of details in the register of presumed deaths will be as if the missing person had died and his or her death been registered in the usual way.

That is all I wish to say about the Bill itself. During the passage of the Bill through its Assembly Stages, the important work of the Independent Commission on the Location of Victims' Remains has continued, and, in December 2008, the commission confirmed that it had located one of the disappeared. That is obviously a welcome development, giving fresh hope to the families of those whose bodies have not yet been found.

The families of the disappeared have recently launched a new campaign to raise awareness of their plight, and have called once again for anyone with information to contact the independent commission. I repeat what I said during the debate on the Second Stage of the Bill: I am sure that everyone in the House will wish to convey the House's support to the continuing efforts of the independent commission, and anyone with any information is urged to make it available to the authorities as soon as possible.

The Committee for Finance and Personnel's report on the Bill welcomed my Department's commitment to assist the families of the disappeared in identifying avenues of funding or practical assistance in connection with applications for declaration of presumed death. My officials have contacted a range of organisations, from the Legal Services Commission — which is responsible for both legal aid and exceptional legal aid — to the Northern Ireland Lawyers Pro Bono Group and the Northern Ireland Court Service, the latter in respect of remission of fees. Discussions will continue, and families will be kept informed of the progress made by my officials through the WAVE Trauma Centre.

At this stage, we cannot say that any specific funding package can be put in place, but officials are in contact with colleagues in the victims unit of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM), and will continue to work with the victims unit to see what can be done to reach a satisfactory outcome for those close relatives of the disappeared who wish to apply for a declaration of presumed death.

Finally, I alert the Assembly to a further stage in the Bill's passage towards Royal Assent. It is my understanding that the Secretary of State will lay the Presumption of Death Bill before Parliament in accordance with section 15 of the Northern Ireland Act

1998. That is because it contains provisions dealing with reserved matters that are not merely ancillary to transferred matters. Once it is laid before Parliament, a minimum of 20 Members of either House may within 20 days table a motion that the Assembly Bill should not be submitted for Royal Assent. If no such motion is tabled within that 20-day period, the Secretary of State is free to submit the Bill to Her Majesty for Royal Assent.

**Mr O'Loan:** I note and acknowledge all that the Minister has said. The Bill is a necessary and valuable piece of legislation. It has general application, but it also has particular significance in relation to the disappeared. The families of the disappeared have watched the progress of the Bill with immense interest, and, it should be said, considerable concern and emotion.

There are those among the families of the disappeared who have been keen to see the legislation passed and will wish to avail themselves of it. Everything should be done — and, I think, has been done — in the terms of the Bill to make the progress of any application to the courts as easy as possible.

Anything that can be done to ease the financial burden on those families, especially measures that can be taken by the relevant public authorities, should be done to enable that to happen.

Not all the families of the disappeared will wish to avail themselves of the legislation. It should not be thought for a moment that the enactment of the Presumption of Death Bill will remove the onus on all those who can assist the families of the disappeared to recover the remains of their loved ones so that they can be given a Christian burial. That onus also remains on public authorities who have any relevant information.

Earlier in the process of the Bill, I had concerns about the issue of disclosure of information, but I am somewhat reassured by what I have learned since. It is neither necessary nor, perhaps, helpful to have a duty of disclosure on public bodies, but I still believe that anyone who has information that can assist the families of the disappeared or those who will seek to make an application under the new legislation has a moral duty to do so.

The only other issue that was of concern to the Committee for Finance and Personnel, which considered the legislation very closely, was the seven-year rule. I am satisfied that that rule can, if necessary, be readily adjusted in future without recourse to primary legislation. The Presumption of Death Bill should have the full support of the Assembly.

**The Minister of Finance and Personnel:** I thank Mr O'Loan for his comments. Thankfully, the great majority of Members and people across Northern Ireland will never have to deal with the kind of situation addressed by the Bill or be in a position to have to have recourse to the provisions of the Bill.

However, I trust that the Bill will provide the people who are in that awful position with some practical assistance in dealing with the emotional, financial and legal problems that arise in such a dreadful situation.

As Mr O'Loan rightly said, the greatest possible help for those families would be to have the remains of their loved ones returned so that they can give them a proper Christian burial and, in doing so, achieve closure. I will close the debate on this important issue by saying that the entire House hopes that that day will come for all those families as quickly as possible.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

That the Presumption of Death Bill [NIA23/07] do now pass.

## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

### Steps to Work Contracts

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

**Mr Attwood:** I beg to move

That this Assembly notes the procurement process for the award of Steps to Work contracts; expresses concern about the management, the requirements and the conduct of the process; and calls for a joint inquiry involving the Committee for Employment and Learning and the Committee for Finance and Personnel, into the conduct of the procurement process.

I ask you to please correct the clock, Mr Speaker.

I will make some preliminary remarks before I get to the heart of the motion. I want to ensure that there is no doubt about the scope of the motion. It is six or seven years since the current public procurement arrangements in Northern Ireland were put in place. Annually, in excess of £2 billion of public funds may be used for public procurement exercises. Concerns have been raised in some places about a range of public contracts, particularly in relation to Steps to Work. Given the number of successful challenges to our procurement policy that have been taken through court proceedings, it seems timely to take the process into a new phase.

*1.00pm*

I reassure the House and the Minister that the object of the motion is not to circumvent a principle that the Minister outlined to me in a letter in September last year, when he said that there was a need for a:

“procurement process to satisfy the principles of EU law, particularly with regard to non-discrimination, fairness and transparency.”

The purpose of the motion is not in conflict with that declaration of principle nor with the requirements of EU procurement policy. Neither is it the intention of the motion to create an insular and protectionist approach to public procurement policy in Northern Ireland. The motion is not intended to do any of that.

Businesses in the North, of whatever nature, need to be stretched and challenged in respect of the service that they provide and the contracts that they might be awarded to ensure that they offer efficiency, effectiveness and value for money. The motion is not some attempt by a politician or the Assembly to cry after the Steps to Work milk has been spilt.

In August of last year, before the Steps to Work contracts were awarded, I wrote to the Minister for

Employment and Learning to flag up issues of principle that I believe needed to be satisfied when it came to the procurement exercise, to ensure that the issues that have arisen subsequently may be mitigated or would not arise at all. This is not a motion in which we are crying over split milk; it reflects some of the concerns that existed in and around the time of the procurement exercise. That is the purpose of the debate, and I hope that the Minister and others are reassured of its intention.

To explain what is at the heart of some of the concerns around the Steps to Work contracts, I will give three or four examples. When one organisation that was awarded contracts under the procurement exercise was tendering for the contracts, it made explicit how it intended to proceed. In its submission for the tendering process, that organisation stated that it was its:

“intention to act as Managing Agent, subcontracting out the majority of the provision and ‘filling gaps’ where required.”

When a contract for Training for Success, Steps to Work or any other public provision in the North is being awarded, there is an obligation on those managing the procurement process and on government to probe what those sorts of words mean and ask whether it is appropriate that an organisation that is bidding for work outlines in its opening statement its intention to subcontract out the majority of the work. That may be consistent with procurement policy, but I ask — a joint Committee inquiry should also ask — whether that is the best way to proceed.

If that is the best way to proceed, a second question arises about that procurement exercise: what is the quality of the submission that is expected at the tendering stage in respect of the subcontracting proposals? I know of a tenderer who was awarded a contract worth millions of pounds over a number of years, but, when that contract was awarded, all that was outlined regarding the subcontracting proposals was a letter of support — just like the one that I have referred to already — indicating in minimum terms what the subcontracting arrangements might be in the future. In that instance, unsolicited letters of support that were sent out to trade organisations in Northern Ireland, some of which some received the letter only two weeks before the deadline for tendering submissions, in May of last year were regarded as a sufficient basis for the procurement unit to conclude that there was evidence of a subcontracting relationship and allowed the contractor to be awarded preferred status. Is that a process that is fit for purpose, given that the Assembly previously endorsed the Committee for Employment and Learning's report on Training for Success, which dealt with subcontracting relationships?

The report states that the Central Procurement Directorate should put in place:

“mechanisms to ensure that stated agreements in contract bids are supported with formal written documentation clearly demonstrating the willingness of third-parties to be considered as part of the substantive bid (and which provide details of the level of resources agreed to be provided)”.

That is what the Committee had endorsed by the Assembly. It seems to me, however, that, when it came to a subsequent procurement exercise, the Central Procurement Directorate endorsed a preferred status to contract bids on the basis of a letter of support. That does not stand up to what the Assembly previously endorsed, namely that details of the level of resources agreed to be provided should be outlined in sub-contracting arrangements.

My third example is that, when preferred status was granted to one organisation three weeks before those contracts went live, that organisation had one member of staff in Northern Ireland and no training accommodation here. That organisation, having had no involvement in the North, had little or no knowledge of local and regional employment opportunities, which was the essence of the tender process's requirements. When that organisation went live three weeks later in its Steps to Work training provision, which, according to Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) officials, was required to be fully operational when the contracts went live, it was still interviewing dozens of people to provide the services that it was contracted to provide. When the contracts went live, people in Northern Ireland who were contacting that organisation were referred to offices in England and were then given a mobile telephone number to ring to pursue their interest in taking up Steps to Work.

My fourth example concerns the rigour and capacity of the evaluation process. Departmental officials signed off evaluations several weeks after the evaluation process had been undertaken, and there was little information in the documentation about the basis on which officials had made decisions on which contracts should be awarded. There is a need, especially given the McLaughlin and Harvey court case last year, to re-examine how processes are managed, whether they are exhaustive and detailed, and whether all relevant information is recorded on that documentation. That is the essence of some of the thinking behind the motion, which will, I hope, attract support.

There is, of course, another reason why we should send out a message about procurement: to inform those who tender for contracts in the North that there will be accountability on the Floor of the Chamber for what happens to ensure that the billions of pounds that are spent on the public good in Northern Ireland are spent properly, efficiently and effectively.

**The Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning (Ms S Ramsey):** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Before I get

into the substance of the motion, may I congratulate the Member on the birth of his new baby? I hope that he is not losing too much sleep, although it does not seem as if he is. I also hope that the Member is carrying out his fair share of night feeds.

**Mr Attwood:** Every morning.

**Ms S Ramsey:** I will check that out to confirm that it is true.

Mr Attwood outlined the Committee's significant concerns around how the procurement process for Steps to Work was handled, and individuals and organisations have approached Committee members, including me, to express concern and dissatisfaction with the process. Mr Attwood is by no means unique in that regard — everybody on the Committee was contacted in one way or another. I remind Members that I brought the issue to the Committee at that time, and we discussed concerns about the process. The Committee had face-to-face meetings with the Minister and the permanent secretary, and we sent correspondence to the Department on the issue.

I cannot stress enough that the Committee has considered the issues with Steps to Work, and it has sought to have those concerns addressed. Mr Attwood highlighted some of the processes that the Committee was involved in during its inquiry into the Department for Employment and Learning's Training for Success programme, which has been touched on today. We are worried that some of the issues around procurement came out of the Training for Success programme and went into the Steps to Work programme.

The Committee was convinced that there was a need for a broader assessment of the public procurement process. We contacted the Committee for Finance and Personnel, and I spoke to the Chairperson of that Committee about the issues a number of times. The Committee for Finance and Personnel is seeking to scrutinise the whole issue of public procurement policy and practice in the North.

The remit of the inquiry includes looking at ways to increase the access of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and social economy enterprises to public procurement contracts and to maximise the economic and social benefits to local communities from those contracts as a result. I have no doubt that other Members will raise the issues affecting their constituencies.

At our Committee meeting on 21 January, we agreed that the most practical approach to making public procurement policy and practice more user-friendly to local SMEs and social economy enterprises (SEEs) is for the general policy and practice to be reviewed. We could be revisiting other departmental policies and programmes every other week, so we agreed that, unless we dealt with the policy and practice of

procurement now, we could be dealing with it every other week or month. We need to get to the crux of the matter to ensure that we are coming at it from the point of view of what local communities need, while ensuring that we are dealing with the issue of procurement once and for all.

Our Committee made a submission to the Finance and Personnel Committee's inquiry, and we highlighted issues that we had identified in both the Training for Success and Steps to Work programmes on the issue of procurement. Our Committee is conscious that the Committee for Finance and Personnel will examine issues at the heart of the public procurement process as part of its inquiry, and I am sure that the Chairperson will remind us of that. The inquiry is ongoing, and it is only now considering written submissions.

We are also very conscious of the fact — Mr Attwood has also mentioned it — that there are still live issues around the procurement process for the award of Steps to Work contracts, as one contract has still to be awarded.

I am in no way seeking to oppose the motion *per se*, but I suggest that we wait until we see whether the outcome of the Finance and Personnel Committee's inquiry addresses our concerns, especially about Steps to Work. It would be a duplication of work and resources for our Committee to attempt to pre-empt the recommendations that will flow from the Finance and Personnel Committee's inquiry. Based on the wording of the motion, it is my understanding that Mr Attwood would like the issues involved in the management, requirements and conduct of the procurement —

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

**Ms S Ramsey:** The issues that are being highlighted today are very relevant, but I ask the House to give us time to see the outcome of the Committee for Finance and Personnel's inquiry. Go raibh maith agat.

*1.15 pm*

**Mr Newton:** As Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning, I have no objections to the motion. It is appropriate to point out — and the point has been made by the Chairperson of the Committee — that there is a live issue around the awarding of one of the contracts. Therefore, I am conscious of and concerned about debating the issue at this time, before all of the ramifications of that contract have been settled.

I imagine that, when DEL put Steps to Work out to tender, every Member of the House was contacted by community groups in their constituency. Those groups were concerned that, having delivered community-based programmes through community-based projects



and having satisfied the Department's requirements, they would lose the contracts to deliver Steps to Work to organisations with a more sophisticated approach, larger budgets, greater expertise in certain areas and the ability to put a tender together on a more professional basis. They had stood by the communities during the Troubles, and now that there was a relative peace they found that they were unable to tender as effectively as those other organisations.

I suppose that the requests from many Members to see efficiency in all levels of Departments prompted the need to reduce the number of tenders, and allowing one point of contact for the delivery of a contract by DEL largely took us down this road. In an attempt to improve the programme, the Department put the contracts out to tender as it had to do under EU rules and regulations.

My feelings on the issue are very much in line with the approach taken by the Chairperson and the majority of the Committee. In the search for contractors of a sufficient size to be commercially viable for potential suppliers, each of the 10 contracts that went out for delivery in the Steps to Work programme was intended to be awarded to a single contractor with the right to employ subcontractors, delivering such elements of provision as required to meet the conditions of the contract. That was made quite clear within the contracts. From that arrangement, the Department gained a single point of contact, and the lead contractor took sole responsibility for all aspects of delivery and compliance with the operational guidelines of the programmes, including the quality of provision, which was to be delivered in line with the Department's Success through Excellence strategy.

Concerns were raised in the Committee following contact from community groups, and every party represented in the House has questioned the Minister in plenary meetings on the Steps to Work contracts. Indeed, departmental officials appeared before the Committee on 8 October 2008, and every member of the Committee present at that meeting pursued the issue of Steps to Work and the concerns that were being raised via their constituency offices.

I was approached by those who were concerned about some of the language used in the contract document, and I wanted an assurance that all efforts had been —

**Mr Speaker:** The Member should draw his remarks to a close.

**Mr Newton:** I wanted an assurance that all efforts had been made to engage with community groups. I was assured that there had been three large, well-attended meetings where community groups were permitted to question the Department.

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

**Mr McClarty:** I thank the Member for West Belfast, Mr Attwood, for bringing the issue to the Chamber. However, my party and I do not fully understand the purpose of the motion.

It cannot be denied that the procurement process for Steps to Work was difficult: indeed the issue is ongoing in Foyle. However, it has been addressed by the Minister for Employment and Learning on a number of occasions and by the Committee for Employment and Learning, which encouraged the Committee for Finance and Personnel to carry out a review of public procurement in general. The Committee for Finance and Personnel has already held evidence sessions, and we await its findings.

Public procurement is a complicated business, but it is worth pointing out that ultimate responsibility for it lies with the Department of Finance and Personnel, through the Central Procurement Directorate. It is also worth pointing out that the rules by which procurement decisions are made were created in 2002, when Mr Attwood's party leader, Mark Durkan, was Minister of Finance and Personnel. Procurement is also subject to EU laws, and we are often restricted by EU guidelines.

From Mr Attwood's speech, I discern that he is concerned that local businesses are not being given the best opportunities to obtain Government contracts. That concern is shared by the Ulster Unionist Party and by many businesses in Northern Ireland. I hope that the Committee for Finance and Personnel's review will set out how improvements can be made in that area while staying within European law. During this time of recession, it is crucial to give local companies the best opportunity possible within the rules. Is the SDLP, which appears to be the most pro-European party in this place, arguing for us to scrap the single market?

A recent CBI questionnaire showed that 46% of respondents found it difficult to obtain information on forthcoming tenders. Figures such as those are not encouraging, and it is obvious that improvements are needed in certain areas. However, as has been stated, the Committee for Employment and Learning has already examined the specifics of the Steps to Work procurement process, and the Committee for Finance and Personnel is addressing the issue of procurement more generally. I am sure that, on publication of the Committee for Finance and Personnel's report and if deemed necessary, the Committee for Employment and Learning will address the issue again.

Let us not forget that the Steps to Work programme is operating successfully throughout Northern Ireland and that it offers innovative and crucial opportunities to people recently made redundant and the long-term unemployed. Although I recognise Mr Attwood's concern, I fail to see the need for his motion.

**Ms Lo:** I thank Mr Attwood for proposing the motion, and I share a lot of the concerns that he expressed. However, I agree with my three colleagues on the Committee for Employment and Learning that it is premature to call for an inquiry, given the legal implications and the fact that the Committee for Finance and Personnel is considering the procurement process.

Lessons must be learnt from Training for Success and Steps to Work, and better procurement processes are needed. Although we do not want to limit the award of contracts to just local businesses, which is protectionism, goes against free trade and is not allowed under EU legislation, there must be a more common-sense approach, which is not just based on value for money. Most importantly, we must establish whether the needs of signatories to the programme are being met.

Although large multinationals may have the competence to write excellent application forms for contracts and to satisfy the criteria on methodology, we need to scrutinise them thoroughly to assess whether they can deliver on the ground. To say that they are just managing agents leaves me asking a big question about their competence to deliver the programme.

The Department's timescale for setting up the programme was crazy. Training for Success was such a rushed job — even DEL staff have admitted that the programme was totally rushed. The timescale for Steps to Work was incredible. We issued a call for tender on 22 April 2008, for which the closing date was 6 June 2008. At that stage, many groups had already complained about the short time available in which to prepare their bids. The preferred bidder was announced in mid-August 2008. Some of the bidders from England rushed into advertising positions in order to fulfil promises.

The formal contracts were awarded to eight local areas on 17 September 2008, with an expectation that the programme would start on 29 September 2008 — 12 days after the contracts were awarded. How on earth did we expect those programmes to operate properly and smoothly? How could any group, be it local or English, have started the programme efficiently? Did we expect people to work in tents?

**Mr McCarthy:** And use mobile phones?

**Ms Lo:** Yes, as Mr Attwood said earlier.

Staff had to be recruited and then trained to operate the programme, which was supposed to be person-centred. Staff need proper training to understand the programme and individuals' needs. Twelve days in which to recruit and prepare staff is a nonsense. I really question DEL's thinking in that instance. We should have called for tender and prepared for the process well in advance of April 2008, especially since the programme was supposed to be live a few months later.

**Mr Hamilton:** I will not dwell on the Steps to Work programme or the process that led to the awarding of contracts, because, frankly, I know little or nothing about it. That is a rare admission of a lack of knowledge on my part. Instead, I will talk more generally about the procurement process in Northern Ireland and about some of the issues that are frequently raised about the process, which do not exactly stand up to scrutiny when considered.

Several Members mentioned that the Committee for Finance and Personnel, of which I am Deputy Chairperson, is conducting an inquiry into the procurement process in Northern Ireland. We are doing that because we are very aware of the concerns that are frequently expressed about public procurement in Northern Ireland. One cannot escape noticing the various legal challenges that have been launched, as well as the controversy that has built up around the likes of procurement frameworks and the cases that have already been mentioned.

As a Committee, we are also mindful of the economic downturn and the desire to assist local firms in trying to avail themselves of as much public procurement in Northern Ireland as possible, whether that be the record levels of £1.6 billion of investment in capital infrastructure or the countless other millions in revenue expenditure. The Committee is aware of those considerations. Indeed, rather than just paying lip service to them, it intends to get stuck into the matter by conducting an inquiry.

*1.30 pm*

From time to time, there are legal challenges to our procurement process, as there are in any part of the world. If one were to look at the evidence that has been submitted to the Committee for Finance and Personnel since, say, the start of April 2007, one would see that there have been legal challenges costing approximately £3.9 million. Given that, one could not but be concerned about the process. However, although that figure looks bad and is certainly too high, evidence from industry experts indicated that Northern Ireland is far from being the worst region in the UK and Ireland. Such evidence came even from members of the legal profession, who, one could say, have an interest in saying that the process is shoddy and not fit for purpose.

Indeed, those experts cited an example that sticks in my mind. Even before putting a contract out to tender, councillors in a large city in the north of England indicated to whom they wanted that contract to go. The procurement process began, and, lo and behold, the contract was awarded to that very company. That is the sort of shoddy practice that we see elsewhere. Although we may have difficulties with our procurement process, as everybody does, we are certainly not as bad as that.

I also examined some of the experiences that are associated with contract awarding in Northern Ireland. The perception that it is exceptionally difficult — indeed, nigh on impossible, as some suggest — for local firms to get their hands on some procurement contracts in Northern Ireland does not stack up whenever one considers the evidence. From the start of February until the end of March 2009, the Central Procurement Directorate, which is caught in the headlights of Mr Attwood's motion, awarded 45 out of 54 — 83% — of contracts to local firms. We must bear in mind that that is only one centre of procurement excellence. The monetary value of the contracts awarded by that one centre of procurement excellence was £3.2 million. Everyone would agree, particularly in these difficult economic times, that that is a sizeable chunk of money. I picked up that evidence from the Central Procurement Directorate's website, and, if one were to delve into its history, I am sure that one would discover similar stories. In fact, given that that is only one centre of procurement excellence, the overall figure for the others would probably be much higher. Moreover, the proportion of contracts awarded to local firms is much better here than in the rest of the United Kingdom.

The Committee for Finance and Personnel's inquiry was mentioned, and there is nothing that has been said in the debate that that inquiry will not touch on. In fact, I expect fully that those specific and general matters will come up in evidence and will be mentioned in the report. Therefore, given that the inquiry is ongoing and that it will afford ample opportunity to carry out the sort of work that is mentioned in the motion, I see no merit to the motion. The issues that have been raised are serious and of the utmost importance, and they deserve to be considered in the context of that inquiry.

**Ms Anderson:** Go raibh maith agat. Éirím le tacaíocht a thabhairt don rún seo. I support the motion, and I thank Alex Attwood for securing the debate.

Many Members will recall that Sinn Féin secured an Adjournment debate on this very subject last year, when the issue became a source of considerable controversy in my constituency in Derry. At that time, it emerged that a local consortium of training organisations had lost out on a vital tender to deliver the Steps to Work programme in Derry. The consortium had been providing that training for years, and it was stunned when the contract went to an English firm. That happened despite the well-grounded fears that the successful company had neither the capacity nor the proven track record to deliver such a service. Sinn Féin challenged the Minister about that decision directly, and its representatives on the Committee for Employment and Learning challenged departmental officials. Indeed, I acknowledge that the Committee Chairperson, Sue Ramsey, raised the matter

first. Eventually, the decision was overturned, but Raymond McCartney and I warned that that pattern would be repeated throughout the North, and we called for a review of the procurement process that allowed that to happen.

We were determined that the same thing would not happen again, and we tried our best to avoid a repeat of the fiasco by raising our concerns when another major contract to provide training for mechanics was awarded to the Carter and Carter Group, another English firm. At that time, it was clear that the Carter and Carter Group lacked the capacity to deliver, and it was in severe financial difficulties. Sinn Féin vigorously opposed the decision to entrust the Carter and Carter Group with training our young people. Fortunately, the decision was overturned eventually, and, shortly afterwards, the Carter and Carter Group collapsed. However, both those examples show that there is something wrong with a procurement process that allowed such appointments to be made in the first instance.

I acknowledge that Alex Attwood, along with Raymond McCartney, Sue Ramsey and me, has been highlighting and challenging the Steps to Work debacle. It is hoped that this debate can assist the process of instituting the type of inquiry that is needed, and I acknowledge that work by the Committee for Finance and Personnel is ongoing.

The tendering process relating to such contracts should be carried out in an open, transparent and fair manner, and the standard of service that we are aiming to deliver at the other end should be central to the process. We are not talking only about numbers on a balance sheet; contracts should not go simply to whoever is cheapest. In many cases, the successful bidder will be entrusted with training our young people for the workforce. They will be creating tradesmen and tradeswomen for the future. We may be in a recession now, but that will not always be the case; today's young people will rebuild our economy. Those young people deserve the chance to gain first-class skills and training, and their well-being should not be placed in the hands of organisations that are unfit for purpose.

The Department for Employment and Learning has been providing training for years. I am aware that the Minister for Employment and Learning is not in the Chamber, but, given the debacle that I have outlined, it may well be time that he went back to the classroom. Tá sé thar am ag an Aire gabháil arais go dtí an seomra ranga.

**Mr Shannon:** I wonder whether it was necessary to have today's debate, and other Members have touched on that point. I understand that the motion was tabled some time ago, so perhaps that is why the debate is being held.



Members are aware of the worthy goals that are set out in the Steps to Work programme. Everyone would and could hang their hats on the process and on the objectives that it sets out to deliver. It aims to assist people who depend on benefits to get by, and, importantly, it sets out to help people who have disabilities and those who are in need of therapeutic employment but who, in some cases, are restricted in what they are able to do by health problems.

I had questions about the scheme and whether it could deliver. Although its goals were admirable, I felt that many people were unable to work and felt pressed to return to work when, emotionally and physically, they were not ready for that step. Aside from that concern, however, has the scheme delivered? Has the procurement process succeeded in doing what it set out to do? I am not sure whether that has been clarified to its full extent. Perhaps the Committee will consider those questions in the future.

I am concerned about community groups and their involvement, as is my colleague Robin Newton, who mentioned his concerns in his contribution. Many questions must be asked about the tendering process. Some of those questions appear in Members' information packs. Members have already tabled questions for oral and written answer, and Members have asked other questions during today's debate. Among those questions are: how was the tendering process carried out; was it done fairly; was it transparent; and did it deliver? The Committee will be able to answer those questions, and, ultimately, the Minister should take on board those answers.

Members who wear another hat — as I do on Ards Borough Council — are aware of the tendering process. Regardless of whether a tender is 10 minutes or 10 days late, it is late. If a tender does not adhere to the criteria, it is outside the guidelines; it is as simple as that. In the case of the Steps to Work programme, it is a pity that the procurement process has thrown up many questions and that a golden opportunity to help people with disabilities and on benefits to get into work has not been fully realised.

Cud a' jist pae tribuet tae tha woarkers en staf at tha Sooth Eastern Reginal Coelege in tha Airdes, fer ther help in takin fort tha Steps tae Woark skeem? They er baith proafesinal an aproachabal an caun still mak shair that tha skeem is delivered.

I pay tribute to the staff at the South Eastern Regional College in Ards for their help in delivering the Steps to Work programme in that area. They were and are always professional and approachable and can still ensure that the scheme can deliver.

Lots of questions have to be asked, and they are significant enough to place a large question mark over how the tender process was put together and, importantly,

how the procurement process was introduced.

However, I urge caution. I understand that an inquiry, as other Members said, has already been started by the Committee, and action is taking place. I feel that that inquiry will ask the questions and get the answers. We should let that process run its course and deliver its conclusion first.

**Rev Dr Robert Coulter:** In listening to the debate, I cannot help but wonder what the point is in bringing it to the House at this time. In view of the fact that an inquiry is ongoing and the fact that a very good programme is working very well for young people, the motion should not have been brought to the House today.

We in the Ulster Unionist Party are proud to be behind the Steps to Work programme and to have delivered it for Northern Ireland. It may have its problems and face some difficulties, but, at the present time, we should consider the effect that such a debate will have on the young people who are involved in the programme. What confidence are we in this House giving to them today?

The programme provides much-needed help and support for those who are unemployed, and it provides access to an experienced adviser to guide them through the process of returning to work. It also provides them with access to training courses and programmes that will improve their skills base and employability. Furthermore, it provides them with a small but vital financial aid during their period of unemployment. Are we giving them confidence today as they work through this phase of their lives?

Some of the contractors who have been engaged with the programme are from the private sector, and, as we have just been told, at least one contract was awarded to a college. Many contractors provide support and training through a period of unemployment to those who need it. As far as I understand, the private-sector companies have excellent track records of providing similar services in other parts of the world. Why, then, are we today questioning work that is already going to be examined and that, at present, seems to be developing well?

The issue of the procurement process has been pushed before and rightly so. There should be transparency and openness. The Committee for Finance and Personnel is investigating the public procurement process, and that inquiry will surely fulfil the needs of the motion. Why then, are we debating it today?

It is worth noting that the Steps to Work procurement exercise was conducted by DFP in line with public procurement policy that was adopted by the Executive in 2002. It is a good procurement policy, and it serves taxpayers well. As far as I can tell, it has done nothing but a good job. The contracts that were awarded for the delivery of the Steps to Work programme have been in



operation for some months now, and by all accounts, they seem to be working satisfactorily.

The motion is largely superfluous. As I said, the Committee for Finance and Personnel is already conducting an inquiry, which will identify and seek to resolve any issues that exist.

I am afraid that I cannot support the motion.

1.45 pm

**Mr P Ramsey:** I thank the Member for proposing the motion. There may not be consensus on the wording of the motion, but most Members have talked about the difficulties, problems and concerns, not just with the Steps to Work programme, but with procurement in general. One thing is certain; it is in the public interest that Members have an opportunity to discuss and highlight the issues and ensure that, where there are difficulties, Ministers make the changes necessary to improve performance.

I want to reiterate some of the points that Mr Attwood has, rightly, introduced. There are concerns about the potential for suboptimal delivery were a Steps to Work contract to be awarded to a company that, on paper, has a good track record of delivery but has no experience, track record or presence here. Suboptimal delivery will mean a raw deal — not a good deal — for the unemployed, who are entitled to high-quality, work-related training.

Will the Minister assure Members that all companies that have been awarded the Steps to Work contract are able to deliver, particularly those that have little physical presence here? Most Members have alluded to the fact that such companies have minimal experience of and no relevant contact with Northern Ireland.

Another concern is that competent Northern Irish organisations with a track record in the management and delivery of training are failing to win contracts. That should be a concern to all Members. Small companies here are, typically, smaller than their British and European counterparts. That has its advantages and disadvantages. However, it is important that those companies are strategically placed to win contracts. If the failure of Northern Irish organisations to win contracts is reflected across a range of Government procurement activities, which I suspect it is, we need to look at the way in which various Departments work, particularly with Invest Northern Ireland, to ensure that local companies are better prepared.

Given that local companies have lost out considerably, there seems to be something badly wrong with the criteria, the process or the preparation. Many local companies are second- or third-tier subcontractors, which means that the opportunity to reap the multiplier effect as regards Government spending is lost.

Will the Minister outline how his Department works with Invest Northern Ireland to ensure that as many outsourcing contracts as possible are won by local companies? How much of the value in total contracts is being captured by local companies?

My final concern relates to my constituency. Martina Anderson has already mentioned the fact that the final award of a contract in Derry was to Rutledge Joblink and that that has been put on hold because of the objection of a locally based organisation. The Minister may not know about that, but I am sure that officials from the Department for Employment and Learning could inform him about it. The delay in implementing the contract is disadvantaging unemployed people in the Derry area. I have spoken to representatives from a range of professional, community-based organisations that currently deliver the New Deal programme and are keen to deliver the Steps to Work programme. Will the Minister shed light on the process and outline when a final decision on the contract will be made?

**The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel (Mr McLaughlin):** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Although I wish to contribute to the debate as Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel, I should, at the outset, point out that my Committee has not had an opportunity to consider the proposal, nor has the Committee been briefed on the Steps to Work programme, which falls, primarily, within the remit of the Committee for Employment and Learning.

Members of the Committee for Finance and Personnel will have noted that the Committee for Employment and Learning has already raised concerns about the procurement exercise for the Steps to Work programme. Those concerns were referred to in a submission that the Committee for Employment and Learning made to my Committee's ongoing inquiry into public procurement policy and practice.

The Committee for Employment and Learning, as well as highlighting its concerns with the process around the tendering and awarding of contracts for the Steps to Work programme, suggested that my Committee's inquiry might also consider measures to ameliorate the situation whereby EU competition rules create circumstances in which an organisation can bid for contracts in areas in which it has no proven infrastructure or record of provision. That has been referred to already, when Mr Attwood proposed the motion.

The Finance and Personnel Committee's ongoing inquiry is strategic in nature and aims to make recommendations to the Department of Finance and Personnel for improvements to public procurement policies and processes for the purpose of increasing

access to opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises and social economy enterprises. It also aims to maximise the economic and social benefits for the local community, while taking account of the principles that govern public procurement.

The inquiry will also consider the nature, extent and application of social clauses in public contracts. The Committee has received 33 written responses to its inquiry, including a response from the Committee for Employment and Learning. The Committee is due to begin its consideration of those responses when it meets this Wednesday, with a view to calling witnesses to present oral evidence.

Importantly, to supplement the oral and written evidence received during the inquiry, the Committee will commission external specialists to conduct primary research into the end-user experience of local SMEs and social enterprise committees in tendering for and delivering public contracts.

Given the wide scope and the strategic focus of the inquiry, it is unlikely that the procurement processes for individual contracts will be examined in great detail. That is not an issue that falls to the Minister or the Department that my Committee scrutinises. However, my Committee is likely to wish to include consideration of the general concern around the difficulties that EU competition rules create for local SMEs and social economy enterprises, or — this may be more relevant — the interpretation that the Central Procurement Directorate and others may apply to those rules and the steps that can be taken to address those issues.

Without wishing to pre-empt the Committee's forthcoming considerations, I anticipate that the ongoing inquiry by the Committee for Finance and Personnel is likely to cover the general points of concern that have been identified already by the Committee for Employment and Learning.

Speaking on behalf of my party, I too wondered why the motion was being brought forward at this stage, given the inquiry that my Committee is involved in. I remind the Member of the provisions of Standing Order 64, which provides the two Committees with the procedural option of working together more closely and formally on that issue or related issues of joint concern should that prove necessary in future. However, the Assembly can support the general principles of the motion, because it draws attention to important concerns.

**The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Dodds):** As Members who have taken part in the debate are aware, Steps to Work is a new programme that has replaced the Department for Employment and Learning's New Deal programme, and it offers support

services to assist the long-term unemployed to gain employment.

To remind Members of the background to the programme, the Department for Employment and Learning established a working group in January 2007 to review alternative contractual models to the model used by the New Deal programme and to recommend a model to deliver Steps to Work. One objective of that review was to recommend a contractual model and procurement strategy that would reduce the number of contracts and service providers that the Department was required to manage and that would have more effective legal control of the contracts for the Steps to Work programme and an efficient mechanism for monitoring and managing those.

The review recommended a prime-contractor model. Prime contracting is a model that is recommended by the Office of Government Commerce for managing large supply chains, for example, in construction contracts, which require input from specialist contractors. It removes the burden of unnecessary bureaucracy from subcontractors, permitting them to focus on delivering outputs.

It is recognised by the Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply as a model of best practice procurement that can generate significant efficiencies in the supply chain, which is extremely important in our current economic climate. Therefore, most people will welcome and endorse the application of modern procurement techniques to deliver best value for money and assist Departments in achieving efficiency savings in their procurement expenditure.

As some Members have highlighted, public procurement processes are guided by the principles of the Northern Ireland public procurement policy, which was established by the Executive in May 2002. Public procurement processes are also regulated by European Union procurement laws. The majority of public procurement is carried out by centres of procurement expertise to ensure that the principles are effectively embedded in procurement processes. In the current straitened times, I am sure that the Assembly will be especially pleased to hear that that has resulted in value-for-money savings of £250 million over the last three years. That is a very significant amount of money in the context of public expenditure.

The procurement of the Steps to Work programme was managed by the Central Procurement Directorate. It is one of the recognised centres of procurement expertise and applies the appropriate policies and procedures. The key principles of public procurement are fairness, transparency, non-discrimination and competitive supply. CPD endeavours to ensure that all procurement processes utilise best practice techniques to satisfy those principles.

The procurement process for the Steps to Work programme was a competitive tendering exercise. It is Government policy that goods, services and works should be acquired through competition unless there are convincing reasons to the contrary. Competition promotes economy, efficiency and effectiveness in public expenditure, and it is a very important and useful means of ensuring that the market is fully tested. Procurement through competition remains the best way of achieving best value for money, and it assists in demonstrating transparency and integrity.

The principle of transparency relates to the clarity and openness of the procurement process and not directly to what is being procured or who is supplying it. In short, transparency in public procurement is intended to ensure that there is no unnecessary secrecy or lack of openness. To ensure that the procurement process for Steps to Work satisfied the concept of transparency, a series of market-sounding information events were held in Belfast, Armagh and Limavady. Interested organisations were briefed on the content of the new programme and given an overview of the proposed contractual model and the procurement process prior to the publication of the invitation to tender.

The invitation to tender clearly defined the contract objectives, requirements and outputs and stated the evaluation criteria. Those criteria were predetermined by representatives from the Department for Employment and Learning who have experience and expertise in the delivery of the programme. All tenderers were notified of the outcome of evaluations promptly, and, within the bounds of commercial confidentiality, they were offered the opportunity of a debriefing on the outcome of the tendering process. That informed the suppliers of the relative merits and demerits of their tender offer and will help to facilitate better performance in future competitions.

CPD advised the Department for Employment and Learning throughout the development of the invitation to tender, which ensured that the requirements of the tender would promote fairness in the competition and would not result in unnecessary restrictions to potential suppliers, particularly new market entrants, which is very important in the context of the EU procurement laws. A total of 17 tender offers were received, and those were assessed against the published criteria by a representative panel from the Department for Employment and Learning with the necessary knowledge and experience of the programme to identify the offers that demonstrated best value for money. The panel was advised by representatives of CPD to ensure that the principles of fairness, transparency and non-discrimination were maintained.

All tenderers were notified of the outcome at the conclusion of the evaluation processes. In line with the recommendations of the Committee for Employment

and Learning, the preferred bidders were only issued with formal contract awards following confirmation from the bidders that formal agreements were in place with all their proposed subcontractors. The procurement process in the Foyle area is ongoing, but contracts have been awarded in nine out of 10 areas, and CPD has been advised that the service is being delivered satisfactorily.

It should be noted that, as other Members have stated, public procurement is regulated by EU law. Those laws state that the courts are the appropriate mechanism for a review of a procurement process in regard to non-compliance with the procedures laid down by law. The courts are where bidders who feel aggrieved at their treatment in the procurement process should go. Therefore, the Assembly's review of the conduct of the procurement process should look primarily at any perceived failure in the delivery of best value for money in accordance with the principles of the Northern Ireland public procurement policy.

This has been already mentioned on a number of occasions, but I know that the Committee for Finance and Personnel is engaged in important and valuable work in that area, and we look forward to the outcome of that work.

*2.00 pm*

Specific issues were raised in the debate. Mr Ramsey asked about the current state of play in Foyle. As he is aware, a contract is yet to be awarded for there, so, until that procurement process has been concluded, I am unable to comment further. As I have always said when answering enquiries about live procurement exercises, be they in response to questions for written answer or oral answer, it is not possible for me, as a Minister, to comment.

Mr Attwood asked a number of questions about subcontracting. Officials from the Department for Employment and Learning made no stipulation that a prime contractor should provide a particular level of service. The contract model that the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) decided on was to engage directly with a prime contractor, who would then subcontract elements of service provision to maximise the range of services and choice to clients across contract areas. The prime contractor would also be contractually responsible for the management and maintenance of those subcontractors' performance. DEL's intention, under the Steps to Work contract, was to rationalise the supply base, which it has direct responsibility for managing and controlling. Under the previous set-up, DEL dealt with more than 100 contractors. Therefore, to improve the quality and consistency of service delivery across contract areas, that approach was adopted.



Mr Attwood asked how it was possible for a company that does not currently have a presence in Northern Ireland to be awarded a contract. As has been mentioned on a number of occasions, his party is probably the most enthusiastically in favour of the European Union, and all that flows from it. Therefore, I do not need to remind the Member that the principles of the single economic market are based on the free movement of services within the EU and that it is not legally permissible to require organisations to have a presence in the member state where services are to be delivered at the time of tendering, or to have previous experience of operating in that member state. Such action would be regarded as being discriminatory against tenderers from other member states.

Any contracts that were awarded to organisations not currently based in, or operating in, Northern Ireland were conditional, and they required their operation to be functioning before the contract's commencement date. Obviously, that situation could be remedied to ensure that we do not end up in the position about which some people have complained, but that would entail our signing up to a rather radical reform of policy that ran contrary to our membership of the European Union. I am interested to hear whether the SDLP wants to go down that line.

A number of Members, including Mr Hamilton, Mr McClarty and Mr Ramsey, raised the issues of general public procurement and of giving firms and companies equal access to contracts. We are committed to making unprecedented levels of capital and procurement investment. We have introduced a number of measures to assist local firms, including small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), to avail themselves of procurement opportunities. Those measures include the introduction of eSourcing NI, which is an electronic procurement portal.

Members should note that recent figures show that more than 95% of public-sector construction-works contracts in Northern Ireland are awarded to local firms, the majority of which are SMEs. That provides a significant boost to the local economy. When that figure is compared with equivalent figures in other United Kingdom devolved Administrations, indicative figures from Wales reveal that, historically, less than 50% of contracts are awarded to local firms. In Scotland, the equivalent figure is under 60%.

Those comparisons demonstrate the importance that I and the Executive place on local industry, companies and businesses, particularly SMEs, at this particular time. Over 95% of contracts in Northern Ireland are awarded to local companies, compared with 50% in Wales and 60% in Scotland. It is a matter of action and delivery, not talk. The actions that I have outlined speak louder than any words that could be uttered by Members in the House.

I am grateful to everyone who took part in the debate.

**Mr Attwood:** I welcome all the contributions to the debate. Although the motion is not intended to divide the House, I reaffirm the approach required of the Assembly to the Steps to Work contracts, and, I daresay, to others: to get to the bottom of the issues that have now arisen, an individual, dedicated inquiry must be conducted into what did, or did not, transpire. For several reasons, the Assembly should never foreclose on the option to examine particular contracts, because a dedicated examination can draw out the hard experience of procurement in the North.

I noted carefully the comments of the Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel, whose contribution was most helpful. However, he said that the ongoing review of procurement in the North is strategic, not specific. He confirmed that that is the case by saying that the examination of particular contracts is unlikely. Rather, there will be an interpretation of how the Central Procurement Directorate considers certain matters, and general points of concern will be raised.

However, the procurement policy in the North must be reconfigured to make it more fit for purpose and able to deliver all the objectives that everyone seeks to achieve. To do that, the particular points of concern about what happened during the Steps to Work procurement exercise must be examined and the specific lesson must be learned. Therefore, I am convinced that the model of a particular inquiry into Steps to Work is the way to proceed.

I say that particularly in response to the Minister's comments. His outlining of the processes and what happened, in general, during the procurement of Steps to Work was helpful. However, when one takes a step back from what the Minister said, one finds that he did not fully address the key questions. The current procurement process involves appointing prime contractors, because it is easier for the Government to work with them than with dozens, if not hundreds, of other contractors. However, once appointed, the policy of those prime contractors is to subcontract the work to other companies, some of which subcontract again. Is that sensible? Is that the intended purpose of the current procurement process?

The danger is that rather than creating a more efficient relationship, there is, ultimately, little or no relationship between the Government and a family of subcontractors. A potential consequence of how the process for Steps to Work was handled is the culture of the subcontracting of subcontractors, which defeats the purpose of the new procurement process and possibly creates a new mischief therein.



The Assembly should be telling people that a qualitative process of procurement operates in the North. Therefore, should a contractor with one member of staff and no accommodation in the North start to recruit two weeks before a contract goes live, because it would not otherwise be fit for purpose in time, such activity would stick out like a sore thumb.

I disagree with anyone in the Assembly, or in any training organisation in the North, who concludes that a procurement process is fit for purpose if it ends up with that outcome two weeks before people who are in desperate need of Steps to Work training can start. That is not to say that I oppose EU procurement proposals or that that model of procurement is not the right one. However, if we consider the qualitative assessment of whether that model achieves the desired outcome, how can we be satisfied that a process that means that an organisation that has one member of staff, no accommodation, and, on the day that it goes live, can be contacted only on one mobile phone number, will deliver what other Members referred to as training and support for people who desperately need it?

I am curious about one or two comments that have been made today. It surprises me that any member of the Committee for Employment and Learning would say that Steps to Work is working, given that seven months after it was introduced, we have received no qualitative proof that that is the case. I remind Rev Coulter that that is the situation. It is only this month that the independent inspectorate has begun to inspect how Steps to Work is being delivered. I hope that Rev Coulter and other Members are correct in saying that Steps to Work is being delivered and that the training is fit for purpose. However, no one can draw that conclusion today, because no one — not in the House, not in the Committee for Employment and Learning, not even the Minister — has been advised by either DEL officials or by the education inspectorate that that is the case.

Mr Ramsey was right to say that there is no consensus on the mechanism to deal with the issue. However, comments that were made by Mr Shannon, Mr Hamilton, Ms Anderson and Ms Lo — indeed, comments from Members across the Chamber — show that seven months after the Steps to Work contracts were awarded, collective and individual doubts remain. That is the reason that Mr McClarty was wrong to say that the Minister has answered all questions on the matter. If that is the case, why do so many Members have questions about what has happened with Steps to Work and about what has happened in the seven months since late September when the contracts were awarded? If, as Mr McClarty said, the Minister has dealt with the matter and there is to be an inquiry, why do we all have questions? The reason is that we do not

have proof that Steps to Work is working and that we know that specific issues remain unresolved.

I welcome the DFP review. I think that it will add to our understanding of procurement and improve procurement mechanisms in the North. However, if someone were to ask me whether I thought that that review will deal with the Steps to Work issue, I would say no. There are many reasons for that. One is that the inquiry, as the Committee Chairperson indicated, will not only not be able to look at particular contracts, but it will be stopped from looking at them because of the ongoing risk of legal challenges. Despite a series of letters to the Minister, a lot of my questions remain unanswered, because officials continue to advise the Minister that there is a risk of legal action on certain contracts.

Not only will the DFP review not deal with specific contracts, but, in my view, there is a culture in Government and in DEL that there may be a risk of legal action so we do not deal with stuff. To some degree that is understandable, but I think that that is wrong. There is a middle way. The middle way is to answer proper, challenging questions on specific contracts, and, if necessary, have an independent inquiry into those contracts, as well as the more global review that the Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel outlined.

2.15 pm

I believe that that is the way to go, even if that is not the general feeling of the House, because — as much as any other reason — a few weeks after issues were raised about various contracts, a senior representative of a training organisation in the North came to my office with a person from a lobbying organisation and said that political pressure from the likes of me represented an attempt to undo a procurement process. Subsequently, I wrote to the chief executive of that lobbying organisation, who did not even acknowledge receipt of the letter. That speaks volumes about the attitude of some to the political authority that rightfully resides in this Building.

*Question put and negatived.*

## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

### STEM Subjects

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

**Mr Butler:** I beg to move

That this Assembly expresses its concern at the decline in the number of students enrolling in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects; notes the commitment in the Programme for Government to increase by 25% the number of students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds at graduate and postgraduate level, studying STEM subjects by 2015; and calls on the Minister for Employment and Learning to bring forward proposals to ensure this commitment is delivered.

Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Tá mé iontach sásta go bhfuil seans agam labhairt ar an tairiscint an-tábhachtach seo inniu.

This debate concerns the decline in the uptake of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects by students in recent years, how that decline can be reversed, and how the commitment in the Programme for Government to increase the number of students who study STEM subjects can be delivered.

International research shows that the decline in the uptake of STEM subjects is a problem that is far from exclusive to the North of Ireland. Although the education system plays a major role in the number of students who take STEM subjects, factors outside the education system have also influenced the decline of recent years. The global consensus is that enrolment for STEM subjects has been in decline for over a decade. Research from as early as the 1960s showed that one third of students made a decision on whether to study science subjects by the age of 12.

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

There are many reasons for the decline in the uptake of STEM subjects. Many of those who have researched the decline have seen the issue of why young people switch off from STEM subjects at an early age as a complex and multifaceted problem. Factors include: teaching qualifications; recruitment and retention; the content of the science curriculum; the way in which science is taught or assessed; the alleged difficulty of the physical sciences; influence that is exerted by the media, parents, student peer groups inside and outside school and career advisers; and the nature and extent of students' interaction with science, inside and outside school.

Bearing in mind the global challenges facing the economy, particularly in science- and technology-based industries, the place of STEM subjects in the education system has become increasingly important in recent years. However, that sits against the backdrop of a decline in the number of students who are choosing key STEM subjects, problems of teacher supply, a comparative lack of integration among the components of STEM, and a need to better develop the links among schools, further education and industry, particularly in respect of careers advice.

It is not only here that the decline in the uptake of STEM subjects impacts on the economy through the loss of a skilled workforce in the science and technology industries. Those problems are echoed throughout Europe and the USA. The opportunity exists for any country that can reverse that decline to gain a competitive advantage.

The Assembly must also be mindful of developing countries, particularly the so-called BRIC countries — Brazil, Russia, India and China — and the increase in their STEM education on a great scale, which is creating well-educated workforces that are capable of exploiting their low cost base.

That presents a substantial challenge to our efforts to attract science- and technology-based businesses into the economy. In particular, research has shown that developed countries do not place a high value on science and technology. By contrast, in developing countries, a STEM-related career is frequently considered by many people to be a route to life improvement.

I understand that the South of Ireland, Scotland and England have already set in motion strategies and policies to grow the STEM skills base in those countries. I also understand that a review of STEM subjects is being carried out here through partnership between the Minister for Employment and Learning and the Minister of Education. Hopefully, the Minister will provide some indication of the contents of the review's report today. I welcome that.

It must be acknowledged that some positive steps have been taken to halt the decline of STEM subjects; for example, Queen's University's initiative to provide scholarships of £1,000 to students who apply to science courses. The initiative that has been taken by the Education Minister, Caitríona Ruane, to lift the cap on teacher-training places and to allow more teaching graduates to take up science courses is also welcome. The Stormont Executive have also given additional funding to both the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) and the Department of Education to fund projects that are associated with STEM subjects.

Increasing the STEM skills base is imperative for economic growth. Unless more young people study the

various STEM subjects, there is a risk of a serious shortage of people who are qualified in those subjects at all levels in the workforce. That is particularly important in the present economic climate, where the focus and emphasis on training and skills has shifted to retention of existing jobs and to trying to survive the current recession. The Assembly must ensure that it trains and skills its way out of the present economic difficulties.

Last year, Martin Murphy, the head of the largest technology company here, Hewlett-Packard, warned that the North's ability to compete on the global stage and to attract overseas companies is being compromised by increasing skills shortages. Subjects such as maths, physics and chemistry are important to global companies such as Hewlett-Packard because they form the basis of careers in computing, IT, and engineering which are essential to their operations.

Certain perceptions of STEM subjects help to explain why people do not take them up. It is perceived that it is more difficult to obtain good grades in STEM subjects than in other subjects such as arts and humanities. Moreover, research shows that pupils do not perceive science subjects to be the passport to lucrative, interesting and glamorous jobs. Many young people also have a poor image of STEM subjects and place little value on their ability to get them safe jobs, with stable incomes and stimulating careers about which they can be passionate.

It is also considered possible that some degree of student reluctance to pursue careers in science and technology may lie as much outside the school environment, in wider society. There is a necessity for current role models who are young, normal, fun and scientifically literate. The transition from primary to post-primary school has also been seen as a negative experience for many pupils who want to take up science. Attention must be focused on demonstrating that STEM subjects are no more difficult than other subjects.

Negative views about success in STEM subjects have become associated with unacceptable stereotypes. The attitude that science is boring has led to a perception that people who enjoy or succeed in STEM subjects are, or might be, geeks and nerds. Those subjects are not considered funky.

Teachers are an important resource for STEM students who have to make study and career decisions. It is said that high-quality, inspirational teaching is the strongest influence on positive attitudes towards STEM subjects. However, research shows that many STEM teachers are not confident about acting as career guidance counsellors. Many career advisers have humanities or social science backgrounds, and some

research has shown that only 10% of career advisers have a science degree.

The media has been accused of characterising STEM subjects negatively and perpetuating stereotypes that highlight the alleged degree of difficulty associated with attaining good qualifications in a STEM subject. Parental influences can also affect student uptake. Such influences include parents' educational backgrounds, their occupations and their aspirations.

STEM subjects must be rebranded, re-imaged and re-imagined for the benefit of young people and students. We must alter the public image and perception of STEM subjects and use bold, creative and innovative design to compete with messages from the world outside school, in which young people prefer to dwell. The re-imaging of STEM subjects should target primary-school pupils, as that will enable us to address the matter before the decline in motivation and interest in STEM subjects takes hold.

The Executive's target to increase by 25% the number of STEM graduates and postgraduates by 2015 is very challenging, and would require an additional 1,600 students to enrol in such courses each year for the next seven years.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The Member should bring his remarks to a close.

**Mr Butler:** That is a big task but, if we are to succeed, it must happen. Go raibh maith agat.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** As Question Time commences at 2.30 pm, I suggest that the House take its ease until that time. The debate will continue after Question Time.

*The debate stood suspended.*

2.30 pm

## Oral Answers to Questions

### EDUCATION

#### Post-Primary Transfer: NICCE

1. **Mr McClarty** asked the Minister of Education what action she will take on the decision of the Northern Ireland Commission for Catholic Education to introduce an academic test for the 2009-2010 post-primary transfer procedure. (AQO 2526/09)

#### Academic Selection: Catholic Sector

7. **Ms Anderson** asked the Minister of Education for her response to the decision by the Catholic sector to end academic selection. (AQO 2532/09)

**The Minister of Education (Ms Ruane):** With your permission, a LeasCheann Comhairle, I will answer questions 1 and 7 together. Question 1 is factually incorrect: the Commission for Catholic Education did not decide that an academic test should be introduced. In my answer, I will outline why that is the case, but I wish to make that point first.

Cuirim fáilte roimh an ráiteas a d'eisigh roinnt mhaith príomhoidí ó scoileanna Caitliceacha neamhroghnacha ar na mallaibh a thug tacaíocht ghlan shoiléir don treoir ar aistriú 2010 a d'fhoilsigh an Roinn.

I welcome much of the statement from the Commission for Catholic Education, which restates its opposition to academic selection at the age of 11 as a means of transferring to post-primary education, and I note the call for all schools in the Catholic sector to move to an alternative form of transfer. I welcome the commission's call for schools in the Catholic sector to follow the transfer 2010 guidance as fully as possible.

I note the commission's recognition of some of the risks involved in the operation of breakaway tests: the risk of discriminating against a child or groups of children; the risk of children having to sit multiple tests; and the risk of distorting the statutory curriculum. All of those risks and others can be avoided if the transfer 2010 guidance is complied with. Indeed, many educationalists have asked whether it is possible to operate breakaway tests without discriminating against children. That is a valid question.

I also welcome the recent statement issued by principals of non-selective Catholic schools offering

support for the transfer 2010 guidance produced by the Department of Education. I note in particular the comment:

"The availability to schools of the minister's admissions criteria makes testing superfluous and unnecessary. Our schools have no difficulty with such criteria, nor should any Catholic post-primary school".

I also highlight the opposition of the trade unions, including all teaching unions, to academic selection. Teaching staff should consider carefully the advice that their unions are providing in response to any pressure that may be applied to them to facilitate the testing of children by breakaway grammar schools.

Consultation on the recommendations contained in the transfer 2010 guidance ends today, with consultation on an equality impact assessment on the guidance continuing until 4 June 2009. After responses to those consultations have been considered carefully, a final version of the guidance will be produced.

**Mr McClarty:** I thank the Minister for her response, although I do not accept much of its content. Does the Minister have even a modicum of pity for the northern bishops, given the predicament in which she has now placed them?

**Some Members:** Hear, hear.

**The Minister of Education:** The northern bishops are well able to speak for themselves, which they have done. As I said, I welcome the contribution that they have made in relation to the ending of academic selection. It is important that all schools follow the advice of the Catholic bishops, and, indeed, of the Catholic secondary schools.

I want to make the Assembly aware that many primary schools throughout the North of Ireland are very concerned at the attempts by some grammar schools to encourage primary schools to deviate from the curriculum. Last Friday, the primary-school principals of Newry and Mourne sent out a unified message in opposition to academic selection. There were more than 46 principals present at a meeting from which was issued a statement that the primary school principals of the Newry and Mourne area are opposed to academic selection.

Another important point made in that statement was:

"As our statutory legal duty is to deliver the Revised Curriculum, this prevents us from using teaching time or school resources to prepare for, or facilitate, any transfer tests. Deployment of staff and school resources will be for the Revised Curriculum only. If schools were to set aside the Revised Curriculum in order to prepare for tests, we would be failing in our statutory duty towards our children, notwithstanding the possible legal consequences."

That was the stated view of 46 principals in the Newry and Mourne area.

I am also aware that 37 school principals attended a meeting in Donaghmore on Friday 24 April and that



many primary-school principals in places such as Coleraine and Lisburn are standing up and being counted. They are making sure that the children whom they teach have the best possible access to the primary curriculum.

**Ms Anderson:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle, agus go raibh maith agat, a Aire. Is the guidance on academic selection merely saying “at your own risk”?

**The Minister of Education:** No, it is not. The Department’s guidance does much more than that. It defines the aims and objectives for the whole process, which are clarity, robustness and equality. It communicates important changes in the law, recommends a menu of admissions criteria and defines and illustrates the recommended use of those criteria. It recommends key measures, including equality of access for those who are entitled to free school meals and those who are outlying applicants. It does not recommend academic admissions criteria but sets out, neutrally and factually, what constitutes responsible use of such criteria.

Leis seo a rá ar bhealach eile: is creat iomlán iontrálacha é an treoir; má chloítear léi, cinnteoidh sí soiléarthacht, láidreacht agus comhionannas sna hiontrálacha, agus ní bheidh aon chrannchur postcóid ann.

In other words, the guidance is a complete framework for admissions. If the guidance is followed, it will ensure clarity, robustness and equality in admissions, and there will be no postcode lottery. For the first time in decades, there will be a fair admissions process for children transferring from primary to post-primary education.

**Mr Poots:** I note that the Minister did not take the opportunity to correct Ms Anderson’s incorrect question as she did after Mr McClarty’s question. I also note that the Minister — *[Interruption.]* Yes, I am asking a question, Ms Anderson. I also note that the Minister indicated that she welcomed most of the Northern Ireland Commission for Catholic Education’s statement. I wish that she would welcome all of it. To do that, she will have to accept some form of testing for the next number of years, as the commission has recommended. As Minister of Education, will she continue to fly in the face of the commission and reject its views?

**The Minister of Education:** I am sure that the Commission for Catholic Education will be bemused by DUP support. I want to clarify some points, and I will read directly from the commission’s statement in case there is any lack of clarity or if some parties do not understand what it said. First, the commission:

“restates its position ... that the current system of academic selection at age eleven is no longer an appropriate way for children to transfer to Post-Primary school.”

The statement continues:

“All Catholic Post-Primary schools should give full consideration to the guidelines on admissions criteria issued by the Minister for Education on 2nd Feb 2009.”

Let us remember why there is no regulation. It is because the party opposite refuses even to discuss the issue at Executive meetings. The commission also states:

“In the absence of a regulated system of Post-Primary Transfer, the Commission accepts the view of the Working Group that an academic test may be appropriate in the short-term, particularly for those Post-Primary schools which are oversubscribed.”

However, there is a sting in the tail:

“Those Catholic schools which opt to make use of such testing should ensure these tests: Do not discriminate against any groups of children; Will avoid children having to sit a multiplicity of tests; Will be used for only a very limited period of time; Will not involve any distortion of the statutory KS1&2 curriculum and; Will focus on English and Mathematics”.

Anyone who is involved in education has to ask whether children can be put through high-stakes tests at the ages of 10 or 11 to determine entry into post-primary education without discriminating against them. I do not believe that we can do that.

**Mr O’Loan:** Does the Minister agree that, having failed to reach consensus on education reform, she has washed her hands of responsibility and walked away from the situation, leaving parents, teachers and pupils to pick up the pieces? Does she further agree that the Commission for Catholic Education’s decision to permit entrance examinations reflects that view?

**The Minister of Education:** There are 1,238 schools in our education system in the North of Ireland, including preschool units, primary schools and special schools, and I take seriously my responsibilities for every child in our education system.

The Member’s question has a very narrow focus. I will not continue with a system that supports only 40% of our children. We have an opportunity to ensure that every child has a fair chance and to get rid of inequalities in the education system once and for all. I note that the Member’s party claims to be against academic selection, and I welcome that, but I would like to hear more vocal support from that party for finally removing inequalities from our system.

I urge the Member to reread the Commission for Catholic Education’s statement and the statement from the Catholic post-primary-school principals, who have been clear in asserting that there should be full and unequivocal support for the Minister’s guidelines and that their full and immediate implementation should follow the consultation period in all Catholic post-primary schools.

If anyone thinks that the only people who are opposed to academic selection are from the Catholic sector, nothing could be further from the truth, as the Members opposite well know because many principals have made representations to them. I welcome the support from across the board to bring equality into the system. I noted Dawn Purvis's comments on the matter in the Chamber last week, which were very well made.

## Post-Primary Transfer: Entrance Tests

2. **Mr B McCrea** asked the Minister of Education what advice she is giving to parents and teachers of Year 6 pupils who will sit entrance tests in an unregulated system. (AQO 2527/09)

### Entry Criteria

10. **Mr Neeson** asked the Minister of Education what assessment she has made of the impact on P5 and P6 pupils of schools opting to use examination as one of their entry criteria, in addition to the proposed 2010 guidelines. (AQO 2535/09)

**The Minister of Education:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will answer questions 2 and 10 together.

Léiríonn an treoir um aistriú 2010, a soláthraíodh chuig bunscoileanna, an measúnú atá déanta agam maidir leis an tionchar diúltach atá ag an aistriú acadúil iarbhunscoile ar eispeireas oideachasúil páistí iarbhunscoile.

The advice that I have provided to primary schools and parents in the form of the transfer 2010 guidance reflects my assessment of the distorting impact of academic post-primary transfer on the education experience of primary-school children. The guidance therefore seeks to support primary schools' delivery of the primary curriculum in the interests of children and parents. I have written to the parents of all P6 children to the same effect.

I met primary principals in Tyrone, where I was accompanied by Stanley Goudie, the chief inspector of the Education and Training Inspectorate. One of the points that he was at pains to make to the principals was that primary schools represent a sector in their own right; they are not just a stepping stone to post-primary provision. The message to primary schools is that they should not be obliged or pressured in respect of post-primary schools' admission arrangements.

Primary schools understand that their role, as outlined in legislation, is to continue to provide an excellent primary curriculum to children. Their role is not to serve the narrow interests of the admission

arrangements of one group of post-primary schools. Teachers' unions are also providing that message to their members. For example, the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) has advised its members against involvement in the administration, preparation, supervision or marking of entrance tests.

My message to parents is one of assurance that they have no need to put their child through an entrance test. The transfer 2010 guidance recommends that no school operate such a test. If all schools follow that guidance, all parents and children will be served by a fair system of transfer for the first time.

**Mr B McCrea:** The Minister may not favour selective transfer criteria, but she is selective in the facts that she states. She is selective in the people that she quotes and in the way in which she deals with the issue. She is, in fact, discriminatory, and is dealing unfairly with many people in our society.

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

**Mr B McCrea:** What advice will she give parents who will be discriminated against by her free-school-meals criteria, as highlighted by the equality impact assessment that stated that 62% of pupils who are in receipt of free school meals are from the Catholic tradition —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I must insist that the Member come to his question.

**Mr B McCrea:** Only 29% of such pupils are from the Protestant tradition. She is sectarian, she is trying to divide us, and she will not succeed in destroying Northern Ireland.

**The Minister of Education:** The best way to deal with that rant is to look at the facts, which are not selective. There are 28 post-primary schools in Belfast: 12 grammar schools and 16 secondary schools. The 12 grammar schools educate 54% of the children attending the 28 schools. The 16 secondary school educate the remaining 46%; 3,010 of the desks in the 16 secondary schools are empty, an average of 188 empty desks per school.

2.45 pm

The Member claims to be interested in children who are entitled to free school meals and statemented children: in the 16 secondary schools, 35% — one in three — are free-school-meal children, and 278 children are statemented, which is an average of 17 per school. In the 12 grammar schools, 5% — one in 20 —

**Mr B McCrea:** Those are merely selected facts.

**The Minister of Education:** The Member does not even want to listen to the answer because he knows that he has no answer here. *[Interruption.]*

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order, please. The Minister has the Floor.

**The Minister of Education:** He has no answer. Let us deal with the issues that are before us, rather than pretending that they do not exist. In the 12 grammar schools, 5% of children — one in 20 — get free school meals, and 95 children are statemented.

I have the statistics here for Antrim, Armagh, Down, Derry, Tyrone and Fermanagh. We can pretend that there is not an issue and continue to act in the way in which the Member is acting, throwing out comments willy-nilly, or we can deal with the facts. I am going to deal with the facts, and I am not going to allow children to be discriminated against.

**The Deputy Speaker:** I remind Members that they must not interrupt the Minister when she is answering questions.

**Mr Neeson:** I want to clarify the role of the Alliance Party, which wants to see change and has tried to support the Minister over recent months in trying to bring about change. However, does the Minister not realise that what is being proposed at the moment has created a great lack of clarity about the future. The Alliance Party is opposed to long-term selection —

**The Deputy Speaker:** Does the Member have a question for the Minister?

**Mr Neeson:** Will the Minister accept the proposals that were put forward by my colleague Trevor Lunn to delay the changes for two years?

**The Minister of Education:** I welcome the fact that the Alliance Party is opposed to academic selection, and I would ask it to continue to work closely with my Department in bringing about the end of academic selection.

The Member talks about delaying the proposals. The 11-plus was brought in decades and decades ago. The people who are calling for delay are the people who are facilitating the minority who are trying to block change. There will be no delay, because we cannot continue to fail children in the numbers in which we are failing them. There are 12,000 leaving our schools every year without English and Maths GCSE, or Irish and Maths, depending on which subject they are studying. That is simply not acceptable. We have to look at other countries that are dealing with underachieving and how they are dealing with it. We have to look at the success stories — Finland, Poland and different countries that are bringing about changes for all children. I am not prepared to sit on my hands and continue to fail children.

My other point, which the Alliance Party knows, is that I brought forward compromise proposals. The two parties opposite refused to discuss them, refused even to put them on the Executive's agenda. That is how

much they cared about reaching consensus. They were mistaken in believing that they would block change or stop me and my Department from moving forward. That is not the case; we are moving forward. The proposals have been out for consultation, and we are now moving forward in the best interests of every child in the North of Ireland.

**Mr McCausland:** The Minister referred on a number of occasions to equality and inequality. When she appeared before the Committee for Education on 1 October 2008, she was asked to provide the Committee with examples of educational, social or sectoral inequality in the current system. Will she explain why, in spite of repeated correspondence and in spite of being asked at a subsequent meeting, she has failed, after six months, even to answer such a simple question? She talks about inequality, but she does not even know what she is talking about.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Minister, if there is a question there, will you respond?

**The Minister of Education:** I do not think that there is a question there, but I will say that, after two years, I am still waiting for proposals to come from the Committee. That says it all.

**Mr McCausland:** You cannot answer the question. That is the problem.

**The Minister of Education:** There was no question.

**Mr Molloy:** Will the Minister clarify whether the Assembly's failure to bring about and agree new regulations will mean that children will have to sit a number of unregulated tests?

**The Minister of Education:** Go raibh maith agat as an cheist sin. Ní bheidh oiread agus aon teist amháin le déanamh ag aon pháiste, má chloíonn scoileanna leis an treoir.

No child needs to be forced to sit breakaway tests, and, if schools follow the guidance, no child will have to sit a test at the age of 10 or 11. That is what we are working towards. There is no educational case for a test, and international evidence is clear on that. Not only do many non-selective systems produce better results than are found here but international surveys regularly conclude that attainment gaps and extended underachievement are characteristics of selective systems. I ask all educationalists to join with us and be part of the dynamic change that is happening in our education system. This is about putting equality at the core of our system and ensuring that every child gets a fair chance.

### Counselling Services in Schools

3. **Dr McDonnell** asked the Minister of Education what funding is provided to primary schools and



special schools for the provision of independent counselling services in schools. (AQO 2528/09)

**The Minister of Education:** Tá folláine agus leas mothúchán daltaí ina bpríomhthosaíocht agam. Tá tacaíocht ghairmiúil chomhairleoireachta ar fáil do gach duine óg in iarbhunscoileanna ó bhí 2007 ann.

The emotional health and well-being of pupils is a priority, and I know that it is a priority for the Member who asked the question. Access to free, professional counselling support has been available to all young people in post-primary schools since 2007. Young people may access the service through self-referral or school referral. The service is provided to 230 post-primary schools, all of which have access to half a day of counsellor time every week.

The service costs £1.8 million per annum. Last year, I secured an additional £2.5 million, with £1.7 million available in 2010-11, to allow us to begin to extend the programme to promote pupils' emotional health and well-being in the primary and special-education sectors. The expansion will focus on developing pupils' resilience and coping capacities, and it will include access to appropriate therapeutic interventions, which may include independent counselling support.

A study has been undertaken to determine the nature and level of need in our primary and special schools, as well as the interventions that are appropriate to the age and abilities of children and young people. The final report is expected to be delivered by the end of April 2009, and the results of the research will be used to inform a policy framework for appropriate support service development. Given all those factors, it may be necessary to look at a targeted support model, rather than one with universal access, as well as age-appropriate models for the younger children. I thank the Member for his question and for his interest in the matter.

**Dr McDonnell:** I thank the Minister for her answer. What is her interim assessment of the uptake of the service? Is it adequate? Does the Minister have any plans to increase the funding that is available, if possible, particularly to schools in marginalised areas where needs are extremely high? We are all aware that the demand for that type of support service in marginalised areas is high and may not be availed of as much as is possible.

**The Minister of Education:** I will reply to the Member in writing detailing the uptake. I agree with him that providing the funding is a very important intervention by the Department. The Department has completed a review of special needs and inclusion, and it is a very thorough piece of work. It is with the Executive but, to date, the party opposite has refused to allow it to be tabled, which could jeopardise £25 million of additional money that I have sought. It is very important that we get that funding and that we

get the policy on the table, because it is a very important policy. I urge all Members to support me in ensuring that that is put on the Executive's agenda.

**Mrs O'Neill:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Minister talked about the support that is available in post-primary schools, and I welcome that support. She also touched on the expansion of that support to primary schools. Why have special schools and primary schools been treated differently to date?

**The Minister of Education:** Go raibh maith agat as an cheist sin. A child's age and his or her ability to articulate and understand are key to any intervention. Therefore, therapeutic support must be tailored to the individual child. It must also be flexible, age-appropriate and suitable for the child's stage of development.

Primary and special schools can and do buy in counselling and other therapeutic supports, if they consider that children will benefit from them and to determine the most appropriate and tailored support for children given their age and ability. Research is being undertaken to determine the level of need in our primary and special schools, and the final report from that research is expected by the end of April 2009. Those results will be used to inform a policy framework for appropriate support-service development.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Question 4 has been withdrawn.

## Portadown College

5. **Mr Simpson** asked the Minister of Education whether she will agree to departmental officials visiting Portadown College to view and discuss the board of governors' preferred option of building the new college on its existing location. (AQO 2530/09)

**The Minister of Education:** Mar a dúirt mé le linn na díospóireachta atrátha faoi Portadown College — Coláiste Phort an Dúnáin — ar na mallaihbh, tá níos mó obair á déanamh ag Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Deiscirt ar an mbreithmheas eacnamaíochta.

As I indicated during the recent Adjournment debate on Portadown College, the Southern Education and Library Board (SELB) is undertaking further work on the economic appraisal. The SELB is remodelling the original preferred option to provide a replacement school, with a new technology block and sports hall to be built on the school's existing playing fields. It is essential that the appraisal principles are applied correctly and that the decision on how best to provide suitable accommodation for pupils at Portadown College is based on a robust business case. To that end, the appraisal must include and thoroughly assess a full



range of viable options, and I hope that that work will be concluded quickly.

In June 2007, departmental officials visited the school accompanied by officers from the SELB. They are familiar with the school site. Since then, officials met board officers in March 2009, and there will be a further meeting following receipt and consideration of the revised economic appraisal if necessary.

I am aware of the views of the board of governors on the preferred location for the new school, and those views have been reflected in the appraisal. However, it is the appraisal process that determines how best to approve suitable accommodation for current and future pupils of Portadown College.

**Mr Simpson:** Does the Minister agree that the alternative being put forward by the board of governors will provide far better options for safety, traffic flow, car parking and sporting excellence than the proposal currently on the table?

**The Minister of Education:** As I have said, there is a process in place. That process must run its course, and it would be inappropriate for me to comment on any of the options at this point.

**Mrs D Kelly:** Outstanding replacements and repairs that are needed in schools in Craigavon such as Craigavon Senior High School, St Michael's Grammar School and Tannaghmore Primary School and across the borough such as St Patrick's College in Banbridge. Will we have any assurance from the Minister that we will see any of the work commencing during this financial year? Furthermore, will she give us definitive dates for those works to be completed? Will she assure the House that it will not be the case that those who shout loudest get?

**The Minister of Education:** It is certainly not the case that those who shout loudest get: the Department has a capital build programme. I will write to the Member about all the schools that she has named, as it would not be appropriate for me to go into the detail of each of those processes at the moment.

**Mr McLaughlin:** The Minister has already alluded to the importance of the economic appraisal process. Will she explain why that process is taking so long?

**The Minister of Education:** Rinneadh roinnt leasuithe ar an mbreithmheas eacnamaíochta ó shin, agus shocraigh an bord ar chruinniú ar 4 Márta go ndéanfaidh siad níos mó obair air.

A newbuild for Portadown College was included in the new starts announcement of 1 March 2006, and the SELB indicated in April 2007 that it wished to pursue a fundamental change to the recommended option in the economic appraisal for Portadown College. In doing so, the SELB wished to take account of potential additional provision to be provided by the Sports

Council and DCAL. Indeed, Members have previously encouraged my Department to work with DCAL and other Departments when making provision. That is one of the reasons for the process taking so long.

3.00 pm

The economic appraisal has been revised several times. At a board meeting on 4 March 2009, an undertaking was given to complete some further work, including the consideration of a replacement school on the existing playing-field site. As I said earlier, the concern is to ensure that all parties involved prepare and agree a robust, defensible appraisal.

## EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING

### Queen's University/Stranmillis Merger

1. **Mrs Hanna** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether he has informed Queen's University, Belfast and Stranmillis University College that a merger date of around September 2009 is not possible, and to outline their response. (AQO 2546/09)

**The Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey):** I recall answering a very similar question last month.

Although I have not informed Queen's University or Stranmillis University College that a merger date of around September 2009 is not possible, I previously stated that I have made it clear to senior management at Queen's University and Stranmillis College that key steps must be taken before any merger is approved. Those steps include the Assembly's endorsement. The completion of all those steps, rather than any desired deadline, will determine the timetable for any proposed merger.

Given that we are now at the end of April and stages such as a public consultation have not yet begun, it is now my view that a merger by September 2009 is impossible.

**Mrs Hanna:** I thank the Minister for that response. With the outcome of the teacher-demand module not yet published, and given the concern around the proposal, will he assure me that he will take his time to ensure that the merger is subject to a very balanced, strategic, long-term assessment?

**The Minister for Employment and Learning:** I have given that assurance to a number of Members, and I am happy to repeat it. The business case has arrived in my Department and is being dealt with there. It must go to the Department of Finance and Personnel, before returning to my Department for policy consideration. My Department must then take a view

on it, and we shall then discuss the business case with the Committee. After that, a consultation process must occur before legislation is introduced.

The Member knows that all those processes will be followed. I indicated that I will not seek accelerated passage for the legislation. The merger decision will take whatever time it takes, and we must make up our own minds on whether we believe the proposal to be viable, helpful and beneficial or whether we believe otherwise.

**Mr Poots:** If it is not to proceed by September 2009, will the Minister give a commitment to the House today to include St Mary's College in the merger in order to do away with the separate system that is currently in operation, thereby fully integrating third-level education?

**The Minister for Employment and Learning:** The Department has reacted to a proposal that the board of Stranmillis College put to it, but it has received no proposal from the board of St Mary's College. Therefore, at present, we have nothing to which to react. However, I know that, with financial help from the Department, St Mary's is carrying out research on the way forward for the college. Of course, any proposals from the college will be treated exactly the same as the proposal we received from Stranmillis College.

**Mr K Robinson:** Would a delay beyond the speculative start date of the 2009-2010 academic year have financial implications for either Queen's University or Stranmillis College? Moreover, given the outstanding and unique site that Stranmillis College occupies, and its proximity to Belfast city centre, what safeguards would be put in place to ensure no disposal of land or property takes place that might be against the public interest?

**The Minister for Employment and Learning:** I assure the Member that, should Stranmillis College cease to exist, any land that it currently owns will be under the control of the House and the Department. Members have written and spoken to me about that matter, which is obviously of great concern, because the land bank is very significant. There are no circumstances in which we would not have control. Legislation is required to dissolve the college, at which point we have the authority and the power to intervene specifically on the land issue.

As far as financial implications are concerned, I introduced conversion funding for the colleges last year. I promised that that would apply in the next academic year, so I do not anticipate that any additional financial difficulties will arise from a delay in that process. As I have said on a number of occasions, it will take as long as it takes.

## Global Downturn: Employment Services

2. **Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what additional employment services will be made available to address the large number of workers recently made redundant due to the global downturn. (AQO 2547/09)

**The Minister for Employment and Learning:** My Department is increasing capacity in the employment service to allow it to cope with the effects of the economic downturn. In order to meet demand, 130 additional front line staff are being recruited, and, where appropriate, jobs and benefits offices are working overtime. Workers who have recently been made redundant are eligible for entry into Steps to Work, the Department's main employment programme. Arrangements have been made to allow apprentices in the construction, motor vehicle and engineering sectors to complete their training if they are made redundant. Redundancy services and job clinics are available for companies that are affected by the downturn. We will continue to monitor the situation to identify any additional measures that may be appropriate to meet rapidly changing circumstances.

**Mr McCarthy:** Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for his response. Will he inform us whether his Department, perhaps in conjunction with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, has given any consideration to resurrecting Enterprise Ulster or the Action for Community Employment (ACE) scheme? Those were very fruitful, and they did a tremendous job in the community. Such schemes would give the ever-increasing number of unemployed people the opportunity for a fresh start.

**The Minister for Employment and Learning:** The Member will be aware that Enterprise Ulster was wound up in the past few years and that the ACE programme operated very effectively for quite some time. All forms of assistance are being considered. I recently met the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. Together with her officials and Invest NI, she and I are working on proposals that will bring direct help to companies and employees who are being put on short time or are being threatened with immediate redundancy. Our focus is on bringing forward such proposals, and we hope to do so within the next few weeks.

We are moving into a very changing situation, so all options have to be considered. We have regard to what is happening in other parts of the United Kingdom and further afield. Setting up bodies is a time-consuming exercise because, for instance, one has to consider the legal basis on which they would operate. People want as quick a response as possible, and the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and I are focused on those areas.

**Mr Ross:** The Minister will be aware that many of those who have recently been made redundant are from F G Wilson in Larne, and many of them are welders. He may not be aware that welders need to be coded every six months. For welders who are in jobs, their employers do that; however, those who are out of work for up to six months need to be coded independently. A number of people have come to see me because they have had difficulty in finding anywhere in Northern Ireland to get coded; they have, therefore, had to pay out of their own pockets to travel to GB to get that done. Employers are also finding it difficult to find local people who have the relevant certificate.

I have written to the Minister about the matter. Could he use his Department's offices to ensure that there are places in Northern Ireland where welders who are out of work can get the necessary coding?

**The Minister for Employment and Learning:** I am aware of the issue with regard to welders, and I will shortly write to the Member in that regard. There is no doubt that F G Wilson, and other companies that we would have regarded as blue-chip, have been under enormous pressure. As the Member knows, there has been a series of layoffs and pay-offs over the past six or nine months.

I appreciate the point that the Member makes. If it is clear to the employment service that a particular piece of training is likely to lead to an individual finding a job for which there is a need, there is no doubt that advisers will be very flexible in the offers that they can make.

I will have to be absolutely clear that the qualification process for coding is adequate. However, I will contact the Member about that in due course.

**Mr B McCrea:** What is the Department's assessment of the success to date of the Local Employment Intermediary Service (LEMIS) programme?

**The Minister for Employment and Learning:** As the Member will know, that programme operates in a number of areas already, and there is a wide range of provision. The Steps to Work programme is our primary tool, and as well as LEMIS, we have the Pathways to Work scheme for those who were on incapacity benefits. Given that some of the projects are pilot schemes, there are early signs of positive responses in areas where the schemes have to reach those who are far away from the labour market.

LEMIS operates in north and west Belfast, Londonderry and Strabane, and it targets long-term unemployed people who are far away from the labour market. In 2008-09, it exceeded its job-outcome target by just over 12%, which equates to 449 confirmed job outcomes for clients against a target of 400. That was achieved against a background of rapidly rising unemployment. Therefore, we are confident at this stage that the system is working. However, it will have

to be monitored over a longer period of time, after which the next challenge will be to assess whether to extend it.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Question 3 has been withdrawn.

### Redundancies in Small Manufacturing Companies

4. **Mr Neeson** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what assistance he is making available to persons recently made redundant from small manufacturing companies in the current global downturn. (AQO 2549/09)

**The Minister for Employment and Learning:** We offer those who face redundancy or who have been made redundant recently, including those in small manufacturing companies, the opportunity to avail themselves of redundancy clinics on the company's premises, where that provision is available. With partner organisations, including the Social Security Agency, Invest Northern Ireland, local enterprise agencies and further education colleges, we provide information, advice and support to assist workers to find alternative employment or to access retraining or upskilling.

In addition, on Monday 6 April, I met with Minister Foster to discuss what assistance our respective Departments could provide, and, with the aim of offsetting the need for redundancies, I am considering actively proposals to encourage employers to provide training for people who have been placed on short-term working.

**Mr Neeson:** I thank the Minister for his response. I am very much aware of the co-operation that exists between his and other Departments. To what extent are the regional colleges providing courses and training for people who have, unfortunately, been made unemployed?

**The Minister for Employment and Learning:** I am pleased to say that there has been a positive response from the regional colleges. Many of them have drawn up option menus that are specifically related to their local areas. Through those option menus, people, particularly those on short-time working, can avail themselves of opportunities to attend courses when they would otherwise be at work.

Each college has drawn up its own proposals, and I have no doubt that the colleges will play a major role in implementing the proposals that Minister Foster and I are considering. For example, they are able to provide on-site services to individual employers. Therefore, they are resources that we are glad to have. We appreciate the work that they do, and now that the industrial dispute in the colleges has been settled, I am confident



that they will be able to concentrate their efforts where they are needed at this time, which is on doing what we can to upskill our workforce in the hope that we can take advantage of the upturn when it comes.

3.15 pm

**Mr Cree:** Will the Minister confirm that a special package of assistance is being provided to unemployed people who want to start their own business?

**The Minister for Employment and Learning:** Such a system is in operation. The Member will be aware that Invest NI has successfully promoted its Go For It campaign over recent years. As part of the Steps to Work programme, the Department provides help in compiling a business plan, the support of a business adviser and business training at a local enterprise agency. That provision operates through Invest NI's Go For It campaign.

After receipt of that assistance, individuals who wish to start their own business may test trade for a period of up to 26 weeks, while receiving a weekly allowance from the Department and continued support from a business adviser. Therefore, if an individual decides to set up his or her own business, he or she will have at least six months in which to see whether it works. During that time, the Department will continue to support the individual financially. If that does not work out, we will have to go back to the drawing board and look at how such people can be assisted.

Therefore, there is a six-month period in which people can test out a business and during which they will receive an allowance and the continued support of a business adviser.

**Mr Shannon:** I thank the Minister for his response. A number of small manufacturing companies have gone out of business, or are in the process of doing so, in my constituency. Off the top of my head, I can think of one company that has reduced its workforce from 30 to two. That workforce comprised a mix of people who now require retraining, and they range from those who have 10 to 15 years experience to apprentices.

What assistance can the Minister provide to companies that are making staff redundant in such vast numbers to ensure that we will have a skilled workforce in place and that people will be trained and ready to go back into business when the good times return? Perhaps some experienced members of the workforce will be able to go back into the manufacturing business and start again.

**The Minister for Employment and Learning:** The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and I are examining that area. We are looking at companies that have to lay off people or put them on short-time working, for instance. Mrs Foster and I are trying to find out whether we can develop a system whereby

people who are off work one or two days a week could be provided with training on the company premises by that company or by a training provider.

We want to find ways for my Department and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, through Invest NI, to help. We have had to work our way around state-aid issues, but I think that we have found a solution to that. We wish to discuss those issues with our Executive colleagues, and it is hoped that we will be in a position to bring forward firm proposals shortly.

Work is, therefore, at an advanced stage. We know that time is short and that people are under a lot of pressure, but it will be our aim to offer support to companies that it is believed have a viable future. However, an element of judgement will be required. If we have to use our discretion as to whether particular companies are helped, mistakes will be made and perhaps some companies that will be offered assistance will not make it through the recession. I am laying down that marker in case, at a later stage, someone informs us that a company that we helped has since failed.

There will be risks, but we have to balance those against the chances of losing the expertise and skill of a workforce, because it is important that our companies still exist when the recession is over. Therefore, I ask the Member to be patient for another few weeks until we bring forward our proposals, which it is hoped will make a positive contribution to assisting our manufacturing sector in particular.

### **Social Security Agency: Strategic Business Review**

5. **Ms Lo** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what discussions he has had with the Minister for Social Development in relation to the proposed changes in social security offices under the strategic business review. (AQO 2550/09)

**The Minister for Employment and Learning:** The Minister for Social Development has kept me advised of the progress that is being made by the Social Security Agency on its strategic business review, because our Departments share and provide a range of joint work that is focused on employment and welfare services in the jobs and benefits offices. My Department will continue to provide services from all those offices.

**Ms Lo:** I thank the Minister for his response. Given that the review's proposal is to encourage telephony and discourage face-to-face appointments, is he concerned that footfall in jobcentres may decrease?

**The Minister for Employment and Learning:** I regret to say that there is no drop in footfall at the moment. I have so far recruited an additional 48



members of staff, out of a total of 130, to deal with the upsurge in applications and requests for advice.

The Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) is not withdrawing its services from any of its offices. There are 35 offices, approximately 26 of which we share with the Social Security Agency, and a few jobcentres are stand alone. We have no proposals at this stage to depart from any of those sites.

Certain benefits, including the new employment and support allowance, are telephony based. However, they are benefit claims. We use face-to-face interviews and put people in touch with an adviser who can help them to seek additional training. We make our offerings in the centres as flexible as possible. A number of the measures regarding this issue that the Chancellor announced in his Budget speech have already been taken here. Indeed, some of the measures that were announced last week were measures that were scrapped, a number of them not more than a year ago. We did not go down that road. So, we already have most of the schemes.

I am confident that we will continue to provide a full service from all our jobcentres. The Minister for Social Development and I spoke just last weekend and are keeping in close touch on those matters. Clearly, the availability and accessibility of many jobcentres is important. We are also looking closely at one or two new sites to give us the option of moving, because in some cases the premises and their locations are unsatisfactory.

**Mr A Maginness:** I welcome the Minister's answer. I also welcome the Minister for Social Development's announcement about the strategic business review and her assurance that there would be no job cuts and that staff will be treated properly when moving to other locations.

Will the Minister reassure the House that in no circumstances will there be a complete substitution for face-to-face contact between customers and officials? It is important to maintain that human contact, particularly with people who have difficulty in articulating their problems.

**The Minister for Employment and Learning:** The Member made a number of important points. Telephony services have been introduced for a number of benefit applications. However, the Member has to understand that most of our main programmes are interview based. In the majority of cases, it is not possible to assess a client over the telephone, although that does not mean that there cannot be telephone contact. A programme such as Pathways to Work is built around six mandatory interviews.

In fact, we have been increasing the number of interviews required because we feel that it is the only way in which an adviser can make an assessment of an

individual client. We have no plans to substitute our service. By and large, is not possible for the service to be dealt with in the same way as an application for a benefit.

It is important that the client be able to speak to someone who can offer specific help, and because a benefit operates within certain legislative guidelines it is probably more suitable to telephony. Trying to assess a client's abilities — or lack of abilities — and what might be good for the client cannot, realistically, be done by telephone. Therefore, I can give the Member the assurances that he seeks.

### Queen's University/Stranmillis Merger

6. **Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what assessment he has made of the potential advantages of the merger between Queen's University, Belfast and Stranmillis University College. (AQO 2551/09)

**The Minister for Employment and Learning:** As I have stated before, the proposed merger must go through a number of key steps prior to any merger being approved. The first stage is the approval of the economic appraisal. The appraisal will set out the advantages, as well as the drawbacks, of the proposed merger in both financial and non-financial terms. My officials are dealing with the appraisal at present, and I am not in a position to comment until that process is complete.

**Mr Easton:** Can the Minister reassure me that before any merger is considered fully he will address the inequalities between Protestants and Roman Catholics as regards the balance of those from the Roman Catholic community above those of the Protestant community who are being trained? Will he also give me an assurance that he will tackle the Catholic certificate of education, which is leading to inequality for Protestants who are trying to get jobs in primary schools?

**The Minister for Employment and Learning:** I have told the House on a number of occasions that the merger will not be rushed. The Department will make an assessment and take into account all the issues, including those that the Member has raised with me on a number of occasions, both in person and in writing. It will then go to the Department of Finance and Personnel. If that Department approves the business case, it will come back to my Department for a policy discussion and approval. We will then have a discussion with the Committee. If, after public consultation, the Department decides to move to legislation, it will go through all the Stages in the House without accelerated passage.

The Member will have every opportunity to make his own judgement on any proposals that may emerge, and there will be a full legislative process. All of these matters will be addressed throughout the process. I know that the Member is concerned about balance issues, other Members have raised ethos issues with me, and so on. All of those matters will have to be taken into account in any assessment that I will make before I come to any conclusion.

**Mr Gardiner:** Will the Minister confirm that if the business case passes all its technical scrutinies in the Department for Employment and Learning and the Department of Finance, his ministerial judgement on the merit, or otherwise, of a merger will also allow for any factors that have changed since the summer of 2008, such as the University of Ulster's York Street proposals?

**The Minister for Employment and Learning:** Several things have intervened since then; that has been one and the economic situation has been another. Universities, as with other institutions, are, to a large extent, governed by finance. We will have to make an assessment of all of those matters. It will be looked at comprehensively, and there will be an opportunity for Members to debate and discuss those matters fully if it reaches the legislative stage. Concerns can also be raised at the consultative stage. No opportunity will be lost to give people the opportunity to put their case.

3.30 pm

## ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

### Renewable Energy

1. **Mr Attwood** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether steps will be taken to facilitate cross-border trade in renewable electricity; and if she intends to introduce a mechanism to allow subvention or inducements to be paid to renewable energy generators on a cross-border basis.

(AQO 2566/09)

**The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs Foster):** I am conscious that the current subvention arrangements for renewables, here and in the Republic of Ireland, have the potential to limit the extent of cross-border trade in renewables. The incentive mechanism for indigenous renewable energy in Northern Ireland is the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation (NIRO). In order to be eligible for support under the NIRO, renewable electricity must be produced and consumed in the region. I understand the same to be the case for the Republic of Ireland's

renewables support scheme, the renewable energy feed-in tariff (REFIT).

Any changes to the way in which renewable projects are considered for support to take account of the cross-border dimension would require the co-operation of the Governments in London and Dublin; would require legislation; and would have to take account of the legitimate expectations of existing generators who have strategic plans that are based on the certainty of the NIRO continuing. I have no plans to change the current arrangements.

**Mr Attwood:** The Minister and the Governments in London and Dublin should have plans to change the current arrangements for subventions. Given that the target is to generate 15% of our energy from renewables within 11 years, that we have an all-Ireland grid, and that there are proposals to strengthen that all-Ireland grid, is it not time that the current, mutually exclusive arrangements for subventions, North and South, are adjusted to create subventions that enable the North to take renewable energy from the South —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Will the Member ask a question, please?

**Mr Attwood:** — and vice versa? Does that not make sense? Is it not time to act in that way?

**The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** I hope that the Member will recognise that the NIRO has been very successful to date in reaching targets, and renewable energy generation has doubled since it was introduced in 2005. However, he is right to suggest that we need a much bigger contribution from a wider range of renewables for our overall energy strategy. That is one reason why we recently introduced the concept of banding to the NIRO; that will incentivise renewable energies that are, perhaps, not as in vogue as wind energy.

I listened to the Member's views on having a single mechanism for the whole island. However, that view was not expressed by the majority of consultees during the recent revision of the NIRO legislation. I understand where the Member is coming from when he makes such a suggestion: it sounds neat and attractive, but, frankly, we must think about those who have made investment decisions about renewables in Northern Ireland, and I do not want to send out a signal to investors that we will start chopping and changing the system. I simply will not allow that to happen.

We need more renewable energy. I will not allow anything to jeopardise potential investment, and, therefore, I reiterate my answer to the substantive question: I will not change the arrangements at present.

**Mr Hamilton:** The Minister will be aware of the many innovations and technological advances in the renewables sector in Northern Ireland, such as

movement on tidal-energy potential and compressed-air storage, among others. Will the Minister outline how reforms to the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation might better allow us to tap into the obvious renewable-energy potential that exists in Northern Ireland rather than obsessing about cross-border co-operation?

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

The Member will know that we brought in a banding system at, I think, the beginning of this month to deal with the wide range of renewables that are available, and he mentioned some of them. I hope that the banding support will give greater incentive to those less-developed technologies and that that will allow investors to see Northern Ireland as a good place to invest in such new technologies. We are talking about tidal, off-shore, and wind generation, as well as bio-energy. The Member mentioned compressed-air storage, and the old salt mines off the coast at Larne have been targeted as a site for that.

There is a high degree of consistency between all three UK obligations, and as well as sending out the signal that we will not chop and change, we must avoid the possibility of gaming between the obligations — between the countries of the United Kingdom. That is why I am satisfied that our policy is the right way forward, and that is why we are sticking to it.

**Mr K Robinson:** Does the Minister have any plans to harmonise the renewable obligation certificates in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland? Is she satisfied that the single electricity market is working to the benefit of domestic and commercial users in Northern Ireland?

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

I do not have any plans for harmonisation, because there are two different systems involved. One is a feed-in tariff, and the other is what we have here in the United Kingdom. We cannot harmonise the Northern Ireland renewables obligation certificate (NIROC) and the renewable energy feed-in tariff (REFIT), because it would be impossible, technologically, to do so.

The single electricity market is working well, and the first report from the regulators indicates how well it is working. However, I want to see more competition in that market as there is room for improvement in that regard. We need to concentrate on competitiveness in the single electricity market, and that is essentially what we are doing. We will consider competition when we look at our strategic energy framework, which, as Members will know, will be consulted on in the very near future.

## Indigenous Industry: Funding

2. **Mr McGlone** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether additional monies will be made available for grants, loans or loan guarantees for indigenous industry. (AQO 2567/09)

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

Invest Northern Ireland's budget is allocated to specific programmes, the outputs of which are designed to deliver the agency's corporate plan targets. Between its formation in April 2002 and March 2008, Invest Northern Ireland offered £399 million worth of assistance to locally-owned companies in support of developed projects compared to £347 million worth of assistance that it offered to externally-owned companies during the same period. Therefore, since Invest Northern Ireland's formation, approximately 53% of its assistance has been committed to locally-owned businesses.

A more detailed examination of the statistics shows that Invest Northern Ireland made 14,151 offers of assistance during that period, of which 12,928, or approximately 91%, were made to locally-owned businesses. That clearly shows that the vast majority of Invest Northern Ireland's time and work is targeted towards the indigenous business base.

**Mr McGlone:** I thank the Minister for her answer. Does the Minister agree that, given the current economic climate, it is particularly important that viable companies do not go to the wall due to temporary cash-flow problems that have arisen as a result of the recession? Has her Department given any thought to reallocating moneys normally used to subvent overseas investment? Overseas investment is clearly not forthcoming, and those moneys could be reallocated to different budgets to provide loans, or loan guarantees, to small and medium-sized enterprises.

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

I thank the Member for his question, which follows on from an SDLP document that made some points about Invest Northern Ireland holding cash reserves. Invest Northern Ireland does not hold cash reserves, and it is not allowed to hold cash reserves. Invest Northern Ireland's general reserve balance consists mainly of the agency's long term investments in its client companies in the form of loans or shares. A requirement to distribute those reserves as per that SDLP document would, effectively, require Invest Northern Ireland to withdraw support from its client companies by calling in loans and liquidating investments. I am sure that that is not what the Member wants me, or Invest Northern Ireland, to do in the current circumstances.

The Member also asked what the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) is doing to bring schemes forward. If the Member was listening



earlier, he would have heard about the discussions that I continue to have with the Minister for Employment and Learning. We are very hopeful that we will be able to bring forward a package in the very near future. My Department is also looking for state-aid clearance for a working capital scheme, which we hope to have in place in the next couple of weeks.

**Mr I McCrea:** I thank the Minister officially for a recent meeting that she had with me and representatives of Magherafelt and Cookstown district councils.

Will the Minister detail the work that Invest Northern Ireland is carrying out with businesses in the mid-Ulster area? As she knows, concerns were expressed at the meeting regarding the ongoing crisis faced in mid-Ulster.

**The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** That meeting with Mr McCrea was very useful. It gave me and the Invest Northern Ireland team the opportunity to set out a number of initiatives that are operating currently, as well as some new ones that are designed to give financial support and practical advice to small and medium-sized businesses in the mid-Ulster area.

The Member knows that many firms in that area have availed themselves of the accelerated support fund. That support is still available and it is used by local firms. Mid-Ulster is an area of excellence in engineering and construction. The North Western Regional Office has delivered some specific programmes in the mid-Ulster area, including Construct for Growth, a pilot programme operating in the construction sector. It is holding a construction and engineering breakfast seminar in mid-June. It is also helping companies to look further afield for work. Recently, eight companies from the construction sector travelled to Paris to look for work.

A company from the Upper Bann constituency has obtained a construction contract for work going on at the Paint Hall in Belfast with some of the very successful investments that we had there recently, including 'Your Highness' from Universal Pictures and 'Game of Thrones' from HBO. There are opportunities; the challenge is finding them. I will continue to support Invest Northern Ireland as it seeks those opportunities for firms in mid-Ulster and elsewhere in Northern Ireland.

**Mr McElduff:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Local enterprise centres play a vital role in supporting small and medium-sized enterprises and local businesses, which are the mainstay of our economy. Is the Minister satisfied that local enterprise centres are adequately funded or properly resourced to provide the necessary support?

**The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** I thank the Member for his question. I agree that the enterprise agencies and centres provide a good grounding for companies. On Friday past, I was pleased to open a new set of six workspaces in Clabby,

County Fermanagh, of which three have been let already. I am pleased to be attending the enterprise agencies' annual general meeting this Thursday, at which I hope to interface with many of the enterprise agencies and listen to the specific issues that they may want to raise with me.

As the Member knows, the Go For It programme went out to tender recently and the enterprise agencies were successful in that. I am pleased with that, and Invest Northern Ireland will continue to work with those enterprise agencies so that not only will the Go For It programme be successful, but those who have been through that will then go through the Growth programme and move on to become Invest Northern Ireland clients.

In the past, people entered the Go For It programme but there was not so much flow between that programme and Invest Northern Ireland. I do not want to see that happening; I want to see Invest Northern Ireland linked into the Go For It programme, so that companies can grow and have potential for export. I reiterate that, as the Member knows, I recognise the work that is done by local enterprise centres.

**Mr Savage:** I thank the Minister for her answer. Is the Minister aware that banks and major financial institutions continually change their policies as to how and when they give out loans? Farmers are finding it very difficult to get loans to purchase farm machinery so that they can upgrade, which is especially important coming into the harvest time.

Only today, I received a letter from agents who were turned down for a loan. The excuse given was the age of their machinery. Those agents have never missed a payment on a loan. Is the Minister aware of the difficulties faced by farmers in that situation?

**The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** I am aware of the difficulties faced by small businesses, be they in the agricultural sector or other sectors. That is the reason that I and the First and the deputy First Ministers continue to meet the banks on a one-to-one basis.

We consider it important to present genuine cases to those banks, but to do that requires evidence. Previously in the House, I called for Members to provide evidence of alleged sharp practices that could be presented to the banks. I repeat that call, and if Members have issues with specific banks, they should bring the evidence to us, and we will take up the case with the banks concerned.



3.45 pm

## Corporation Tax

3. **Dr McDonnell** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether there is a strategy and structure in place to take advantage of the 12·5% corporation tax in the Republic of Ireland, for the purposes of new industry, in areas located close to large centres of population in Northern Ireland.

(AQO 2568/09)

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

In recent years, Invest Northern Ireland and IDA Ireland have co-operated, to their mutual benefit, on several activities. However, the pursuit of foreign direct investment (FDI) is one key aspect of the agencies' work in which they continue to be in direct competition.

It is also important to recognise that Invest NI and IDA Ireland have different propositions. The latter promotes Ireland's corporation tax rate, which appeals to major corporations that seek to neutralise and optimise their tax position, whereas Invest NI promotes Northern Ireland as a cost-competitive location that is close to, and culturally compatible with, its customers. The different propositions mean that IDA Ireland and Invest NI target different companies and may work in different sectors.

However, both agencies recognise the importance of co-operation when mutual benefit can be generated for the two jurisdictions. Co-operation is, therefore, directed at areas of common interest in the business-operating environment, such as communication, infrastructure, skills, legislative policy, business environment, and knowledge and research. The north-west business and technology zone (NWB TZ) is an excellent example of the approach in practice. It is a cross-border business and technology zone that harnesses the synergistic — Members should try saying that word — benefits of linking the educational research institutions, graduate pools, business clusters and enhanced property solutions in Londonderry and Letterkenny. All are linked by a high-specification telecommunications network.

The zone will ultimately enable the region to compete more favourably for, and to secure, value-added inward investment. When investors subsequently choose to locate in the zone, the population in the wider region, from both jurisdictions, will be able to take advantage of the opportunities created.

**Dr McDonnell:** I thank the Minister for her answer. She will be aware that, in the light of the recent shabby behaviour and ill-treatment of workers by companies such as Visteon and Nortel, most Members are trying to think creatively, perhaps even latterly, outside the

box. If a 12% corporation tax zone were to be set up in or near Belfast, the Assembly could make try to make some use of it. Inward-investment opportunities may be being lost because of the rate of corporation tax here. Is there any way in which we might piggyback that situation?

Is there a chance, through joint working, to create some leverage to persuade those companies that demand a corporation-tax rate of 12%, and will not come here without it, to locate on the border? Companies located in Buncrana, Monaghan and Dundalk will employ people from Derry, Enniskillen and Newry respectively. Does that suggestion provide an opportunity for the Assembly to work to find jobs that would compensate for the current drastic levels of redundancy?

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

I thank the Member for making those points. I have no difficulty with his thinking laterally. As I said, the problem is that, in seeking FDI, there are two completely different propositions. Therefore, my Department is considering areas of co-operation, such as on infrastructure and the telecommunications network, which, as the Member knows, has been upgraded.

Only last week, significant FDI was secured from the Republic of Ireland. I am glad to be saying that in the week after it happened. We announced the creation of 77 new jobs with Intune Networks, a Dublin firm that decided to invest in the Linfield Industrial Estate in the Member's constituency of South Belfast. Eircom NI announced that its new headquarters will be situated in Forsythe House in the city centre, creating 30 new graduate jobs, with 30 more over the next 12 to 18 months.

Opportunities are being taken — this is a good, cost-competitive place to come. The two companies that announced last week that they were coming here were great advocates for investment in Northern Ireland. They spoke much better than I could on the subject. They talked about the level of skills, about the people and about why Northern Ireland is such a good place in which to do business. I am happy to tell the Member that we are securing FDI from the Republic of Ireland, and that we will continue to do so.

**Mr McFarland:** What discussion has the Minister had with her colleague the Finance Minister, and the Treasury in London, with a view to lowering corporation tax in Northern Ireland so that companies can improve their chances of surviving the present economic crisis?

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

I do not know whether the Member knows of the Varney Report — he should have had the opportunity to read it by now. Over the past six months, I have had no discussions with the Minister of Finance and Personnel on that issue, because I am concentrating on

the issues that I referred to in my previous answer. It is a different proposition from that in the Republic of Ireland; we are looking at the cost-competitive nature of Northern Ireland, the value of our skills, the people that we have, and the fact that we have the youngest population per head in Europe. We are a very good proposition. I will not talk down the economy of Northern Ireland; there is much to be proud of. I wish that others would recognise that, stop talking down the economy and stop asking for handouts.

### Tourism Signature Projects

4. **Mr F McCann** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the total amount of funding that has been secured or allocated to the five tourism signature projects as outlined in the Northern Ireland Tourist Board's corporate plan. (AQO 2569/09)

**The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** The capital amount of £75.1 million that was allocated under the Programme for Government to the five tourism signature projects, as outlined in the final version of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board's corporate plan, 2008-2011, is broken down as follows: the Titanic and maritime heritage signature project, £43.5 million; the Causeway Coast and glens signature project, £15 million — £9 million for the visitors' centre and £6 million for the Causeway coastal route; the Walled City signature project has an integrated development fund (IDF) allocation of £9.1 million; the Mourne signature project, £4 million; and St Patrick/Christian heritage signature project, £3.5 million.

**Mr F McCann:** Does the Minister not agree that it might be a mistake not to deal with the five projects as co-equal priorities, especially when it comes to eliminating regional disparities and dealing with socio-economic issues?

**The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** If the Member is asking whether all the signature projects are equal, the answer is yes. However, I think that everybody accepts that they are starting from very different bases. We are trying to target the signature projects so that they will link into one another. Therefore, when visitors come to one signature project in Northern Ireland they will be signposted to other signature projects. We will continue to review the availability of more European funds, especially with the change in sterling and the euro. However, the Member must accept that those projects are starting from very different bases.

**Mr P Ramsey:** The Minister is fully aware of the importance that the Walled City signature project has in the city of Derry. She has visited on a number of occasions and has seen the sound investment that has taken place to preserve the built heritage. However, the

project is not finished, and there is quite a shortfall. We must ensure the preservation of the Apprentice Boys' Memorial Hall and the Long Tower precinct, and the continuation of the Free Derry second phase, the Free Derry museum. Are there departmental guidelines on how we can proceed to the next stage and, ultimately, ensure that all buildings within the Walled City are protected and invested in?

**The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** I am glad that the Member reflected that I am a frequent flyer into Londonderry city. I appreciate the work that has been done on the Walled City signature project; it is a tremendous and unique project. I want to see it completed, and the rest of the buildings brought up to the level envisaged. As I say, the potential for further EU allocations for signature projects, including the Walled City, is kept under constant review, and I have asked the Department to have a look at that again. I am happy to come back to the Member, or any other Member, on that if he needs me to.

We have confirmed with the Department of Finance and Personnel that we propose to increase funding to phase 2 of the Walled City projects through the use of EU funding, and using IDF funding to match. We can do that because of the exchange rate. We want to do as much as we possibly can. The signature project in Londonderry is a jewel in the crown of the west, and we need to keep promoting it.

**Mr Cree:** I can certainly understand the importance of the signature projects. What funds will be available to encourage other novel projects that may be discovered during the timescale of the plan? How will the Northern Ireland Tourist Board react to new projects that could attract European investment with grants of up to 100%?

**The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** I am not sure that many European investments are made with 100% grants. If any new or innovative proposals come forward, the Tourist Board will consider them. The Member will be aware that, in the near future, we are introducing an innovation fund, which will consider up to 50% funding for innovation grants. Therefore, if he has any projects in mind, he should bring them forward to the Northern Ireland Tourist Board to see whether they are suitable for that fund.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Question 5 has been withdrawn.

### Foreign Investment

6. **Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what assessment she has made of the current level of interest in foreign companies investing in Northern Ireland. (AQO 2571/09)

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

I reiterate that the significant economic pressures that are being faced are a global problem from which Northern Ireland is not immune. However, despite the substantial job losses that have been reported in the past few months and weeks, positive progress towards achieving the public service agreement targets has been made in the past financial year. In 2008-09, inward investment activity levels remained encouragingly high. Indeed, Members may have heard the positive investment announcement last week from Intune Networks, a telecoms company whose £9 million investment will create more than 70 jobs.

However, throughout the year, Invest Northern Ireland has also noted that economic and market conditions have prompted companies to tighten their belts and focus their efforts on cost containment. That has led to a number of companies deferring their investment decisions, and, as a result, the early stage pipeline of new foreign direct investment prospects is significantly reduced in comparison with the same point last year.

The project sale cycle for inward investment can take between 18 months and 24 months to complete. Invest Northern Ireland is confident that, in the medium to long term, Northern Ireland will continue to benefit from foreign direct investment in its key sectors, and we continue to do whatever possible to ensure that Northern Ireland is well placed to capitalise rapidly once market conditions improve.

**Mr Moutray:** I thank the Minister for her response. The Minister indicated a high level of interest on the part of foreign companies. What is her Department doing to assist local companies such as the Almac Group in Craigavon and others to negotiate the current economic climate and to exploit new opportunities for expansion and investment?

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

As the Member knows, the Almac Group is one of our stellar companies; the Department works with the company, and Invest Northern Ireland is a frequent visitor to its premises.

I recently had the opportunity to visit the Almac Group's new drug discovery centre, which it established in 2008 as an R&D centre to enable the group to develop its own novel pharmaceuticals, particularly for cancer, to complement the group's other service-oriented businesses. The total investment costs for that innovative R&D project were £13.1 million, and the project received assistance of £6.108 million from Invest Northern Ireland.

That project has the potential to transform the Almac Group radically, to create further new jobs and to enhance significantly the development of a knowledge-based economy in Northern Ireland. It does

a tremendous job, and pharmaceutical companies throughout Northern Ireland, which do work that largely goes unseen, do a fabulous job to give Northern Ireland a reputation of which everyone in the House should be proud.

**Mr O'Loan:** What industry segments has the Minister identified that will be suitable for growth after the recession? What steps are being taken to build the infrastructure and competencies that are appropriate to those segments?

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

The MATRIX panel — the science industry panel that works with Government, academia and industry — has identified sectors for me. It has identified the areas of cleantech, nanotechnology and high-technology areas of information and communication technology. Through Invest Northern Ireland, we are working well to attract those types of companies.

As I said, last week a further two investments were made in Northern Ireland. We will continue to target those sectors, as they bring high-quality jobs to Northern Ireland and will serve us well in the long term.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** That ends Question Time. Members may take their ease for a moment before the next item of business, which is the private notice question.

4.00 pm

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

## PRIVATE NOTICE QUESTION

### Budget 2009-2010

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The Speaker has received notice under Standing Order 20 of a private notice question to the Minister of Finance and Personnel.

**Mr O'Loan** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in light of the UK Budget, if he will present a revised, emergency Budget to the Assembly for 2009-2010 with an emphasis on measures to respond to the economic downturn.

**The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Dodds):** The net impact of the measures that were announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Budget statement to Parliament on Wednesday 22 April 2009 is broadly neutral as regards the funding that is available to the Executive during the next two years, with Northern Ireland's share of additional efficiency savings being largely offset by increased Budget allocations.

Departmental budgets and the Northern Ireland Budget as a whole are kept under constant review. Indeed, they will soon be reviewed formally as part of the June monitoring round. That will be followed by further opportunities to amend spending plans for the current financial year in September, December and next February.

My Department must always be flexible and responsive to changing circumstances. The normal approach to managing the Budget provides a much more flexible and dynamic process than the one-off exercise that the Member seeks. For example, the process that I have outlined, which involves reviewing the position four times each year instead of just once, has identified adjustments to the Budget worth over £1,000 million during the past two years.

**Mr O'Loan:** I thank the Minister for his answer. However, I would like him to go further than he has indicated that he will. The use of monitoring rounds is certainly not a strategic approach to the current difficult situation.

As the Minister is aware, the SDLP has produced a major discussion document on new Budget proposals that would help the economy. One Member of the House commented on those proposals by saying:

— *“There are valuable elements in the SDLP's overall proposal”. — [Official Report, Bound Volume 40, p8, col 1].*

He also said:

— *“The whole House needs to start examining its priorities.” — [Official Report, Bound Volume 40, p3, col 2].*

He added:

— *“there is some measure of benefit in that debate taking place, and all the political parties putting forward their proposals”. — [Official Report, Bound Volume 40, p8, col 2].*

If I tell the Minister that the Member who made those comments was the First Minister, I am sure that he will agree with them. Obviously, the SDLP also has the support of a large number of leading economists in Northern Ireland.

Given the fact that, in these difficult circumstances, the Chancellor, Alistair Darling, chose to prioritise a number of measures, including retraining, providing help for small and medium-sized businesses, putting more money into social housing and the green economy, particularly energy efficiency —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The Member must ask a supplementary question.

**Mr O'Loan:** Will the Minister copy the Chancellor's example?

**The Minister of Finance and Personnel:** I thank the Member for his question. First of all, I agree that some suggestions have been made by a number of parties that are useful to my considerations. However, as the Member is well aware, other proposals in the document to which he has referred have been rubbished, not least some of the information relating to Belfast Harbour Commissioners and Invest NI. Both organisations have now put in writing their view that the figures and analysis that have been produced by the SDLP do not stand up to scrutiny.

I am always willing to look at any suggestions that come forward that will present extra money for the Northern Ireland Budget. As part of that, I have suggested that £50 million could be saved each year by reducing the number of Departments and taking away some of the “ugly scaffolding” of the current infrastructure, to which the SDLP leader has referred. I hope that the Member will be as open to those suggestions as we are to some of his.

**The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel (Mr McLaughlin):** The Committee for Finance and Personnel has requested an oral briefing from DFP officials to specifically examine the outcomes of the assessment of the delivery aspect of public service agreements and the monitoring of the Department's performance against those public service agreements, which have been carried out by the performance and efficiency delivery unit.

Have any areas of concern arisen from PEDU's work that put the achievement of economic targets in any doubt? Is the Minister content that existing Budget



allocations are sufficient to meet economic priorities and targets?

**The Minister of Finance and Personnel:** I thank the Chairman for his question. The public service commitments set out in the Programme for Government were agreed by Executive Ministers. The Chancellor of the Exchequer's announcements last week are not expected to have a major net impact on the Budget and the funding available to the Executive over the next two years. It is important that the Executive continue to monitor Departments' performance against their respective Programme for Government targets regularly. Officials in PEDU and the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister are taking that work forward, and it is important that it continues in the future. The focus of that monitoring process has been to ensure that sufficient systems are in place to facilitate delivery and to ensure that an early warning system is in place when target milestones are not achieved.

## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

### STEM Subjects

#### *Debate resumed on motion:*

That this Assembly expresses its concern at the decline in the number of students enrolling in Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects; notes the commitment in the Programme for Government to increase by 25% the number of students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds at graduate and postgraduate level, studying STEM subjects by 2015; and calls on the Minister of Employment and Learning to bring forward proposals to ensure this commitment is delivered. — *[Mr Butler.]*

**Mr Easton:** Northern Ireland can ill afford a continuation in the decline in the number of students who study science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Therefore, it is imperative that the House overwhelmingly endorse the motion.

As Members and many hard-working families know, Northern Ireland is not immune to the effects of the global economic downturn. The solution to the economic problem lies in a knowledge-based economy, particularly in STEM subjects. Furthermore, given our present economic circumstances, I am happy to contend that our Programme for Government has distinguished itself by placing the economy at its heart.

I would love to inform the House that more students are enrolling in STEM subjects than ever before, that we have more lecturers and teachers in STEM subjects than ever and that we have higher graduation levels in the STEM subjects than at any other time in Northern Ireland's history. However, sadly, the evidence does not allow me to do so. However, before we all get depressed, people in Northern Ireland who acknowledge the necessity of quality education in STEM subjects have much to celebrate. It is not all doom and gloom. We have high enrolment figures at 49%, but, given the comparison with Scotland, we cannot be complacent. Keeping ahead of the field in comparison with England and Wales will help to deliver the competitive edge that we require.

I believe in giving credit where credit is due, and I commend the Department for making available an extra 300 PhDs by 2011. Our universities have demonstrated considerable leadership. The University of Ulster deserves praise for its Step-Up programme, and I commend Queen's University for its scholarship; bright students who achieve three A grades at A level merit that £1,000 reward for their excellence. However, we cannot ignore critical areas. A commendable number — 2,855 — of students graduated in STEM subjects, and that figure has been consistent for several years. However, it is disconcerting that more people — 3,130 — graduated in STEM subjects in 2002-03.

Moreover, I am perturbed at the number of lecturers in STEM subjects. I address myself to the South Eastern Regional College in my constituency of North Down. Many constituents testify that the college distinguishes itself through its quality teaching and learning, and I am pleased to put that on record. However, in 2008-09, there are 144 lecturers in the STEM fields, whereas, in 2007-08, there were 180 — a loss of 36. I do not consider that to be progress, because it impacts on the local and national economy.

In the past, I have said that we need more effective co-ordination between further education, those involved in apprenticeships and the demands and requirements of industrial employers. I reinforce the need for synergy. However, we need to go further and unlock the scientific curiosity and creativity in our primary-school children and fire their enthusiasm and imagination for scientific fields. Our schoolchildren must have ambition if they are to hold down skilled STEM-sector jobs. I welcome the STEM events at the King's Hall and other venues, which placed before some 3,500 primary-school children creative scientific approaches that helped to stimulate an interest in science, including, for example, a robotic sumo wrestler.

We need delivery on the commitments that have been made to the STEM programme.

**Dr Farry:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Easton:** No, I will not. Effective career advice helps, as does linking skills and innovation to the wider economy. Better teacher supply and integration helps, as do more productive links between employers and schools. Facilitating the triumvirate of schools, further education and industry to more effectively communicate also significantly helps.

Getting it right with STEM subjects is critical for the following six key reasons: it reduces economic inactivity; grows our competitiveness; attracts investment; contributes to adult upskilling; improves adult education; and, most critically of all, provides employment. We have noted the decline in the uptake of STEM subjects and, for the sake of the economy, we must now note the report from the Minister for Employment and Learning on how we can achieve a 25% increase in students studying such subjects. Failure in that area is not an option. I commend the motion to the House.

**Mr McClarty:** I thank the Members who tabled the motion. Increasing the number of students who study STEM subjects at university and at postgraduate level is integral to the development of our economy, the collective wealth of our society, and our ability to make the best possible recovery from the current recession.

Although the Minister for Employment and Learning has a responsibility for the development of STEM subjects in higher education — that I know he

takes very seriously — the overall responsibility for their uptake and development lies with two other Departments. The Department of Education and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment also have crucial roles to play.

It stands to reason that, for people to study STEM subjects in higher education, they have also to take those subjects and enjoy them in secondary education. It also stands to reason that, if we are to make use of STEM subjects in the economy, there must be continued co-operation between business and Government.

The motion, rather than taking the broad and co-ordinated approach to STEM subjects that is required, has, I am afraid, fallen prey to some party politicking. The Members who tabled the motion fail to acknowledge the role of their own Minister of Education.

The world economy has changed substantially over the past 30 years. Western countries have significantly moved away from heavy industry and have been leading the way in technology, design, software development and financial services — what is now called the knowledge-based economy. However, with that change in emphasis there has been a decline in the number of young people who study science, technology, engineering and maths. That worrying trend, if unchecked, could see the competitive advantage that our education system affords us in those fields being transferred to developing countries, which are producing hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of graduates in STEM subjects every year. We are in danger of being left with economies that are heavily reliant on consumption and debt, which, as we all know, is a completely unsustainable position.

I welcome the independent review into developing STEM subjects that was jointly commissioned by the Department for Employment and Learning and the Department of Education. I understand that the report is currently with the Minister, and I look forward to analysing the policies that develop from it. I sincerely hope that the report adequately addresses the issue of encouraging young people to engage with STEM subjects at an early age.

I fear that the modern education system has deprived many young people of the excitement and potential possibilities of science and engineering subjects. It appears that young people are less inspired by STEM subjects than ever before and are now often persuaded to study subjects that can appear easier and guarantee better marks at GCSE and A level. That problem must be addressed. Similarly, there is a need to adequately examine how we can encourage more children from socially deprived backgrounds to gain access to higher education, particularly in STEM subjects. As was

discussed last week, plans to tackle educational underachievement are as crucial as that examination.

4.15 pm

There is also the issue of retaining as many young undergraduates as possible in Northern Ireland. Although the trend is not as prominent as it was in previous decades, thousands of our young people are still travelling to GB and to the Republic of Ireland to study and work. Although most contribute to the greater economy, their talents are often lost to Northern Ireland.

If we are to learn anything from the recent mistakes that precipitated the current economic crisis, it is that government and the private sector must be in continual and productive conversation with each other. If Northern Ireland is to grow its private sector adequately, strategies must improve and increase. The adequate development of STEM subjects throughout the education system and the ability to feed them into and develop new areas in our economy will be crucial to our future economic and social success.

I believe that the Minister for Employment and Learning is engaged fully in that process. I also believe that he, in conjunction with his colleagues, will deliver the necessary framework for that development to take place. I hope that all Departments that are involved have the capability to deliver the co-ordinated drive to carry out that plan. I support the motion.

**Mr D Bradley:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Tá an-áthas orm páirt a ghlacadh sa díospóireacht thábhachtach seo.

I am happy to participate in this debate, and I thank the Members who secured it.

It is a fact of life that our economic development depends very much on the STEM subjects. If we want to attract foreign direct investment, we must have a workforce that can offer a good supply of STEM graduates. If we want to develop a stronger base of SMEs here, we need people who are qualified in and able to apply STEM subjects in practical business settings.

Recently, we heard news of a company that will bring 150 new jobs to the Sandy Row area of Belfast. The company spokesperson, when explaining the reason that it moved to Northern Ireland, said that the availability of a good supply of experienced software engineers was a major determining factor. That illustrates, in a practical setting, the importance of the STEM subjects.

I could rehearse the many disadvantages in Northern Ireland that we have in economic development. However, it is much more productive to concentrate on the positive. As Mr McClarty said, the successful economies of the future will not depend solely on location, national

resources or infrastructure — those factors will always have a bearing — but will be knowledge based. That means that economic development will be driven largely by brain power that is focused in the most productive economic directions. In the context of this debate, that means that there should be a focus on science, technology, including information and communications technology, engineering and mathematics.

At present, the number of pupils in Northern Ireland taking STEM subjects at A level has fallen drastically by 35%. We must address that situation urgently if we are to gain the competitive edge that we need for economic survival.

What do we do? Obviously, we must encourage and direct more people to the STEM subjects. At the moment, our schools seem to be obsessed with producing more and more professionals for service industries. We must highlight to young people the practical business and economic applications of the STEM subjects, not only by providing the relevant information in an attractive, modern format but by placing greater emphasis on a more applied approach to teaching and learning and on the application of knowledge through the challenge of problem solving in simulated real-life situations, which will help to stimulate the interest of young people in those subjects. We must get the message across that the STEM subjects mean economic development, that economic development means work, and that work means prosperity.

Often, school principals and senior management teams are the gatekeepers who can admit or exclude information and messages to schools. We need to ensure that we get the message across to those people, and that they, in turn, cascade that message down through staff to pupils.

As a major stimulus, some organisations have advocated a champion for STEM subjects. I agree that that would be helpful, but we need a series of actions, working in tandem, to ensure that we have a coherent strategy.

Greater engagement between local companies and schools is another important stimulus that should be developed further. The professional development of STEM teachers in business skills is also useful. We need effective programmes and the reskilling and upskilling of our workforce, including conversion incentives. Other useful ideas include payroll shelter, greater investment in the Success through Skills strategy and a national internship scheme.

Emphasis on STEM subjects cannot stop at ages 16 or 18. We must continue to raise the profile of those subjects in further and higher education. The current research assessment process, under which the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFC) rewards pure



research over academic enterprise, does not encourage product process innovation, which can lead to business and economic development.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

**Mr D Bradley:** We need the right balance in favour of academic enterprise, so that our best researchers and innovators in the STEM areas are retained and are active in contributing to our economy.

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

**Mr D Bradley:** Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

**Ms Long:** I thank the Members for bringing the motion to the House. In his introduction, Paul Butler said that there was a perception that people who study STEM subjects are nerds or geeks. I am interested in the debate because I studied STEM subjects and enjoyed them very much. For many years, I was an engineer by day and a politician by night, which could be the strapline for a very boring comic-book superhero. Nevertheless, how people perceive the studying of science and technology subjects is a serious issue.

I am very passionate about the studying of STEM subjects because I believe that it opens doors for young people to really challenging, stimulating and interesting careers. It also equips them with skills that can be transferred into many other areas of learning. That is incredibly important.

Although I agree with the first part of the motion, which expresses concern about the decline in enrolment and highlights the targets in the Programme for Government, the call at the end of the motion puts all the emphasis on the Minister for Employment and Learning alone to bring forward proposals and ignores the responsibility of the Minister of Education in that regard entirely. People's perceptions and their ability to study at the second level will be dictated largely by expectations born out of their primary and secondary education. People are very unlikely to be studying STEM subjects at graduate and post-graduate level if they are not interested and engaged by them when they are at school; and we have to be conscious of that. If people have not studied STEM subjects at GCSE and A level, it is unlikely that they will be equipped to look at them as a potential degree course.

By the age of 13, most people have already decided what degree of emphasis they are going to give science, technology, engineering and maths when it comes to further study. Many people take STEM subjects at that level purely to fulfil the criteria for the curriculum: they must study certain subjects, but not because of any particular passion for them. We have to recognise that, and we have to look at how those subjects are taught.

I am not absolving the Minister for Employment and Learning of any responsibility, but I think that the Minister of Education and her Department have to accept that they are responsible for the first 14 years of primary education and for early-years education. That cannot be ignored.

Study after study has found that perceptions and stereotypes are formed very early in life: those may be gender stereotypes, or there may be ideas about career restrictions or options available. There may be a perception about the difficulty of the subjects, that it is hard to achieve top grades in A-levels if one picks science subjects, or, at least, that it is harder to do so than if one were to pick other subjects. There is also the notion that you are a geek or a nerd if you want to study those subjects. I did not get drawn into the debate about the differences between geeks and nerds: that would only confirm people's suspicions of me.

We need to look at how we engage young people with those subjects when they first come across them in the classroom. That needs to be addressed through positive role models and good careers advice. Experiences in the classroom are also incredibly important, particularly experiences beyond the classroom in fieldwork and practical assessment. That will often engage young people who would otherwise find those subjects very dry if engaged solely in classroom learning. There are huge opportunities, because of that practical element, to engage young people who do not respond to those subjects in a classroom setting.

In the current economic climate, we have to recognise that a lot of our focus will be on looking for jobs in research and development. There must be a degree of technical competence if we are to have the right skills balance to attract such jobs. We have gone through the pattern of attracting jobs that can then be transferred to lower-wage economies, and we have lost out as a result. If we target high-end R&D-based jobs, they are much more likely to remain here in the long term.

STEM subjects are not only for those who want to become scientists or engineers when they graduate; they also provide academic rigour and transferable skills such as logic, numeracy, management skills and experience in problem solving and team working, all of which are crucial in a range of environments. People are not closing down their options if they choose to study for a scientific career; they are opening up a huge number of careers for themselves down the line that might be in fields that they did not expect, such as politics.

**Mr Hilditch:** I, too, welcome the opportunity to highlight this matter in the House and to support the motion. I thank the Minister for Employment and Learning for his participation. As Mr McClarty and Mrs Long said, there are others in that supply chain.



If we are to build our economy, we must build it on information technology and engineering. That is why we must address the decline in the number of students who study STEM subjects and the gap that exists between available skills and the total volume of required skills. At Queen's University in 2000, there was an all-time peak of 120 students studying electrical, electronic and software engineering. In 2008, there were only 36 students on those courses. Other research and statistics project a deep and worrying developing situation.

Employers have good reason to be concerned that there will not be sufficient skills to provide the next generation of scientists and engineers. Our reputation in Northern Ireland for a world-class workforce at the top of the league is in danger of being characterised by becoming mid-table dwellers.

There is an annual requirement in the STEM sector for about 1,350 recruits across all occupational areas just to replace the people who will retire in the next six years. In 2007, 2,500 people were recruited into the entire engineering industry alone, within which there were 535 hard-to-fill vacancies. That is estimated to have cost our economy £21 million in gross value added.

We are trying to encourage investment, and we need to start concentrating on the availability of the workforce that will be required if foreign companies set up here and the need for a training system that will continue to deliver the number of skilled people that are needed for that sector. I therefore urge the Minister and his Department to work with the Committee for Employment and Learning, the Executive and other Ministers who are not here today to build relationships with the universities and colleges, to introduce incentives for students to study the STEM subjects, and to increase the number of apprenticeship opportunities in that sector.

It is imperative that the Minister bring forward robust proposals to ensure delivery in line with commitments in the Programme for Government and to safeguard a future workforce that is fit for purpose. I support the motion.

**Ms S Ramsey:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I am glad that we have the support of the Assembly for the motion, including, in the words of Naomi Long, the geeks and the nerds. It is useful that, in debates such as this, we have the participation of Members who are interested in science subjects. Therefore, I would not allow anyone to be put down by saying that they are geeks or nerds. Geeks and nerds are needed in this day and age.

4.30 pm

One of the main reasons for our proposing this motion was a presentation that the Committee for Employment and Learning received from the

Institution of Engineering and Technology. I accept the point that Naomi Long and others made about other Ministers having a role in the issue, and I will come to that later. However, we spearheaded it solely towards the Minister for Employment and Learning because DEL and its Minister made a commitment in the Programme for Government that he can deliver on, and we need to outline that today.

I am not for one minute saying that the Departments of Education or Enterprise, Trade and Investment, or, indeed, other Departments do not have a role. They have a valid role to play, but, when the Committee heard that presentation, we realised that we needed to take forward a review with STEM stakeholders. Therefore, we organised an event in the Long Gallery and got the buy-in and support of the Education Committee and the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee. It is the first time that three Committees have come together to consider one issue, and the Committees were all quite active in promoting the STEM issue at that event.

There is consensus among the members of the three Committees on how we take the issue forward and how we collectively go to the Department of Education and its Minister, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and its Minister, and the Department for Employment and Learning and its Minister. Therefore, there is no reason for anyone to suggest that we are focusing on DEL or its Minister. We are quite mature about the fact that other Departments have a role to play in the matter.

As I said earlier, there have been discussions in previous debates and even in private Members' questions when Members have said that there is an issue about the Executive looking again at the Programme for Government. We need Ministers to come to the Assembly and outline to us how they propose to deliver their commitments in the economic downturn, because that commitment was given a year ago. Therefore, the delivery mechanisms or the objectives of how to deliver are there. Ministers need to come and outline to us how they will do that, and then we can work together.

One of the public service agreements in the Programme for Government relates to skills for prosperity, and its aim is to:

"Ensure our people have the right skills to deliver economic prosperity now and in the future and increase skills and career choices in STEM subjects".

Again, that goes back to the point that we need to get people involved in science, technology, engineering and mathematics at a younger age, before they are labelled as geeks. We need to make those subjects sexy in primary schools, using language that primary-school kids can understand.

I and other members of the Employment and Learning Committee have just returned from a study visit to America, and the collective, joined-up approach from many of the Departments in the United States struck me. We went to Boston, North Carolina and Washington, and, from the outset, there was a collective approach to STEM subjects. When I saw that joined-up approach, it made me realise that we can talk about what the Minister for Employment and Learning can do when kids get to the age of 16, but we need to talk about what to do before they get to that age. We also need to involve DETI, because there is no point in retraining people if there are no future prospects for them. Those are the reasons why we proposed the motion.

We have excellent schools and colleges, we have investment, and we have world-class universities. We need to bring them together to achieve the objective that was set out in the Programme for Government. I support the motion.

**Mr Irwin:** I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate. As a member of the Committee for Employment and Learning, I am concerned that the numbers enrolling in STEM subjects are declining. It has often been said that a good economy is based on a strong skills base in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Over many years, Northern Ireland has produced many top graduates from STEM subject areas.

In a smaller country such as Northern Ireland, generating a good number of quality engineers is vital to the future of manufacturing and exporting. Therefore, it is worrying that the evidence points to a lack of uptake of those subjects. The problem is compounded by the fact that we are now in the grip of a worldwide recession. In the past few weeks, there has been news of unfortunate job losses on mainland Britain and in Northern Ireland. It is clear that the numbers of people enrolling in STEM subjects will continue to decline in a downward spiral as jobs in those sectors become more difficult to find. The debate today is complex. Although the main thrust of the motion is to urge the Minister to bring forward proposals for a 25% increase in the number of students enrolling in STEM subjects, we cannot ignore the current economic climate.

The review is yet to be published, and I will be interested to read its recommendations on increasing enrolments in STEM subjects. However, given the economic situation, any proposals must be tailored to encourage innovation and ensure that Northern Ireland has the skills and ideas to punch above its weight in a global market.

To date, Northern Ireland has been lauded for its skills base in ICT and engineering. It is that strong STEM skills base that has allowed multinational companies to locate and thrive here. However, we cannot

afford for the recent drop in enrolments to continue, or those same companies will find it increasingly difficult to source new staff and will, ultimately, move elsewhere.

I note that the Minister has raised the possibility of bursaries for students enrolling in STEM subjects. Indeed, the motion calls for students from disadvantaged backgrounds to have increased access to STEM subjects, and there is no doubt that fees are a significant stumbling block in sustaining a three- or four-year university degree.

Although the motion relates solely to the Department for Employment and Learning, there is also room for improvement at the Department of Education. Schools play a vital part in shaping the future for STEM students and in helping them to achieve their qualifying grades for university. The aim of the recent STEM Experience event was to introduce younger pupils to science and technology, and that is a welcome initiative, but more must be done to encourage younger pupils to consider STEM-based further and higher education.

Many factors have a bearing on the enrolment figures for STEM subjects. Much work is required to encourage our children to focus on those subjects and our students to pursue the subjects at university. We must also encourage our economy so that it can sustain our graduates with employment opportunities in industries in which their skills and ideas can be harnessed.

I very much doubt that a review will, in itself, provide the solution to the dilemma. However, it is imperative that it is forthcoming and that the Minister is prepared to accept its conclusions and act in the best interests of students.

**Rev Dr Robert Coulter:** I join other Members in thanking Mr Butler and his colleagues for tabling this important motion.

Across the western world — including the United States, Scandinavia and the United Kingdom — and in Japan, there is a developing and worrying trend of declining enrolment in STEM subjects. Indeed, in the past decade alone, the number of PhD candidates researching science subjects has fallen from 65% to 57%. Although the number of PhD candidates has risen overall, the number taking science subjects has failed to grow at anywhere near the same rate. That is surely a worrying trend.

I am aware that the Minister is currently considering the STEM review, which the Department for Employment and Learning commissioned in conjunction with the Department of Education. I look forward to seeing that report in the near future, after it has been considered, and I hope that it will provide some of the answers to our questions.

As I said, the report was commissioned jointly by the two Departments. That interdepartmental co-operation seems to be a lost theme of the overall STEM debate. The decline in graduates is a symptom of another problem, which has its roots in the school setting. As one who has spent many years working in further and higher education, trying to rectify some of the laxness in the minds of students entering that level of education and interest them in engineering and science, I am fully convinced that the real problem to be tackled is not at the top but at the bottom end, where the students start — in primary school and upwards.

It must be fully accepted that a decline in graduates leads eventually to a shortage of schoolteachers in STEM subjects. However, at this stage, the focus should surely be on the decline in interest at school level. If children and young people are not taking STEM subjects from Key Stage 3 to GCSE and A level, we can hardly expect them to take them to degree and post-graduate level.

We must focus efforts on identifying the reasons for the decline of STEM subjects in schools and take steps to rectify that problem. I feel that, if we succeed in that, the problem in our universities will fix itself. We cannot expect our universities and the Minister responsible for them to tackle a problem that has germinated long before children and young adults get to that stage of the system. The root of the problem needs attention before we can tackle any residual problems in the take-up of university places. That root exists at and even before GCSE and A-level choices.

Therefore, I look forward to hearing what the Education Minister plans to action from the joint report. In respect of what is being done now, Queen's University, as has been stated, deserves tremendous credit for its scholarship, which provides a £1,000 bursary for the top students entering STEM courses. Very often, higher education in professions that are associated with STEM subjects requires much more than a three-year undergraduate course, and any bursary that attracts the best students to those vital courses and jobs is to be welcomed.

That Queen's filled only one-third of its electrical engineering places in 2007 is evidence of the problem that we face. The grant is evidence of Queen's taking a positive initiative to do something about it. Queen's University's pioneering of this type of incentive in the UK is further proof of the top-quality institutions that we have in Belfast. I hope that Queen's is considering other steps that it can take to improve the situation and that it will roll out its bursary a little more widely, budgetary considerations notwithstanding. I welcome the steps taken so far by the Minister and by Northern Ireland universities; however, I reiterate my call for the Department of Education to take its place at the head of the push for STEM subjects.

**Dr McDonnell:** I also thank the Members who tabled the motion. We are all indebted to them and I am delighted to see that there appears to be total consensus around the Chamber.

We all know that we are in very challenging economic times in which there is a great need to take advantage of every opportunity that arises to rebuild our economy. Foundations for a future high-wage, high-value-added economy must be laid today. If we are to meet the demands and requirements of new technologies and new high-value-added industries, we must plan well in advance.

The birth of the Celtic tiger had a lot, if not everything, to do with STEM subjects, because the Irish Republic invested substantial amounts of money in those subjects and in technology colleges. The Celtic tiger's birth was well-planned and did not come about by accident. I would like to see Celtic tiger II being born in the North and producing that sort of economy there. The fact that the Celtic tiger is hibernating does not preclude us from hoping for another round. If we make the appropriate plans, that hope will be well founded.

4.45 pm

If we are to be successful in attracting foreign direct investment and if we are to grow and sustain indigenous firms, we must be able to compete on a global stage and invest in the STEM subjects; their importance to the economy cannot be overstated. Unfortunately, however, there is a steady year-on-year decline in the number of students who study STEM subjects and successfully acquire qualifications in science, technology, engineering or maths at further- and higher-education levels. Others have brought those numbers to the attention of the House, so I will not repeat them.

I know that a review is taking place. I urge the Minister to bring forward recommendations for urgent implementation. It worries me that the Executive made a commitment in the Programme for Government to increase the number of students — especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds — at graduate and post-graduate level in STEM subjects by 25% by 2015. By my calculations, that requires an additional 1,623 students to enrol in STEM subjects each year for the next seven years. That is a tall order.

There are initiatives that may help to achieve that target. It is the view of the SDLP that those initiatives should start now in primary schools right across Northern Ireland. There is no point in waiting. Schools should take every step to promote the STEM subjects and interest in them, and they should create an interest in STEM subjects in a fun and innovative way for primary-school kids in their curriculum and their extra-curricular activities. They should open the eyes of children and young people to the cutting-edge,



high-value-added, highly paid opportunities in our economy if they take that educational path. That effort could be supported by local companies via school site visits, job fairs that showcase careers and mentoring programmes involving companies and interested pupils.

Last week, I attended an award ceremony for the engineering education scheme in Northern Ireland at the Whitla Hall at Queen's. I was very impressed by the projects that were presented by sixth-form students from across Northern Ireland. They developed innovative solutions to industrial problems in collaboration with neighbouring engineering companies from their towns or villages. It was a very worthwhile initiative. I saw, as could anyone, how much the students enjoyed working together in a school atmosphere with local companies in real-life situations.

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

**Dr McDonnell:** Greater steps must be taken to increase the number of STEM graduates. I support the motion, and I urge the Minister to do everything in his power to ensure that that comes about.

**Mr Poots:** This is one of the more important subjects to come before the Assembly. It will probably not receive much coverage because it is not particularly controversial, but that does not diminish its importance.

Over the past weeks and months, there have been considerable job losses in Northern Ireland, particularly in the manufacturing industry. My outlook is not total doom and gloom, and I anticipate that some of those jobs will come back to those industries. Bombardier, for example, has a history of having to move with the times; it has made large-scale layoffs before and has subsequently re-employed. I hope that other organisations, such as FG Wilson, will re-employ as markets recover. However, it is more than likely that some jobs that were lost will not be replaced. I do not believe that the Visteon jobs, for example, will be replaced in the motor industry, and the textile jobs that have been lost over the years will not be replaced. We cannot compete with many of the Far East or north African countries as they progress in that type of economy. If we are to compete and create quality jobs for our people, it will be through STEM subjects.

Giving people the opportunity to engage in tradable services that are, largely, knowledge-based is critical to Northern Ireland's future. It is critical not just for high earners, who leave university and take up good jobs but for lower earners who work in the service industries, in cafes, restaurants, stables, sports clubs and shops. Those people also need a strong, vibrant well-paying economy so that the service sector can exist and prosper. Therefore, it is critical that STEM subjects are developed in our universities and that young people are encouraged to be interested in those subjects.

We must reach out and bring people to Northern Ireland for third-level education rather than export so many of our young people. That is also critical because the more graduates we have in Northern Ireland, the greater prospect there will be of attracting firms here to make use of those graduates. Those firms will be enhanced by being in Northern Ireland, because there will be a stream of quality graduates to fill their vacancies.

We must also become more involved in developing research programmes in association with the universities. Although success stories have come out of the universities, that area must be developed further. We must look at how to bring Northern Ireland universities to the cutting edge of research and development for large companies. That, as a consequence, will enable us to keep more graduates in Northern Ireland.

Sue Ramsey, Rev Coulter, and my colleague William Irwin, touched on the core importance of education. Although the Minister for Employment and Learning will be responding to the debate in this instance, if the young people who actually sit the science and maths GCSEs and A levels do not have the required qualities, it will be pointless for universities to create spaces for them. Therefore, it is important that more young people are encouraged to take STEM subjects, which will lead them on to doing courses involving STEM subjects at university. Much of the debate in Northern Ireland is detrimental to that aim, and the Minister of Education's wish to have a lot of comprehensive schools and to do away with schools that achieve academic excellence will do nothing to contribute to producing more young people with the necessary qualities. Moreover, the Education Minister's actions will not help children from a working-class background to achieve those goals, because a consequence of her actions will be that more parents will be paying for young people to take up places in the best schools. Once again, working-class kids will not have those opportunities.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The Member should bring his remarks to a close.

**Mr Poots:** There is a great burden of responsibility on the Education Minister to assist the Minister for Employment and Learning in this matter.

**Mr Attwood:** I could not dissent from a word that has been said this afternoon. However, I am wondering how we can take a motion from the Assembly and, for the want of a better word, "operationalise" it in the life and economy of the North. It is on that theme that I shall talk.

I do not know what shape the Northern Ireland economy should take in the next 20 or 30 years. However, people who have been speaking to the SDLP in recent days have been saying that the investment



and education priorities for positioning ourselves in the global market must involve bioscience, information technology and engineering. Although that may be self-evident, we must determine, at Government and university level, the hard shape that those broad, warm aspirations will take, and we have not yet done that.

If those are the three priorities — I do not know whether they are — how will they shape up under the Government and universities' partnership over the next 20 or 30 years? The Minister hinted at some of this during Question Time, but, if economic interventions are to be made in the current downturn, they will have to be measured against instances of companies that have a STEM requirement and background and for which training or weighed subsidies may be required, if that is what transpires over the next number of weeks. If we are to ensure that people who are in work can stay in work, we must protect the skills base that is a product of a STEM culture. I want the Minister to give us not only a time frame in which any intervention may come from him and the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment but an indication of the scale of that intervention. Moreover, I want the Minister to indicate what aspects of our economic base, including those that rely on STEM skills and STEM background, might be the priority areas for protection in the event of the Assembly and Executive endorsing a programme of measures.

Alex Easton correctly recognised that one of the better developments over the past couple of years to try to ground our education and economic base in STEM subjects was the roll-out of the 300 PhDs that the Budget funded. However, as Alex Easton and every other Member knows, that funding package is for the North and the South to share. Alasdair McDonnell touched on the broader lesson to be learned, which is that unmet collaborative opportunities exist in higher and further education sectors on this island.

I have previously asked the Minister whether any conversations are taking place with Dublin yet about how we might maximise North/South opportunities in further and higher education and in community colleges. That remains a valid question, but it will also remain a valid strategy over the next 10, 20 and 30 years. Whatever one may say about the Celtic tiger in its current phase, well-regarded international economists believe that the South's essentials are right, because, for over 30 years, it invested in R&D in areas where the skills base would add value to its economy. When we are on the far side of the recession — with respect to the South, it may be on the very far side of it — those essentials will still be right. We can still learn from the South, and enormous opportunities exist to work with it in future.

We need to have a conversation about whether research moneys that come from the Government

should go into the higher-education sector and not into the areas that we think will produce added value and be the economic drivers. It is best that we start that conversation now. Would it be better to invest Government money in pure research or in liberal arts research rather than target it at STEM areas or at PhDs, which would give the people of the North an economic and educational uplift?

**The Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey):** I welcome the opportunity to speak to the motion. I thank the Members who contributed to the debate, and I will address as many points as I can. I am aware that the subject has attracted great interest in the Chamber. February's joint discussion forum, comprising the Committee for Education, the Committee for Employment and Learning, and the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, demonstrated that interest practically. It is good to have the commitment to the issue that Members have shown to date, and I trust that my Department's policy — together with that of the Department of Education and of others that have an interest in the issue — will benefit from their contributions.

The past decade has seen tremendous scientific and engineering progress. From the advances in hybrid-fuel technology to the iPhone and all the features that we now expect from mobile communications, the application of knowledge in the STEM field benefits us all.

Northern Ireland has a proud heritage of world-leading engineering firms and scientific pioneers. From Henry Ferguson and his tractor to Frank Pantridge, the inventor of the portable defibrillator, we can point to those who showed what can be achieved on our own doorstep and exported around the world.

*5.00 pm*

Only last week, Intune Networks, which is a Dublin-based software company, announced its decision to expand its operations in Belfast to almost double its current size. When asked the reason that it chose Belfast, its chief executive made it clear that the key reason was the level of the talent pool of communication specialists that we can offer. However, even with such success stories, it is clear that there is further potential to boost our productivity.

With that in mind, the recently published MATRIX report focused on the economic growth and wealth creation that will be brought about by the increased commercial exploitation of Northern Ireland's science and technology capabilities.

In addition to the work that was taken forward to gain a better understanding of Northern Ireland's strengths and weaknesses in science and technology, MATRIX also conducted a market-foresight initiative known as the Horizon programme. That programme

identified opportunities in five key technology business areas, and it suggested how Northern Ireland could gain a strategic market advantage to compete internationally in those areas. Yet, as the world continues to look towards technology to gain a competitive advantage, it seems that, like people in many other developed countries, more and more of our young people are choosing actively to not study STEM subjects at school, college or university.

The recent report entitled 'Forecasting Future Skill Needs in NI' by Oxford Economics in association with FGS Consulting, supports that view. It also notes that although Northern Ireland is trailing behind the UK average in the percentage of people who have degrees in STEM subjects and who are employed, there is an increasing demand for those graduates.

Dropout levels in STEM subjects are also particularly high. That is the case primarily during the first year of study; for example, one of the highest dropout levels, at 18%, is in computer science. The Department has been working with Queen's University and the University of Ulster to address that problem. A range of measures, both academic and pastoral, has been introduced. Examples of those measures include: increased numbers of tutorials; greater emphasis on personal tutorials for students in their first year; and closer monitoring of attendance. Pre-entry initiatives, such as masterclasses and targeted support, have also been set up.

The point when a young person loses interest in science often occurs much earlier, as a number of Members from all sides of the House mentioned. In many cases, young people have made choices at school that have limited their options in those fields. Therefore, in order to maintain our reputation for excellence and economic competitiveness, it is important that we nurture a passion for those subjects in our young people when they are still at school. A number of Members raised the obvious point that choices are made at 13 years of age, thereby limiting to a large extent what is possible later.

Unlike some other subjects, the application of knowledge in STEM areas requires a solid foundation of underpinning knowledge. The linear nature of mathematics and other sciences requires the patient layering of concepts and theories in the mind. The critical juncture for our STEM-based economy is not, therefore, at the university application stage; it is at the GSCE subject-selection stage, as some Members mentioned.

The teaching of science and mathematics can be ripe, with practical, real-life examples of what can capture and hold the interest of our young people. However, the STEM review identified how the repetition of concepts that were studied previously at Key Stage 2

and Key Stage 3 leads to a reduction in student enjoyment of the subjects. There may be scope to improve the already strong curriculum in that regard.

One slight spark of hope can be seen in a diagram in the STEM report, which I received only recently. That diagram covers the period 2001-08 and shows that in 2007-08, there appears to have been a slight increase in the number of people in Northern Ireland who applied to study STEM subjects at GCSE. Therefore, that may be a slight indication that something is stirring, although it is too early to be definitive.

It is for that reason that I asked Richard Noble OBE to be the guest speaker at this year's skills conference in May. That conference will focus on STEM subjects and will bring together leading policy-makers, educationalists, training providers and industry representatives. Richard is the entrepreneur who oversaw the Thrust SSC project that holds the world land-speed record. Not content with that, he has set up a new project called Bloodhound, which will aim to break the existing record, and, together with a strong education programme, will inspire the next generation of young scientists and engineers and help to address the potential shortfall of skilled young people in that area in the UK.

Our expectations for a successful economy are predicated on the exploitation of STEM knowledge at all levels, from apprenticeships to PhDs. Addressing that shortfall was the reason that my Department, in conjunction with the Department of Education, commissioned the independent review of STEM policy in 2007. The steering group, comprising representatives from business, Government and academia, led by Dr Hugh Cormican, was asked to examine the issues relating to the uptake of STEM subjects and to make recommendations to ensure the future success of STEM education in Northern Ireland. Although I had initially hoped to receive the report earlier, I am pleased to say that Minister Ruane and I received the final report and recommendations on Good Friday, and they are being studied as I speak.

I assure the Committee and Members that my Department will respond promptly to the issues that arise from the STEM review and to the recommendations that relate to my Department as part of the revised 'Success through Skills: The Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland'. I intend to provide a progress update on that at the aforementioned skills conference in May at W5.

It is worth noting in the interim that the report makes several recommendations for which responsibility lies across a number of Departments and bodies. We are all aware that young people's decisions on their future careers are greatly influenced by their choice of subjects at GCSE. Similarly, the general attractiveness

of an industry and the terms and conditions on offer shape those choices. Clearly, business should take a lead. We must remember that what businesses pay people to do jobs in that area has a direct link with the number of people who go down that route.

Businesses will have to play a key role in ensuring that young people make the choice to study STEM subjects. We have seen how that can be done through the implementation of the information and communication technology (ICT) action plan. Better engagement between companies and schools can help to make that happen.

The future skills action group for ICT worked with a wide range of stakeholders to develop a proactive and comprehensive action plan to address the immediate skills needs of the sector. Implementation of that plan has seen a high profile advertising campaign named "Bring IT On"; interactive workshops that link industry with schools, delivered by Momentum, the ICT trade federation; and support for a range of projects initiated by the sector skills council for IT and telecoms — e-skills UK. Work also includes better short- and long-term research about the state of play of the industry and the skills that employees will need to help the sector to reach an even higher level of productivity.

Although I have just received the report, work has been continuing. Through the critical sectors initiative, my Department has recently commissioned a feasibility study into the possibility of providing STEM bursaries or scholarships to encourage students to study STEM courses in Northern Ireland's higher and further education institutions. That research will make recommendations on the types of financial assistance that should be offered, the length of time for which it should be supplied, and which subjects will be eligible for funding. It will also investigate the impact that those bursaries may have on other subject areas. The findings of that study will be available this summer.

It is important to note that Queen's University already offers a £1,000 bursary, to which reference has already been made. A scholarship of £500, in addition to the £1,000 bursary, is paid to all students who achieve three A grades at A level, and a scholarship of £1,000 is paid to all students who achieve four A grades at A level in physics and mathematics. Other organisations also offer their own bursaries. For example, the Institute of Physics in Ireland offers five grants of £1,000 a year to the top-achieving students in that subject.

My Department is also funding an additional 300 PhD places at our universities, to which reference has been made. Those places are confined to areas of economic relevance, including STEM-related subjects, and that will significantly increase high-level skills in those important areas.

I shall refer to one or two points that were raised by colleagues during the debate. A number of Members, including Mr Butler, raised the issue of the decline in STEM subject uptake. I am pleased to say that although the STEM review indicates that there may be a slight turning of the tide, it is, quite frankly, too early to say.

Mr Hilditch referred to enrolment numbers for electrical engineering courses at Queen's University. Another, perhaps slightly more positive, indicator is that, for 2009-2010, enrolments have increased by 12% in software engineering, which is a subject area that is critical to all the issues that we have discussed.

As a number of Members said, the target is challenging. I will not throw in the towel before we have had a good go at it or before we have discussed and implemented the recommendations of the STEM report. A range of measures must be taken over the next few years to resolve the problems.

Naomi Long made a point about the perception of STEM subjects, and that goes to the core of the matter. Companies must get out and engage early with schools, because people need to know what is going on. The image of the nutty professor in a white coat is not the current image; it is the sort of image that is portrayed on television. All the soap operas portray slick lawyers, and that is an attractive image; few of them concentrate on people who work in engineering or science, unless they are trying to blow something up. Society as a whole needs to examine the matter carefully, and promotion of STEM subjects must be done much earlier.

Alex Attwood mentioned a number of collaborative measures with the Republic. There was, and is, collaboration. The Member will be aware of the announcements about research projects that were made before and after Christmas. Funding permitting, I want to extend those projects. I assure him that no opportunity has been missed in that collaborative area, and the universities, through Science Foundation Ireland, are working well together at present. All the projects that we announced involve three, four and, in some cases, five universities. Much is happening in that area, and there is scope for further development if that is possible in the current climate.

I know the point that Alasdair McDonnell made about the Celtic tiger economy being born in the institutes of technology, and so on. There is no doubt that, at the very time when those institutes were opening in the South, we were closing down our colleges. We were going completely in the opposite direction, but a lesson has been learned.

Rev Robert Coulter mentioned the decline in STEM subjects across the developed world and the fact that it is not confined to this region. Millions of engineering graduates are coming out of universities in China and



India every year. The future capacity for engineering in the world will shift to those countries, and we will be left behind if we are not careful.

Many Members contributed to the debate, and I am sorry that I cannot list everybody's contribution. It is clearly a cross-departmental issue. It is primarily my Department and the Department of Education that are involved in, and focused on, the issue, because action must start in schools, even in primary schools. We must get right down to that level. The opportunities and the will exist. We received the STEM report only in the past couple of weeks; we will try to turn it around and respond positively as quickly as possible, and we will publish the STEM report when it is possible to do so. I thank Members for their contributions to the debate. We are focused on delivery and on the achievement of the targets.

**Mrs McGill:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank all Members who contributed to the debate, and I thank the Minister for being present for its entirety.

Having listened to Members' contributions, I wish to make some comments of my own. The Minister commented on individual contributions, and I wish to do the same and to examine how those contributions fit the motion. Perhaps I am beginning my speech with a negative point, but few Members focused on students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Members rightly talked at length about the need to increase the number of students taking up STEM subjects, whether at further education, higher education or PhD level. However, we may have missed an opportunity to focus on people from disadvantaged backgrounds; I will look at the Hansard report, but I think that only one or two Members mentioned them. I do not know what is in the review, but a key point of the motion was to focus on people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

5.15 pm

A couple of Members made the point that Caitríona Ruane, the Minister of Education, had been left out of the motion; however, the three people who tabled the motion, my party colleagues Sue Ramsey and Paul Butler and I, are all members of the Committee for Employment and Learning. Sue Ramsey explained why the Minister of Education is not mentioned in the motion, but it has nothing to do with leaving her, or the Department of Education, out. The Minister for Employment and Learning did not mention the careers strategy, but it refers to a joined-up approach to STEM subjects. It may have been an oversight not to mention the Minister of Education in the motion, but it was certainly not a case of leaving her out.

Paul Butler spoke in detail about STEM subjects when moving the motion; like other Members, he

talked about the decline in the number of students enrolling in STEM subjects and said that there is a need to develop links. I totally agree; moreover, the process needs to begin in primary school. I am a member of the Western Education and Library Board, and, last year, 18 schools took part in an event that was facilitated by Sentinus. I declare an interest in that the competition was won by Donemana Primary School, which is in my council area. I commend Donemana Primary School on that achievement.

Work is being done on the issue. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment carried out an inspection of a small cohort of three schools that are involved with Sentinus. The inspection report highlighted the value of working with children to focus them on the available opportunities. The competition that was won by Donemana Primary School concerned a slow marble run. The schools were given a certain amount of materials and an hour to work on the project, and Donemana Primary School came out on top. There is cross-departmental work being done.

Paul Butler also referred to careers advice. Careers advice is critical, and I hope that the careers strategy that was launched this year will address it effectively in practice. Other Members said that those providing careers advice may not be very well informed about the sciences, which is something that needs to be looked at. Naomi Long, and others, talked about the negative perception that some people have of those who study the sciences. However, despite what the Minister said, such a perception is not common currency. Indeed, Naomi Long also said that people learn logic and so on from studying the sciences, and that could help politicians. In fairness to Mr McClarty, he mentioned the need to look at those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Alex Easton talked about the extra PhDs; so did Alex Attwood, who also mentioned the further education colleges. That is a point that I want to make: not enough is done to forge links with the further education colleges. More could be done. When one talks about the STEM subjects, people think immediately of Queen's and higher education. People think that universities deliver the science graduates, and that is the case. However, while good work is done in higher education, work can be done with further education. Dr McDonnell and the Minister both mentioned the work that could be done in further education. The Letterkenny Institute of Technology does cross-border work with the North West Regional College in Derry and Strabane, though it may not be just in the sciences.

Dominic Bradley said that business needs graduates in STEM and a good supply of software engineers. He urged that we direct more students to the STEM subjects. Some work is being done on that, though businesses should have another look at what they are



doing. In the education system there is progress being made, and the Minister referred to it.

David Hilditch spoke of the drop in enrolment in STEM subjects. The Minister said that there may be some improvement in the trend, though it is nothing to get excited about. He felt that, in some cases, we can detect a gradual increase.

Sue Ramsey said that other Ministers and Departments had a role. She referred to her recent visit to America. The Minister visited the Museum of Science in Boston at an earlier date, and he referred to the work that is done there. William Irwin also spoke of the decline in numbers. All the Members have spotted that except the Minister, with his possibility of a slight increase.

Reverend Coulter spoke of the STEM review commissioned jointly by the Department for Employment and Learning and the Department of Education. He was concerned that the education aspect had been ignored by the three Members who tabled the motion, but I hope that I have made it clear that that was certainly not our intention.

Dr McDonnell made a good point, which was referred to by other Members. We need 1,623 additional STEM students per annum if we are to get up to the level that we should have. As the Minister said, it is a very big challenge. I do not know how it will be met, and I am not sure that those students will come from disadvantaged backgrounds. I stress that point.

Those are all the points that I have to make. I support the motion. The Minister said that there is an awful lot going on. Someone mentioned the word “operationalise”, and it might be important to see how all of this turns out. Go raibh maith agat.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

That this Assembly expresses its concern at the decline in the number of students enrolling in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects; notes the commitment in the Programme for Government to increase by 25% the number of students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds at graduate and postgraduate level, studying STEM subjects by 2015; and calls on the Minister for Employment and Learning to bring forward proposals to ensure this commitment is delivered.

*Adjourned at 5.23 pm.*



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## NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Tuesday 28 April 2009

*The Assembly met at 10.30 am (Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr McClarty] in the Chair).*

*Members observed two minutes' silence.*

### ASSEMBLY BUSINESS

**Mr P Maskey:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I draw your attention to yesterday's Hansard report, in which Mr Basil McCrea made a couple of remarks about the Minister of Education during Question Time. Perhaps a ruling can be made on his remarks, the first of which was:

"She is, in fact, discriminatory, and is dealing unfairly with many people in our society." — [*Official Report, Bound Volume 40, p138, col 2*].

He went on to say:

"She is sectarian, she is trying to divide us". — [*Official Report, Bound Volume 40, p138, col 2*].

I wish the Speaker to make a ruling on my point of order.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Thank you, Mr Maskey. I will refer that point of order to the Speaker, and he will make a ruling at a later date.

## MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

### Swine Flu Outbreak in Mexico and USA

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I inform Members that the Speaker has received notice from the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety that he wishes to make a statement on the current status of the swine flu outbreak in Mexico and the United States.

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr McGimpsey):** I wish to make a statement to the House on the current status of the swine flu outbreak. I report to the Assembly that, as a result of the evolving global situation and spread of cases, the World Health Organization (WHO) has changed the level of threat for swine influenza from phase 3 to phase 4. The change to WHO phase 4 means that there is evidence of increased human-to-human transmission and indicates a significant increase in the risk of a pandemic, but it does not necessarily mean that one is inevitable.

Given the concern about that development, my Department and the Public Health Agency are monitoring the situation extremely closely to assess the implications for public health in Northern Ireland. We continue to liaise closely with the Health Protection Agency and Departments in the UK, particularly the Cabinet Office and the Department of Health, as well as with the Department of Health and Children in Dublin.

Yesterday, I took part in a meeting of the Civil Contingencies Committee. It was chaired by the Secretary of State for Health, Alan Johnson, and involved input from all devolved Ministers. After I have made my statement, I intend to participate in a further meeting of that group.

I also held extensive discussions with my chief professional advisers, and I briefed the First Minister and deputy First Minister. The issue of swine flu cuts across all Departments, and I will regularly update my Executive colleagues.

I have also spoken to Mary Harney TD, the Minister for Health and Children in the Republic of Ireland.

Northern Ireland has robust plans in place to deal with this development. I have issued contingency plans for hospitals, the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service and social care providers. Over the past few days, I have issued urgent advice to GPs and hospital clinicians, and I will continue to update them as the situation evolves. We will continue to ensure that we are prepared and that the public are protected to the maximum level possible. Northern Ireland has stockpiles of antiviral drugs for a worst-case scenario, and those drugs will cover up to 50% of the population. Current evidence suggests that, other than those in Mexico, the

cases to date have had a mild flu-like illness that responds well to the antiviral drugs that we have stockpiled.

My Department will now put in place a number of steps to maintain our own vigilance and responsiveness. Those steps include advising the public on the public health risk and the measures that they need to take in preparation for a potential pandemic. That advice will comprise information leaflets for every household and an advertising campaign, which are both being finalised. We will also continue to advise health professionals on identifying suspect cases, and regional policies and pandemic-management arrangements will be reviewed and refined.

I reiterate the simple but very effective measures that everyone can take in these circumstances. Influenza spreads easily from person to person when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It also spreads through hand-to-face contact if hands are contaminated. Therefore, good hygiene practices, such as frequent hand washing and using tissues to cover the mouth and nose for coughs and sneezes, will be the most effective measures that people can take to protect themselves.

Individuals should listen carefully to Government advice, which will be made available via the media and distributed on printed material. People should consult the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website if they are considering travelling to any affected areas. The current advice is against all but essential travel to Mexico. Information and advice for travellers will be available at all airports and ports. Our enhanced monitoring and reporting will identify people with symptoms that need to be investigated further.

At this point in time, no confirmed cases of swine flu have been found in Northern Ireland. However, as the Chief Medical Officer said, we should expect that there will be cases in due course. The Government have prepared detailed plans and procedures already to ensure that the country will be able to deal with cases of swine influenza. GPs across the country have been notified and made aware of the symptoms and of what to do if they suspect that a patient has pandemic flu. Hospitals are well prepared and have specific plans to deal with a pandemic. We have stocks of antiviral drugs that will be used to treat all those who become ill.

I trust that Members will understand that, as a result of these exceptional circumstances, I will be unable to respond to the motions that have been scheduled for today. It is essential that I participate in a number of important planned meetings on this serious public health threat. However, I will be pleased to respond to any issues that Members may have on those motions if they write to me about the matters in question.

**The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mrs O'Neill):** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

I thank the Minister for coming back to the House today to keep us up to date with what is happening. I have no doubt that the robust plans that the Minister outlined are in place. However, a number of cases, albeit unconfirmed, has been identified on this island. What will be the implications for us if those cases are confirmed?

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** It has been reported from the Irish Republic that none of those cases has reported positive. At the moment, there are no confirmed instances of swine flu in Northern Ireland or, as I understand the information from Dublin, in the Irish Republic. Scotland has two confirmed cases, and England and Wales have no confirmed cases. I have no doubt that there will be an increase in the number of people being tested, because people who have concerns will contact their GPs. I also do not doubt that tests will be run on a number of occasions. We will have to wait and see how many positive tests arise and then decide what the consequences and specific counter-measures will be with respect to the prescribing of antiviral drugs.

**Mr Easton:** How close are the experts to developing a vaccine for this type of flu? I noticed that some tour operators were cancelling flights to Mexico. Is the Minister's Department advising people not to travel to Mexico, and does that advice include travel to the United States?

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** As I said in my statement, when it comes to travel we follow the advice of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, which is advising people that they should travel to Mexico only if it is essential to do so. I am not aware of any advice to people that they should not travel to the United States.

It is estimated that it will take between three and six months to identify and develop a specific vaccine. There are sleeping contracts in place with manufacturers so that production can begin as soon as the vaccine is identified. Through those sleeping contracts, an order is in place for vaccines to protect the population. All of that has been planned for and is in hand, but we have to wait for the specific virus to be identified and for the vaccine to be developed before it can go into production. The UK is acting as one unit on the issue, and sleeping contracts have been put in place on behalf of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

**Mrs Hanna:** I thank the Minister for coming back to the House to update us and for his continuing vigilance. Given the increased human-to-human contact, the fact that the virus appears to be attacking mainly healthy young adults whose immune systems are at their optimum and the concern that the virus is becoming more virulent, is the Minister confident that



the antiviral drugs will be effective should they be necessary?

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** In the worst-case scenario, antiviral medicine would cover 50% of the population, and we have stockpiled that amount. All the UK countries are stockpiled to that level. The Mexico flu virus is susceptible to those antiviral drugs, so we have that protection. Clearly, the best step after that is to develop a vaccine quickly. As everyone is aware, viruses mutate, and that is an ongoing battle in the area of antiviral drugs.

**Mr McCarthy:** I thank the Minister for returning to keep the Assembly informed of what is happening on this important issue. I noticed that he mentioned the media. Is the Minister in contact with the media, and are there communications with the general public? It is fine for the Minister to inform the Assembly yesterday and today, but communications with the general public are of vital importance. Does the Minister have easy and immediate access to the media to keep everyone informed of the position?

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** Public information is one of our key pieces of work. Leaflets will be issued to every household, and that will be supported by a major advertising campaign. The Civil Contingencies Committee will agree a UK-wide media and public information plan. I have also taken steps to ensure that there will be posters and information at ports and airports.

I am also having discussions with Mary Harney, because many people who travel to Northern Ireland come through Dublin Airport. Therefore, we must ensure that we have complementary processes for the provision of information.

10.45 am

Certain protocols are in place. For example, a pilot who flies an aircraft into Belfast or elsewhere and has a passenger who reports feeling ill must radio ahead to the airport to arrange for a doctor to be waiting there. The same protocol applies on ships. Those are long-standing protocols that are still in operation. Public information is important and is a key issue in our UK-wide discussions.

**Mr Buchanan:** I thank the Minister for coming to the House to update Members further on the swine flu situation and for the robust measures that the Department has already put in place to counteract the virus should it come into Northern Ireland.

Will the antiviral drugs that the Department has in stockpile be able to eradicate the flu virus in humans, should it come into Northern Ireland? Although the Minister has already touched on that issue, it does no harm to reaffirm it.

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** I can give Mr Buchanan only the advice that I have received, which is that that virus is susceptible to the antiviral drugs that the Department has stockpiled.

**Ms S Ramsey:** Like other Members, I thank and commend the Minister. I understand that he is working 24/7, which demonstrates the importance of having a local Minister in control of such a matter.

When does the Minister hope that flyers will be available? I am sure that he agrees that there is much public concern. The sooner that correct information can reach people's homes, the easier it will be on them. It may also be useful for the Minister to speak to the media to ensure that their reporting is measured, not only in news bulletins but in talk shows. We do not need the media to add to concern on the issue.

Given that the Assembly will not meet in the Chamber during the rest of the week, I ask the Minister to keep Members informed so that we can act as conduits of information to our constituents.

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** I agree with Sue Ramsey's comments, and information is important. Flyers will be available, and the Department is currently approving the information that will appear on them. Public information will be made available through the Civil Contingencies Committee's UK-wide campaign. An emergency control centre is already up and running, and a telephone helpline will be set up soon so that people can ring for information.

The Member raised a point about the media: it is important that public information is disseminated rather than the media issuing adversarial, political-type information. Specifically, the aim is to ensure that the public understands the importance and seriousness of the situation without any undue scaremongering.

The situation is still a long way from a flu pandemic, and we hope that it will not reach that level. However, as I said in the Chamber on Monday 27 April 2009, we will prepare for the worst and hope for the best.

**Mr Ross:** I thank the Minister for his statement to the House this morning. I welcome the fact that a helpline will be established, which will be useful; I hope that it is set up soon. Is the Minister satisfied with the level and exchange of information, not only between this Assembly, the national Government at Westminster and the various devolved institutions but between Governments and health agencies throughout the world?

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The response is international, national and local. Internationally, it is being led by the World Health Organization, which collates information from Governments worldwide. Nationally, we collate that

information and work together through the Civil Contingencies Committee, which is part of COBRA, and that work is a team effort. Locally, work is focused on the dissemination of information through the health and social care system, acute primary care, the Ambulance Service, and so on. That is what the Department is doing.

There is a need to spread information widely among the public, and all Members and Departments have a part to play.

## **MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

### **North/South Ministerial Council**

#### **Agriculture Sectoral Format**

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I have received notice from the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development that she wishes to make a statement regarding the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) meeting in agriculture sectoral format.

**The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew):** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. With your permission, I will make a statement, in compliance with section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, on the tenth meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council in the agriculture sector.

The meeting was held at Farmleigh House, Dublin, on Friday 20 March. The Executive were represented by the Minister of the Environment, Sammy Wilson MP MLA, and by me, and the Irish Government were represented by Brendan Smith TD, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. The statement has been agreed with Sammy Wilson, and I make it on behalf of us both.

At the NSMC plenary meeting on 23 January, Ministers noted the discussion of the recent animal feed contamination incident and its impact on farmers and producers across the island. We agreed to continue to work closely to complete the measures that the Irish Government and the Executive have put in place to tackle the matter. We also agreed to strengthen our co-operation in dealing with major incidents of this nature and requested our officials to review and, if necessary, revise the existing arrangements.

Ministers welcomed the consultation on the development of the draft all-island animal health and welfare strategy and agreed to convene a cross-border event in 2009 to bring together key stakeholders to discuss the delivery of the strategy. The Council noted the progress on the development of the strategic approach to plant health and pesticides. Senior officials from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development are reviewing and identifying current and new areas of interest in plant health and pesticides and are developing a programme of work. The Departments will submit a joint report to the Council in early autumn 2009.

The Council discussed the outcome of the health check of the common agricultural policy (CAP), including increased modulation and related implications, changes in market management mechanisms, the management of milk quota expiry and simplification of the single farm payment scheme,

including cross-compliance. Ministers broadly agreed on those issues; any differences in approach arose from the different circumstances that apply North and South. Simplification is one area in which both Administrations recognised the possibility of useful gains.

The Council also referred to the current state of play in the World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations. Ministers shared the view that they wanted a fair, balanced and ambitious outcome that would not undermine Irish and EU agriculture and acknowledged that the EU had made a significant contribution to the negotiations. The Council noted the benefit of continued discussion among Ministers on issues of common concern on the EU common agriculture policy and the WTO and requested that officials remain in close contact on such issues. The Council agreed that its next meeting in agriculture sectoral format will take place in June 2009. Go raibh maith agat.

**The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development (Dr W McCrea):** In the Minister's statement and in the press release that was issued after the meeting on 20 March, she said that both jurisdictions:

"agreed to strengthen our co-operation in dealing with major incidents of this nature and requested our officials to review and, if necessary, revise the existing arrangements."

The Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development agrees that a review of the existing arrangements is necessary, particularly given that, in their own words, the authorities in the Irish Republic were aware from the middle of November 2008 of the high level of dioxins in samples and informed the Department in Northern Ireland three weeks later in December after they had taken steps to protect their own industry. Will the Minister therefore confirm that there was a complete absence of co-operation on that incident, the consequences of which still reverberate throughout the pig production and processing sectors in Northern Ireland?

Furthermore, will she tell us which parts of the processes are weak and outline what action is being taken to rectify those weaknesses? Finally, will she explain how our industry can trust and co-operate in an all-Ireland animal health strategy, given that the dioxin incident demonstrated the absence of trust and co-operation and the desire of one partner to rush to save its industry at the possible expense of our industry in Northern Ireland?

**The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** The Member asked a number of questions. One thing that I certainly agree with is that a review is needed, and there will be a review, both in the South and in the North, to see what lessons can be learnt. I welcome the fact that the Committee will take part in that review and will make its experiences known and its views heard in the South.

I have already discussed with Brendan Smith, my counterpart in the South, the need for an early warning mechanism so that there is no lack of communication in future. Such a mechanism would allow us to automatically let each other know when something happens in one area that has an impact on the other. We will certainly do that. I have a commitment from Brendan Smith that, when both reviews are completed, we will discuss how we can organise ourselves better to ensure that we learn valuable lessons from the dioxins incident and that it does not happen again.

As Members will know, significant consultation has been ongoing on the all-island animal health and welfare strategy. Stakeholders are keen on that strategy, because it can help to deliver less bureaucracy and can simplify arrangements for the majority of trade on the island, which is North/South. Farmers like the fact that they can trade with more ease on the island in cattle, sheep and pigs. Farmers want the strategy. It is a Programme for Government (PFG) target, and it will help us to help the industry in the future.

Lessons have been learnt from the dioxin incident, and the strategy is now more important than ever, as it will ensure that we have the tools to enable us to protect our industry. Whatever is happening on this island, on other islands or around the world, we need to have the effective tools to help us to protect the industry and trade on the island.

**Ms S Ramsey:** I welcome the Minister's statement. She mentioned co-operation across the island, which should be welcomed. The Chairperson of the Committee mentioned the review. When does the Minister expect the officials to report on that review? When does she anticipate that the cross-border event planned for 2009 will happen? Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

**The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** We recognised that the review needed to happen after the incident had taken place and had been effectively dealt with. The culling and disposal have now been completed, so I hope that the review will begin shortly and that we will be able to learn lessons from it as quickly as possible. The stakeholder event will take place later this year, either during the summer or in early autumn. It is a useful mechanism through which we can discuss the delivery of the strategy on the island, what it means for us and how it can help us. I look forward to that event.

**Mr Elliott:** I thank the Minister for her statement and for keeping us informed. Was there any discussion on the expiry of the milk quota system? Is there a difference in policy between the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development here and the relevant Department in the Republic of Ireland as

regards the proposed ending of the milk quota regime? Is there any difference of opinion on that?

**The Minister of Agriculture and Rural**

**Development:** There is a difference of policy and opinion, because the milk quota systems, North and South, are very different. Our farmers have benefited from the ability to buy in milk quota from England, Scotland and Wales. We are in a stronger position in relation to the milk quota, and our dairy industry has benefited as a result.

I see Mr McCallister shaking his head. I know about the prices, but the fact is that we are in a stronger position in relation to the quota.

Officials in the South were keen to have an increase in milk quota so that they could work towards the ultimate abolition of the milk quota system and attempt to ensure a soft landing. They achieved a favourable outcome at the WTO. However, the present circumstances and the current auction price of milk would not give anyone confidence in investing in additional quota at this time. We are aware of the difficulties in buying cheap heifers from the continent. There must be a difference of policy on the milk quota, North and South, because there is a difference in practice.

We want to ensure that our farmers do not suffer as a result of the abolition of milk quotas and are best placed to take advantage of the new regime. I understand and accept the difficulties that dairy farmers are facing, including poor auction prices. It will take time to overcome those difficulties.

11.00 am

**Mr P J Bradley:** I thank the Minister for her statement. The SDLP's view is that nothing short of North/South, east-west animal-health hotlines should be set up. Does the Minister concur with that view, and if so, will she agree to put that issue on the agenda of the next meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council in sectoral format in June?

Earlier in the year, the Minister advised the House that she was seeking compensation from the Republic's Government for the consequences north of the border of the contaminated feed incident. She now appears to have rowed back. Why has the Minister dropped that follow-up action?

**The Minister of Agriculture and Rural**

**Development:** As the Member pointed out, we asked the South to meet the cost of the losses that were suffered by producers and processors in the North, and I discussed the matter in detail at meetings with Brendan Smith and at the recent NSMC plenary. The South have responded by saying that for legal and financial reasons, they are unable to help.

In my response to the Committee Chairperson's question, I said that an early warning system will be

put in place and the two Administrations will have the ability to let each other know when something is happening. The issue is already being discussed and the project will be taken forward by officials. We all agree that that is the right thing to do. Communication is very important, and the project is timely, given the nature of Mr McGimpsey's statement this morning. The more communication we have, the better we can protect ourselves, and in this case our industry, from the threat of disease wherever it originates.

**Dr Farry:** I thank the Minister for her statement. She is well aware of the House's desire for new animal welfare legislation in Northern Ireland. We appreciate that she wants to do things on an all-Ireland basis. However, is she conscious of the dangers of North/South co-operation in this instance, where the situation in Northern Ireland is being determined by the lowest common denominator and the person moving at the lowest speed?

Given the desire to have a fair and balanced outcome for EU and Irish agriculture, will the Minister assure the House that her Department's approach in conjunction with the Irish Government to the World Trade Organization (WTO) talks will not be at the expense of agricultural development in the Third World or the living standards of people in those parts of the globe that are based on agriculture?

**The Minister of Agriculture and Rural**

**Development:** As I said, we want a fair, balanced and objective outcome from the WTO talks for Irish and EU agriculture. No one wants policies that will have a detrimental effect on people in developing countries or on farmers in the North of Ireland and on the island of Ireland. We are trying to avoid an imbalance in the negotiations whereby trade could happen with other parts of the world — not, in this instance, with developing countries — and that other countries would benefit from the negotiations and our farmers would lose out. That is not in anyone's interest.

Although it is not lucrative, I am proud of the fact that many processors and farmers in the North contribute to milk supplies that go to developing countries. We export milk and other dairy products to more than 100 countries around the world, some of which are the poorest and some of whose people are most dependent on those products. The fact that developing countries are receiving milk powders based on our grass, air and water quality is something of which we should be proud. The outcome of the WTO negotiations will not be at the expense of the developing countries; the purpose is to ensure that our farmers will not be disadvantaged by other agricultural states.

I believe that full co-operation on animal health and welfare issues can help reduce and prevent animal



disease, facilitate trade and improve the sustainability of farming in the North.

The ultimate objectives of North/South trade should be to facilitate co-operation and trade through the free movement of animals on the island and to optimise animal-health status through alignment of policies to control animal disease. Therefore, the strategy is timely.

The island should be internationally recognised as a separate unit for disease-control purposes and for ensuring effective traceability of livestock in the event of a disease outbreak. During the foot-and-mouth disease outbreak in August 2007, we saw at first hand how recognition of the fact that our animals were not affected meant that we could continue to trade. As a consequence, we did not feel the pain of that outbreak as much as England, Scotland and Wales did.

We are one of the very few countries in Europe that is not struggling to cope with the threat of bluetongue. It is incumbent on us to work together to do everything that we can to keep bluetongue out of Ireland for as long as is possible.

**Mr Brolly:** Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Seo í mo cheist don Aire. To date, what positive outcomes has all-Ireland co-operation on animal health and welfare produced?

**The Minister of Agriculture and Rural**

**Development:** Various positive outcomes have been achieved to date, including the development of a largely similar system for sheep identification; co-operation on the exchange of data to facilitate trade in bovine animals after the BSE export ban was lifted; broad alignment of border-control policies aimed at preventing the introduction of animal disease; co-operation on contingency planning for outbreaks of exotic diseases, including agreement on a common chapter in the respective epizootic contingency plans for foot-and-mouth disease and avian flu; and initiation of a draft common chapter for bluetongue, which I expect to be agreed formally very shortly.

We have also got agreement on a protocol on welfare during transport breaches, and co-operation on testing regimes for TB and brucellosis in border areas. The strategic approach will enable further positive outcomes to be achieved over the next year, all of which provide for meeting the key aim of free animal movement.

**Mr Savage:** I thank the Minister for her statement. One part of the statement, which Mr P J Bradley touched on, concerns me. What impact will increased modulation and its related implications, as well as changes in market-management mechanisms, have on the local farmer?

**The Minister of Agriculture and Rural**

**Development:** I was very pleased that the modulation that was introduced in our negotiations on the CAP health check meant that we could balance our

modulation against what was happening in Europe and that we did not have to increase modulation for farmers here. I was also keen to avoid Europe's insisting that we return to the rural development programme and use that modulation for what it wanted us to.

We successfully negotiated to keep the rural development programme as it is and our modulation rates as they are so that farmers do not experience an increase. We can, therefore, proceed as we had hoped. That was a very positive outcome of the CAP health-check negotiations. I am very pleased that officials and, in that instance, Minister Murphy were able to negotiate that outcome, which benefits farmers in the North very much.

**Mr Burns:** I thank the Minister for her statement. Were the possibilities of EU changes to the less favourable areas discussed?

**The Minister of Agriculture and Rural**

**Development:** No, they were not discussed at that meeting; however, we will discuss them in future, because EU requirements for the less favoured areas will affect all of Ireland. We will want to discuss what each other is doing.

I will use this opportunity to plug our current consultation. Anyone who has an interest in the issue should read the consultation document and give us his or her views. It is very important that everyone tie into that consultation and that views be heard.

**Mr McCallister:** I thank the Minister for her statement and for her pro-Union policies on milk quotas. *[Laughter.]*

Was there any further discussion on compensation from the Republic of Ireland for those farmers who were affected by the recent dioxin scare; and why on earth was fishing not on the agenda, too?

**The Minister of Agriculture and Rural**

**Development:** Fishing was not on the agenda. We were supposed to be talking about agriculture and rural development, but the Rural Development Minister was not able to attend, so we stuck to agriculture. The Member will be pleased to hear that a marine sectoral meeting will be held on Thursday in Carlingford at which fishing will be discussed. However, the North/South Ministerial Council agriculture sectoral meeting is generally not the forum for discussing fisheries issues.

Compensation was not discussed. We had talked about that and received an answer from the South, and we are carrying forward the review to see what comes out of that. At this stage, though, I think that compensation will not be forthcoming. However, we submitted an emergency support measure to the EU and hope to receive money as a result of that to help us with compensation. The Executive dealt pragmatically with the issue of compensation and did their utmost to

try to help the farmers and food processors who were affected by that incident.

**Mr Shannon:** I thank the Minister for her statement. She spoke about simplifying the single farm payment process. Did she have discussions with the unions to see how that could be done, and does she have their full co-operation in moving the process on?

In her statement, the Minister also referred to the state of play with the World Trade Organization. Will she confirm that there is fairness and balance in the discussions that have taken place at the World Trade Organization? I ask that because it is important that the Minister and her Department ensure that Northern Ireland, which depends on exports for the vast majority of its business, is treated with fairness and balance in all World Trade Organization discussions. It is also important that other countries do not close their borders to Northern Ireland products.

**The Minister of Agriculture and Rural**

**Development:** Single farm payments were not discussed at the meeting. Although we spoke briefly about the CAP and the WTO, we did not get into that detail. Obviously, if we are considering moving to a flat rate for single farm payment, I will want to consult widely on that. However, that was not discussed in any detail at the meeting.

I breathed a sigh of relief at the fact that the WTO failed to reach agreement on a deal, because my fear was that the deal that was on the table would not be fair, balanced and objective, and that it would have disadvantaged our farmers. There were further attempts to reach agreement in December 2008. We have taken every possible opportunity to express the agriculture industry's concerns about the adverse impact of an unbalanced agreement, and emphasised that the interests of Irish or EU agriculture should not be sacrificed for the sake of achieving a deal.

I have, obviously, discussed that with my counterparts in Dublin. I have also discussed it with the Scottish and Welsh Ministers. Although we are all very much in agreement, unfortunately the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) takes a contrary view, and it is DEFRA that is at the negotiating table. At times, it is very frustrating trying to get the points of the devolved Administrations across to DEFRA, which wants to make policy without any consultation or input from us. That is not fair, and if the WTO had gone ahead with a deal, we would be facing a very difficult time for farmers. We continue to insist that a WTO agreement should not be at the expense of Irish farmers.

**Mr Dallat:** I add my thanks to the Minister for her statement on a day when there seems not to be an awful lot of business happening in the House. I want to return to the issue of the World Trade Organization and

the need to protect local farmers. Does the Minister agree that we need to import many agricultural products? We are not very good at growing bananas, coffee and tea. Are there opportunities, now or in the future, for a concerted and combined effort to ensure that agricultural products from the Third World are protected under fair trade? I will be most grateful to the Minister if she does not mention Peter Mandelson's name in her reply.

11.15 am

**The Minister of Agriculture and Rural**

**Development:** I thank the Member for his question. I try not to think about that individual, so I do not intend to mention him in my reply.

The Member is right in saying that we need to import some of our food, because some products that we enjoy in Ireland cannot be grown here. Equally, we are very good at producing products such as beef, milk, pork and lamb, and we need to stick to what we are good at. Ultimately, we will continue to export food from the island of Ireland that we can grow well and we will continue to import food from developing countries and other countries.

I believe in fair trade, but I do not believe that that stops with imported goods: I believe in fair trade for our farmers too, and, at the moment, they are struggling. We know about the price of milk, but dairy farmers are not getting a return on the milk that they produce. Therefore, fair trade works both ways. We want to see a fair price for the produce that we export to other countries.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** That concludes questions to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development on her statement.

## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

### Health Provision for Older People

**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.

*The following motion stood in the Order Paper:*

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to reconfigure and enhance services for older people to ensure that these services are integrated, person-centred and well staffed; that the dignity of the individual is promoted; that information is communicated effectively to patients and relatives by health professionals; that inpatients receive a nutritional diet; and that personal care is provided free of charge to all those with medical need. — *[Mr Buchanan.]*

**Lord Morrow:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I see that the Health Minister is not in his place. Have you been given any indication that he will be available today?

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Had the Member been in the Chamber earlier he would have known that the Minister indicated that he will not be available for the rest of the day. Apparently, the Minister is participating in a videoconference with the Prime Minister on the current health crisis.

**Lord Morrow:** Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker, I am sorry that I was not in the Chamber to hear that statement. Does that mean that all business relating to the Minister of Health cannot be taken today?

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** It is my understanding that the two motions that the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety was to sit in on will not go ahead.

**Lord Morrow:** Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker, does that mean that the business is not being taken solely because of the unavailability of the Minister today?

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** That is a matter for the proposers of the motion. If they wish to move the motion, they can do so, but, if they do not wish to move it, they do not have to do so.

**Lord Morrow:** Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker, does that mean that if the motion is moved, there will be no response from the Minister today?

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** That is correct. The Executive have not nominated another Minister to respond on the Minister's behalf. I call Mr Buchanan to move the motion.

*Motion not moved.*

## ASSEMBLY BUSINESS

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order. Given the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety's announcement that he will be unable to be present to respond to the health-related debates today, and the indication that some of those items will not now be moved, the Speaker has agreed, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting for the remainder of the morning. The sitting will resume —

**Mr Poots:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Before you move to suspend the sitting, I wish to raise a point of order regarding the ministerial statement on agriculture.

It has always been the policy and rule of the House that if Members are present for all or part of a statement and wish to ask a question, they will be called to ask a question. I was here for part of that statement, albeit a short part. I spoke to the Clerk at Table while the Minister was still on her feet, but, in spite of that, you refused to call me to speak. I want it to be recorded that you refused to call me and that you have discriminated against me in that respect. I also want the matter to be raised at the Business Committee.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Mr Poots, you are quite right to say that it is normal practice here that if a Member is present in the House for a statement, or part of a statement, they are called to ask a question. The part of the statement for which you were present was when the Minister was on her way to sit down again. You did not hear the statement; therefore, you could not ask a question.

**Dr W McCrea:** Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. It is a fact that the Minister was not sitting when Mr Poots entered the Chamber. She was reading the final paragraph of her statement when he entered, and he was refused the right to ask a question.

An hour was set aside for the statement and questions, and it was closed after 22 minutes. I feel that that is an absolute disgrace, given that we are dealing with a sufficiently weighty matter and that a further 38 minutes remained for that issue. There was no pressure of time; there was certainly no pressure of business, and you know that. Therefore, I ask that this matter be referred to the Speaker.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I thank the Member for his point of order. A Member should be present for the substantive part of any statement —

**Dr W McCrea:** It does not state that —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** A Member cannot ask a question if he or she does not know what has gone before. That is my ruling.

**Dr W McCrea:** Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I ask you to tell me where it says that a Member must be present for a “substantive part” of a statement. I was told by the Clerk that a Member must be present for a statement or part of a statement, not a substantive part of a statement.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I have made the ruling. If you wish to refer the matter to the Speaker, you are free to do so.

**Dr W McCrea:** I stated already that I wish the matter to be referred officially to the Speaker.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** And so it shall be.

**Mr P Maskey:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Francie Molloy, a Sinn Féin Member, also requested permission to ask a question on the Minister’s statement. Although he missed the start of the statement, he was in the Chamber for part of it, and it was ruled that he would not get to ask a question. I want the Speaker to make a ruling on that matter, as Mr Molloy was in the Chamber before the Minister finished her statement.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I thank the Member for his point of order. Those circumstances are exactly the same as those for Mr Poots.

**Mr P Maskey:** Further to that point of order. I was always of the opinion that if a Member was not in the Chamber for the start of a ministerial statement, they would not be heard. However, you made an earlier ruling to Mr Poots to the effect that if a Member is present for part of a statement, they would be allowed to ask a question. One of the Sinn Féin Members was present for part of the Minister’s statement, but was refused the opportunity to ask a question.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** It is the ruling of the Speaker that if a Member is in the Chamber for part of a statement, the Speaker may call them to ask a question. In both of today’s instances, the Members were not in the Chamber for the substantive part of the statement; therefore, I ruled that a question could not be asked by either Member. I will not take any further points of order.

As I said, the sitting will resume at 2.00 pm, when the motion on the revised recommendations report of the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner will be moved. The sitting is, by leave, suspended.

*The sitting was suspended at 11.24 am.*

*On resuming (Mr Speaker in the Chair) —  
2.00 pm*

## PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BUSINESS

### Local Government Boundaries

**Mr Speaker:** The next item on the Order Paper is the motion on the revised recommendations report of the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner. The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for this 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 Beggs:** I beg to move

That this Assembly expresses its concern over the implications for strong, accountable local government and a shared future, in light of the Revised Recommendations Report of the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner.

At the outset of the debate, I declare an interest as a member of Carrickfergus Borough Council.

On 13 May 2008, DUP and Sinn Féin Ministers backed the 11-council model for local government in Northern Ireland. Subsequently, unamended legislation was disgracefully rushed through the House. Part of that legislation set the role and remit of the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner. Public consultation on the revised recommendations of the Local Government Boundaries Commission ended on 9 April, and a final decision is expected before the summer.

I fully recognise the work that has been put into that report to date by the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner and his team. Therefore, none of my comments should be construed as criticism of the commissioner or his professional team as they set about their task. Rather, it is a criticism of the terms of reference that they were given and the way in which the review of public administration (RPA) has been mismanaged since the return of devolution and the emergence of the Sinn Féin/DUP axis at the heart of the Executive.

The Ulster Unionist Party has placed on record many times and today restates its opposition to the 11-council model for local government in Northern Ireland. The lack of local identity provided for in the 11-council model and the resulting sectarian carve-up between the mostly unionist north and east and the mainly nationalist south and west concerns us. That does not lend itself to a shared future.

**Mr Weir:** Will the Member give way?



**Mr Beggs:** Allow me to develop some of my ideas, if I may.

The original aims of the RPA were sound and worthy. However, recent developments indicate that it is becoming less and less likely that central functions will be devolved to the proposed new councils. Reports passed to me suggest that many Departments appear to be clinging to responsibilities and the associated budgets — so much for strong, accountable local government. Many people question whether the process is worth the candle.

Ratepayers pose more basic questions about whether their rates will go up or down as a result of the review. There is little mention of the savings that were expected to be passed to those ratepayers; what we hear of is the costs involved in this process. However, strong local government requires that councils have robust finances and that supposed savings are shared by all.

**Mr Weir:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

The Member has referred to the need for local government to have “robust finances”, but the motion concerns the revised recommendations of the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner. It must surely be outside the motion to talk about rates bases, finances and the transfer of powers. Those subjects are all very pertinent, but they do not fall within a debate on local government boundaries.

**Mr Speaker:** I take on board what the Member has said. The Speaker affords some latitude in debates on private Members' motions. However, I remind Members that it is important that they stay within the remit of the motion, at least in principle.

**Mr Beggs:** To join the dots for Mr Weir, defining local government boundaries dictates the amount of rates that can be raised by councils — the two are directly related.

As we examine where we now are, Members should recall that accelerated passage was originally used to force through the Local Government (Boundaries) Bill in record speed and that the DUP/Sinn Féin axis knocked down amendments proposed by SDLP, Alliance Party and Ulster Unionist Members, each of which would have added weight to local identity issues considered by the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner in coming to his decisions. Legislation in Great Britain requires the Electoral Commission to take account of electoral equality and local community identity. To be more precise, its website states:

“When making our recommendations we also take into account community identity, convenient and effective local governance and the electoral cycle”.

The Ulster Unionist Party tabled amendments, and we warned of the dangers of rejecting some of them. We

proposed that identities should be more readily identifiable in the ward structure; that the identities and interests of local communities should also be recognised; and that the commissioner should consider secure, effective and convenient local government models. However, the DUP/Sinn Féin cabal rejected even that parity proposal.

We also sought to amend the Local Government (Boundaries) Bill to increase the powers of the commissioner so that he would be able to take into account local community identities, as is the case in England. We also tabled an amendment to clause 1(2) of the Bill to remove the word “major”. Again, however, the DUP/Sinn Féin cabal rejected that amendment.

Was that an issue during the consultation on the boundary review? Clearly, local identity was an issue that cropped up time and again when the redrawing of local government boundaries and wards was discussed. However, there remains a lack of clarity about whether the commission can use local community identity as a factor in producing the new ward boundaries. That is borne out by transcripts of the oral hearings. Arguments that were made on the basis of community identity were deemed to be out of order. At the mid-Antrim hearing on 21 November 2008, the assistant commissioner, Ian McCafferty, said:

“I take your points about community identity, social cohesion and so on, however, there is no regard in legislation for boundaries to be drawn with that alone.”

In his report, Mr McCafferty stated clearly:

“there is nothing in respect of services or social ties specifically listed as criteria in legislation governing the review of Local Government boundaries.”

However, when my colleagues Danny Kennedy and Ken Robinson raised that issue during Question Time on 3 November last year, they were told that:

“If individuals, communities or their representatives wish to comment on the provisional recommendations, in relation to local identities or any other matter, they have an opportunity to make representations to the Commissioner”. — [*Official Report, Bound Volume 34, p244, col 1*].

The Minister of the Environment repeated that pledge to my colleague George Savage last month. The question is whether the Environment Minister was really inviting elected Members and members of the public to make representations to the Boundary Commission about local identity in the full knowledge that that was not a criterion that was listed in the legislation and that they would be engaged in a relatively futile exercise. Surely that is not the case. At best, there is confusion about whether social ties and community identity could have been used when the Commission drew its boundaries. At worst, this House was misinformed by the Minister.

What are the practical outworkings? The Ulster Unionist Party feels strongly that the boundaries of Belfast were treated badly during the review. Our party's main grievance is the bizarre transfer of the Dundonald and Ballybeen areas to the new Lisburn and Castlereagh area instead of to Belfast, which would have been the pragmatic choice. Dundonald and Ballybeen are on a main arterial route into the city, and their residents are Belfast people. I understand, to a degree, the Lisburn representatives who wish to expand their rates base, but is that the best way to provide effective local governance for the Dundonald area? I believe not. That poor decision is another outworking of the DUP/Sinn Féin axis.

The Ulster Unionist Party's response was clear in its attempt to ensure that the new Belfast boundaries reflected the city that exists in the twenty-first century. The review of the parliamentary boundaries endorsed that position, recommending that the parliamentary boundaries of the Belfast constituencies be extended to cover areas to the north, south, east and west of the existing city boundary. Unfortunately, the city of Belfast will be constrained by the outdated Victorian boundaries to the east and the north, some of which date back to 1892.

I must raise another issue that is exercising many of my constituents. Currently, there is talk of efficiency savings and cutting down bureaucracy and administration. In many instances, that is code for centralising service provision. The feeling in Carrickfergus and Larne, which already have the lowest proportion of Civil Service jobs, is that teaming up with Ballymena is likely to mean only one thing: the centralisation of many jobs and the location of services in the bigger population centre of Ballymena. The Social Security Agency has already announced the location of a new processing centre there, and back-office jobs in Larne and Carrickfergus are earmarked for transfer. A range of other services are also affected.

The plan to govern Dundonald and Ballybeen from Lisburn with Larne and Carrickfergus in danger of being governed from Ballymena does not bode well for strong, accountable local government, so I ask Members to support the motion.

**Mr Weir:** It will come as no surprise to the proposer of the motion that the DUP opposes it. This motion is, perhaps, one of the most ludicrous to have come before the Assembly, and there has been strong competition. It is ludicrous for a number of reasons. First —

**Mr Cobain:** You can talk.

**Mr Weir:** Mr Cobain will get his chance to speak later, should he desire to put together some cogent evidence, which I would be interested to hear.

The motion is ludicrous for a range of reasons. First, the process that is being undertaken by the Local

Government Boundaries Commissioner is ongoing. Consultation may have finished, but the final proposals have not yet been put forward, so there is an issue even about the appropriateness of tabling the motion.

Secondly, the motion is ludicrous because, at the end of the day, parties across the Chamber will disagree about various aspects of the commissioner's findings, which, like those of any boundary commission, will be a bit of a curate's egg. For example, I welcome the numerous changes that have been made in the proposed North Down and Ards district council area. There was a great deal of cross-party support for those changes, and, to be fair, the commissioner took advantage of that support. On the other hand, there are aspects of what the commission has put forward with which I disagree, such as the proposals for Dunmurry and for Belfast's northern boundary. However, the reality is that if one puts work out to an independent commissioner — that is how things are done in this Chamber; we are not in the business of gerrymandering boundaries — the findings must be independent.

Furthermore, the idea that the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner's decision about whether to place a town or a village within one boundary or another has a significant impact on strong, accountable local government and a shared future is also ludicrous. There is a debate to be had on those issues, and had the proposer of the motion bothered to consult his colleagues on the proposals for a shared future he would know that protections for both communities are built into the governance arrangements, which have also received cross-party support. The two matters are not linked.

**Mr B McCrea:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Weir:** I see that the Member is keen to get in, so I will give way.

**Mr B McCrea:** I am interested in the Member's point about cross-community support. Is it not true that a minority population must comprise at least 10% of the overall population to have some of those protections, and that what we are actually seeing is an attempt to gerrymander boundaries in order to create majority communities that can ignore people in other places? As a result of that, we risk turning Belfast into a contentious city.

**Mr Weir:** First, if the Member knew anything about the RPA process, he would know that the 10% threshold relates to matters of an entirely different nature. With the best will in the world, however one draws boundaries, there will always be some parts of Northern Ireland, such as North Down and Ards, in which heavy unionist majorities will be created. There is no way not to create that situation. Belfast will be balanced under these proposals — as it is under the existing arrangements — so I am not sure how that will create a

“contentious city”. I notice that the Alliance Party seems very pleased at that prospect.

With respect to some of the criticisms about the process, questions were asked about the term “major part”. However, the Ulster Unionist Party acknowledged the legislation in its submissions to the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner, and every one of its proposals was compatible with that legislation. Indeed, had the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner been so minded, he or she could have made those changes. The Ulster Unionist Party’s submission stated:

“The major part of Castlereagh, even under our proposals, will still be going into Lisburn and Castlereagh because it is still the major part of the territory - which is exactly what the Commissioner has said.”

That acknowledges that the party had the scope within the process to propose changes, and, indeed, that fact was acknowledged by the commissioners. Some of us will be disappointed about some of the proposals, but such is the nature of an independent commissioner.

2.15 pm

One wonders why some of those changes were not made, when such a case was made by the Ulster Unionist Party. However, if one looks at the transcripts again and considers the Ulster Unionist Party’s performance with regard to its submissions to the Boundaries Commissioner, one will get a clue. Indications were given about a green wedge around Dundonald, but what evidence was provided? In fact, the Boundaries Commissioner said:

“The Commissioner could not take into account such a factor in the absence of any cogent evidence.”

If Members read the Ulster Unionists’ submissions, they will see evidence of a complete shambles. The Ulster Unionist mayor of Lisburn contradicted the Ulster Unionist submission on Lisburn and Castlereagh, and two Ulster Unionist colleagues cross-examined each other on the same issue. Furthermore, in its submission on Castlereagh, the Ulster Unionist Party stated that Castlereagh was being decimated, but then it wanted more of Castlereagh to go into Belfast. It seems that the Ulster Unionist Party was contradicting itself.

At the hearings regarding Castlereagh and Belfast, we received various bits of anecdotal evidence. We were informed that one member had spoken to people in their offices about the boundaries. Furthermore, we received the pertinent evidence that taxi drivers had even been asked whether they supported Lisburn Distillery. However, not a single petition, opinion poll or survey of the schools to which parents in the catchment area were sending their children was produced; the evidence was appalling.

Having said that, however, there was at least some evidence provided on the Castlereagh and Belfast

boundaries. The Ulster Unionist Party rightly decried the fact that the boundaries to the northern end of the Antrim and Newtownabbey district councils had not been changed. However, the Ulster Unionists did not even show up at the hearings regarding Newtownabbey and Antrim.

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

**Mr Weir:** Not a single minute of evidence was given.

**Mr Boylan:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I am glad that the Minister is in the Chamber to suffer through the debate with the rest of Members. I oppose the motion; in fact, when I read it, I wondered where the Ulster Unionists were going with it.

In our constituencies, Members hear people’s real concerns about job losses, house repossession and many other issues. Members must grasp the public’s opinion on the Assembly, especially in light of public expenses.

After listening to the concerns of my constituents, I find myself speaking on a motion such as this and wondering whether the proposers of the motion realise what is happening around them. I do not mean to be condescending when I say that, but Members should remember that parties and individuals had ample opportunity to contribute to the process.

Members should be providing strong representation. Members who are successful in subsequent Assembly elections will be voted in to represent their constituents. I do not know whether the Members in the Ulster Unionist corner will be representatives or not, but there will be representation.

The successful and strong Newry identity campaign managed to retain the core identity of Newry city. I mention that because most of the debate so far has been about Belfast. Perhaps the issue should have been tabled as a subject for an Adjournment debate rather than a motion.

The most recent revision process, which is referred to in the motion, provided opportunities for many people to contest the boundaries. One of the key decisions on the future shape of local government, which was agreed by the Executive in March 2008, was to provide a framework for stronger, more effective and more responsive local government in the North. At the heart of any local democracy, the administrative system must address both representative and participatory democracy. Decisions should be based on the principle of services being delivered to the citizen as close to the ground as possible.

The new function of community planning will ensure that, for the first time, communities, local representatives and statutory agencies will assist in shaping the future of their local areas in a collective and combined manner. Regardless of the number of



new council units, the most important aspect must be effective and efficient delivery in the operation of the councils.

Equality, transparency and value for money for the ratepayer must be firmly embedded in the new structures. Any councillor who has ever asked for a breakdown of exactly what a ratepayer pays will, under the current system, not have received specific details. In future, we must ensure that people receive value for money.

Any new council will always have majorities and minorities. In my own area, for example, we will be in the minority, but we must work together. The rights of minorities, whether east or west of the Bann, must be protected. Strong safeguards, which will allow for the protection of minority rights and the unhindered operations of the new councils, must be built into the future governance arrangements.

To conclude, two of the most important elements in the delivery of strong local government are the requirements for genuine community participation in the new councils and the need for equality and transparency in the new structures. I remind Members that the decision on the recommendations is not final; however, we must now decide on and continue the process of transition. Go raibh maith agat.

**Mr Gallagher:** I agree that the new council arrangements should provide better services for ratepayers and aim to improve the quality of life of the people who live in the areas that the councils will serve. However, one of the concerns that arises from the proposed 11-council model and, indeed, from the anticipated findings of the Boundaries Commissioner's report is that, instead of providing what I outlined, we shall see the Balkanisation of Northern Ireland. It is for that reason that I support the motion.

A key issue for the SDLP with any new council arrangements will be the governance system that will be put in place. I am sure that many Members will agree that new councils should operate in a system of governance that can build trust and promote partnerships, particularly between the nationalist and unionist traditions. The system should also ensure the inclusion of smaller groups and their fair representation in the top posts and appointments to all outside bodies. Furthermore, the arrangements should be such that all members of the new councils are duty-bound to put the interests of the people whom they are elected to serve at the forefront, rather than their own narrow party political interests. I am sure that I do not need to remind Members that, in the old councils, we witnessed far too many bad examples of party interests being put first. The reform of local government should move us away from that. Furthermore, it should develop new partnerships, build

trust and confidence and build a new, shared future for the people of Northern Ireland. That will not be realised under the 11-council model, with its proposed new boundaries.

**Mr Weir:** Will the Member give way?

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

As was said earlier, what we are witnessing here is a crude carve-up of power between the DUP and Sinn Féin. In its submissions to the review, the SDLP maintained that a more appropriate model for Northern Ireland was the 15-council model. *[Interruption.]*

We are in Northern Ireland, and we can predict the make-up of the new councils. Down and Ards have been mentioned. A new council for those areas will probably consist of 82% representation from the unionist tradition, approximately 15% from the Alliance Party and independents, and 3% from the nationalist tradition. A 75% weighted majority or a 20% call-in mechanism will not protect minorities in the event of abuses of power.

Similarly, it is likely that a new council for Ballymena, Larne and Carrickfergus will consist of 80% unionists, 12% nationalists, and 8% Alliance Party and others. A new council for Newry and Mourne in the south-west will have approximately 26% nationalist representation and approximately 23% unionist representation. Once again, in that case, unionists would not be protected by a 75% weighted majority for voting or a 20% call-in mechanism —

**Mr Weir:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Gallagher:** I have made my position clear in relation to that. Sorry, Mr Weir.

**Mr Weir:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Is it in order for the Member to mislead the House with the figures that he is quoting? Different figures have been agreed at the strategic leadership board —

**Mr Speaker:** Order, order. I ask the Member to reflect on what he is saying. Is he — *[Interruption.]*

Order. Is he directly accusing the Member of misleading the House?

**Mr Weir:** It may well be that the Member has been misinformed; he is giving figures that are not accurate. There has already been cross-party agreement on different thresholds as regards both call-in mechanisms —

**Mr Speaker:** Order.

**Mr Weir:** He is giving information that is wrong.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. That is not an appropriate point of order. Mr Gallagher, carry on.

**Mr Gallagher:** Mr Speaker —



**Mr McClarty:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Has Mr Weir withdrawn his remark regarding the word “mislead”?

**Mr Speaker:** The Member has completely clarified his point. Mr Gallagher, please carry on.

**Mr Gallagher:** I believe that Mr Weir should withdraw that remark, but I want to move on. I was about to make the important point that the governance arrangements should, in the SDLP's view, be based on an 80% weighted majority, with a 15% call-in mechanism. We know that already —

**Mr Weir:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Gallagher:** Already in place — Mr Speaker —

**Mr Speaker:** Order, order. The convention in the House is clear. If the Member who is on his feet does not wish to take an intervention — it is absolutely clear that Mr Gallagher does not wish to take an intervention — the Member should not persist.

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

We all know about the work of the voluntary transition committees, which have been in place for some time. I remind Members that in Lisburn City Council, for example, the unionist block took six of the eight posts available and excluded the SDLP from the voluntary transition committee. Those committees are to be replaced by statutory transition committees, which will have extensive powers. I am calling on the Minister to ensure that this time round the appointments to the statutory committees will be based on fairness and the principle of inclusion.

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

**Mr Ford:** I am somewhat at a loss to understand why we are debating this motion. It seems to me — *[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The Member has the Floor.

**Mr Ford:** It appears to me that Ulster Unionists not only do not listen but do not read in advance either. To put forward a motion that has a general complaint about legislation passed in the House some months ago, dress it up as concerns about the behaviour of the Boundaries Commissioner and say when proposing the motion that it is not actually a complaint about the commissioner and his staff does not seem to be any way of conducting rational business.

I might well agree with many of the criticisms that have been made from the Ulster Unionist Benches of the way in which the process operated. Certainly, as one who proposed a number of amendments to the Bill at Consideration Stage, I agree with them about the mechanisms that went through. However, to suggest that we can now somehow revisit it as a private Member's motion and undo what was passed as legislation in the House seems to be a tad naive. In fact —

**Mr Beggs:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Ford:** I will be grateful to if I can hear any —

**Mr Beggs:** Does the Member recognise that, when the legislation was going through the House, others indicated that local identity was an area that the Boundaries Commissioner could deal with under the current legislation? Therefore, was it not appropriate to highlight the fact that it has not been appropriate legislation that has allowed the commissioner to deal with those areas satisfactorily?

**Mr Speaker:** The Member has an extra minute.

**Mr Ford:** I agree with the Member that the process was not satisfactory, but that is not what the motion says. The motion seems to be unclear as to whether it is criticising the Boundaries Commissioner or criticising the entire process or exactly what it is doing. The proposer complained about a sectarian carve-up. Anyone who has observed elections over the past few years will find that people in the west and the south are slightly more likely to vote nationalist, people in the north and the east are slightly more likely to vote unionist, and people in greater Belfast are slightly more likely to vote Alliance, regardless of whether there is one, 26, 11, 15, or 17 councils — slightly more likely than the general population. Regardless of the number of councils, that is how people will vote. It is nonsense to suggest that the new boundaries represent a sectarian carve-up.

2.30 pm

Another complaint is that Belfast will be a contentious city. Funnily enough, I thought that, back in the 1980s, there was a fair amount of contention in Belfast. It is generally accepted that Belfast is a significantly less contentious city than it was. As Mr Weir said, that is because the Alliance Party holds — and has held for a couple of terms — the balance of power in the city and is likely to continue to do so with the new boundaries. Those Ulster Unionist fears can be done away with.

In Belfast, there are issues about whether the boundaries have expanded enough to represent the capital city and its growth properly, although the boundaries, in some places, are not 1890s boundaries but 1970s boundaries, so there is good reason to examine that matter.

There are also issues about preparations for good governance. As I understand it, the transition committee in Belfast has no representation from Castlereagh Borough Council or Lisburn City Council, despite the significant number of people who will transfer to the Belfast district from those two authorities. There are issues about the better governance of Belfast, but they are not the issues that are being dressed up in the Ulster Unionist Party's claim that,

somehow, Belfast will be contentious, because it is getting realistic, modern and up-to-date boundaries.

The other key point in Mr Beggs's speech is his concern, as stated in the motion, for a shared future. I am delighted to know that the Ulster Unionist Party — or UCUNF or whatever it is called this week; the name may have changed — is committed to a shared future, because we have not witnessed that from the party in the past. Nor does it tally with the behaviour of a number of Ulster Unionist councillors in different places.

**Mr B McCrea:** I am surprised to hear Mr Ford say that. The Ulster Unionist Party is non-sectarian. It is political in the sense that it wants to stand for all the people of Northern Ireland. I challenge Mr Ford personally. As my record on speaking up for a shared future shows and as my colleagues from the SDLP will, perhaps, confirm, the Ulster Unionist Party believes in a shared future for all the people of Northern Ireland. Is that clear?

**Mr Ford:** I am delighted to hear the Member state that so clearly and specifically. We will have to examine his record on education and the records of other Members from his party on other matters to ascertain the validity of that statement.

Instead of whingeing about what has happened in the past, we must now get on with the real issues, such as ensuring that local councils have a process of governance that instils trust. That will be done by incentivising co-operation and partnership, not by the sort of sectarian head-count in which some Members have indulged by adding up numbers. At one point, I thought that Mr Gallagher was going to demand that the single prospective SDLP member of the new council area covering north Down and Ards ought to have a veto over anything that that council might do. We have reduced that to a 20% veto, but it must be seen that, if we are truly to build a shared future, we will do so on the basis of building trust rather than dividing people and creating artificial divisions in which some people are rewarded. That is what must be done if we are to carry the changes through.

I wish to correct Mr Weir on one point. He claimed that no Ulster Unionist turned up at the local boundary hearing for the Antrim/Newtownabbey area. He is wrong: a local councillor turned up to contradict the submission that had been made by the Ulster Unionist Party centrally.

**Mr Ross:** I agree with many of Mr Ford's points. I do not know whether that comes as more of a shock to Members on his Benches or on mine.

Today's debate is nothing new, in the sense that the Assembly has debated the issue on a number of occasions. Today, we heard many of the same arguments about what constitutes strong, accountable

local government and other issues that we have heard previously.

The RPA is one of the most important and significant pieces of work that the Assembly will undertake. However, as I listened to Mr Beggs's opening comments, it seemed that his party had had some sort of conversion or that it wanted to stick with the 26-council model. We want to modernise local government and make it suitable for the twenty-first century and a new Northern Ireland that is more peaceful and stable, with an established Assembly at Stormont. Local government must change to reflect that.

The process has not been easy, and, indeed, any process that will reduce the number of councils from 26 to 11 will not receive 100% agreement. However, most people see the 11-council model as a reasonable balance between the need for locality and the requirement for efficiency. That is not to say that there are not differing views. As my colleague Mr Weir said, there are differing views even in the Ulster Unionist Party. Some Ulster Unionist members of Lisburn City Council argued one thing in respect of the eastern part of the Belfast City Council area; other party members took a different line. Mr Ford referred to a similar scenario in Antrim.

The process is not yet complete, and the final decisions have not been taken. There was widespread public consultation after the original recommendations and, again, after the revised recommendations. Political parties also had an opportunity to contribute to that process. It is important that we remain focused on the goal of achieving more efficient and effective local government in which councils can genuinely deliver for ratepayers.

The Ulster Unionist Party tabled the motion, but it must know that the Minister cannot comment on specific arguments about boundaries because the process is not complete and the independent commissioner still has to make recommendations. Therefore, one wonders why the Ulster Unionist Party put the motion forward. Perhaps today's debate has more to do with the fact that the Assembly rejected an Ulster Unionist amendment some time ago than anything else.

In recent debates on the issue, we heard much from some Members about the lack of community or local identity and social cohesion; however, few of those Members attempted to explain what that means. Most people are not exercised about what council they belong to, and they will not protest about the name of their council; they want a council that can deliver the services that they require effectively and efficiently.

That is not to say that the local community is not important; indeed, it is imperative that councils are not remote. However, our primary driver should be the

creation of an economy of scale and effective and efficient local government. The term "local" means different things to different people — it can refer to someone's street, village, town or townland — and the new councils will not alter that in any way.

The process has been a major piece of work. We must now get on with the job of delivering the type of local government that our constituents want, which is one that delivers services efficiently and effectively. In a few years' time, people will not judge the RPA on boundaries or names; they will judge it on how the changes have affected the services that they receive. I oppose the motion.

**Mr McKay:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I speak against the motion. Indeed, the motion is a bit of a nonsense, given that, as the previous Member to speak said, the process is not yet complete. The motion has more to do with the forthcoming European elections than any elections to new councils.

Sinn Féin believes that equality must be at the heart of local government. Equality has not been in the remit of local government in this place before, and we all know the history of that. For Sinn Féin, the key issue is how local councils are governed in future, and that includes the protection of minority communities. Our focus throughout the review of public administration has been to reduce bureaucracy; to have strong legal protections for minorities; for power sharing to put an end to the politics of exclusion; and to ensure genuine community involvement in decision making through community planning.

People living on, and close to, the border have suffered economically and socially as a result of partition. The fact that community planning will be allowed to take place on a cross-border basis between the new councils in the Six Counties and the county councils in the Twenty-six Counties represents common sense as well as progress. We need streamlined, efficient and effective local government that delivers for its citizens, and one that has cohesive communities and a balance that supports effective representation. The most important local government issues concern its operation, what services are delivered to ratepayers and how those services are delivered. It is critical that we get a system of local government that allows all sections of the community to participate and work together effectively.

It is regrettable that, in the initial report, the boundary commissioner refused to look at the inclusion of the Irish language in ward names and failed to take account of the views of many communities that want Irish to be recognised and promoted. We want to put it on record that that matter still needs to be addressed.

During the consultation period in my constituency of North Antrim, Sinn Féin was the only party to call

for the name of the new council in the north-east to be changed to take account of the fact that the glens wards form part of the council area. It is now recommended that the name be changed from the causeway coast district council to the causeway coast and glens district council. That is welcome because it will help tourism in our local area.

The level of agreement reached thus far represents a real advance in how local councils are governed, in particular, and in the protection of minority communities. Today, as we all know very well, unionists in some councils, such as Lisburn and Coleraine, are still operating the politics of exclusion. We now have ample opportunity to bring all of that to an end.

Cutting the number of councils will reduce bureaucracy; involve communities in decision-making through community planning; join up local and central government; provide legal protections for minorities; and end the politics of exclusion through power-sharing. At the end of the day, as other Members —

**Mr B McCrea:** What about Santa? Is he real too?

**Mr Speaker:** Order.

**Mr McKay:** I cannot hear the Member anyway.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Members will please address their remarks through the Speaker and not across the Chamber.

**Mr McKay:** At the end of the day, Sinn Féin will not take any lectures from the Tory boys in the corner. Sinn Féin will listen to the people, and what the people want is protection for all minority communities. They also want value for money. All in all, the proposals represent value for money and efficiency, and it is common sense to back them. I oppose the motion because that is the only common-sense thing to do.

**Mr McClarty:** I declare an interest as a member of Coleraine Borough Council. Under different circumstances, the motion might represent one of the last chances to influence the debate on the shape and meaningfulness of local government reform in Northern Ireland. Unfortunately, to date, we have witnessed a charade of a process that has taken place solely to solidify a DUP/Sinn Féin carve-up that is not in the best interests of local government in Northern Ireland or of local communities.

The proposals outlined in the revised recommendations of the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner's report represent nothing more than rubber-stamping the flawed back room deal negotiated by the DUP and Sinn Féin. What we are left with today was agreed a year and a half ago. The Local Government Boundaries Commissioner ensured that the agreement between Sinn Féin and the DUP remained largely intact. There is growing concern that democratic processes, media freedom and the best interests of the people of



Northern Ireland are being eroded to maintain the stability that the two major parties have deigned to give us with their smiling face-off. However, in this instance, the people of Northern Ireland and especially those of Belfast have been left with second-best in order to appease two mutually opposed partners.

The Ulster Unionist Party has long supported a 15-council model, as that largely delineates the existing electorate and real communities. It ensures proportionality of the electorate and citizens combined with a single representative structure that enhances accountability of services. A 15-council model has reduced electoral confusion, for people have now to grapple with three electoral areas; and it boosts coterminosity of services. However, due to the DUP/Sinn Féin deal, we are now past that stage.

**Mr Weir:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr McClarty:** No. You did not listen to us when we put forward amendments, and I will not listen to you now.

Throughout the process, we have witnessed Northern Ireland being treated as a place apart, which is unfortunate. Legislation in Great Britain requires the Electoral Commission to take account of electoral equality and local community identity. However, the natural development and opinions of local communities have been largely removed from the process, which is deeply regretted. Rather than giving people influence over the shape of their new local government, the DUP and Sinn Féin have arrogantly imposed decisions from on high.

We attempted to alter the situation by trying to amend the Local Government (Boundaries) Bill to ensure that the Boundaries Commissioner had the power to make meaningful changes and to take into account local identities. However, by rejecting our amendments, the DUP and Sinn Féin ensured that that did not happen. Arlene Foster, the then Environment Minister, irresponsibly stated that the commissioner would have the power to make meaningful changes. The present Environment Minister, Mr Wilson, likewise told the Assembly that:

“The Local Government Boundaries Commissioner can make small or larger changes to boundaries.” [*Official Report, Bound Volume 29, p351, col 1*].

Both were wrong, as the Boundaries Commissioner interpreted the legislation in the way that we warned that he would have to, by concluding in his provisional recommendations report that:

“no major geographical part of any existing local government district has been transferred”.

That has left us with an absurdly constructed framework for local government in Northern Ireland.

2.45 pm

The absurdities are particularly pronounced in Belfast, where the residents of Dundonald, who use the Metro bus service and who largely work and socialise in and associate themselves with Belfast, have been forced into Lisburn City Council. We are led to believe that the people of Dundonald have more in common with the people of Glenavy, Ballinderry, Moira and those who live on the shores of Lough Neagh than they do with the people of Belfast.

Although large parts of west Belfast have been moved from Lisburn City Council to Belfast City Council, the same cannot be said for significant parts of east Belfast. It appears that, in order to create a super-council in Lisburn, Peter Robinson and the DUP have sold out the people of Dundonald, and, in effect, a good deal more than that.

The proposals for local government are not good for Northern Ireland. The blatant DUP/Sinn Féin trade-offs will in no way secure any meaningful shared future or deliver us from our segregated past. That perpetual carve-up is no way to do business. However, it is now fast becoming the only way that we expect government in Northern Ireland to be done, and that is to everyone's long-term detriment. I support the motion.

**Dr McDonnell:** I thank the Members who tabled the motion for doing so, because it raises an issue about which I feel strongly. It is an issue that has affected my constituency and my constituents, who also feel strongly about it.

**A Member:** No, they do not.

**Mr Speaker:** Order.

**Dr McDonnell:** Mr Speaker, was I supposed to respond to that?

We were told that the review of public administration would deliver all sorts of benefits. It was supposed to deliver significant savings to people across Northern Ireland and create an improved, efficient and effective public service. I might have got it wrong, but, from where I stand, all those intended benefits have been abandoned, marginalised and forgotten about. What I have seen delivered is largely a gerrymandering exercise that is reminiscent of the bad old days and that has been worked on by the DUP in collusion with Sinn Féin.

That is the only reason that I can arrive at to explain the bizarre and bewildering composition of the new Belfast local government boundary that the Boundaries Commissioner announced. I do not blame the Boundaries Commissioner, because, whatever promises and statements were made in the House about the Boundaries Commissioner, his hands were tied. He was told what to do, where to go and what decisions he had to take. He was allowed to make a few adjustments around the edges.



In the case of my constituency, which extends to the outer reaches of Belfast, the clear instruction was that all of Castlereagh had to go into the Lisburn area. To echo the words of Mr McClarty, that not only created a bizarrely shaped local council area that ranged from the Dromara hills to Dundonald and on to the shores of Lough Neagh but it provided little cohesion or coherence and was against the explicitly stated wishes of the people. If a person were to suggest that there is a remote sense of cohesion or common interest between the Dromara hills and Dundonald, their sanity would need to be considered.

Staff from my office carried out an extensive survey of the people living in the Newtownbreda and Cairnshill area of south Belfast, which is less than three miles from Belfast city centre. They surveyed 1,000 people who live along the Saintfield Road, which is adjacent to Belfast, and — surprise, surprise — 96% of them said that they wanted their area to be part of Belfast City Council. We presented that evidence to the Boundaries Commissioner and even backed it up with the opinions of planners and professional people who do not have a party political axe to grind. However, all that evidence was discarded and ignored. Therefore, people's opinions did not matter. The exercise simply rode roughshod over the public interest and individuals' interests to ensure that a cabal was created in Lisburn.

It is not only that overwhelming response's being ignored that concerns me. To make matters worse, some of those same residents, who come from across the political spectrum and represent all the political parties, attended the hearings in Malone House and the Ramada hotel, and again they made felt their genuine opposition. I neither stoked nor promoted their opposition. Yes, I sought answers, but I tried to do so as objectively as possible. I did not prompt people to attend the hearings; they came of their own volition. The Boundary Commission ignored every one of their suggestions and requests.

I thought that the reorganisation of local government was intended to make it work better for the people, in which case the commission should have listened to those directly affected. There will be no shared future, not even in a sectarian sense, although I am not looking at the issue from that angle. Little can be shared between people in Dundonald and the far end of Lisburn, the shores of Lough Neagh or the Dromara hills. Serious questions must be asked of the two parties that orchestrated that carve-up.

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

**Dr McDonnell:** I could talk about broader issues that arise from how some of the boundaries were

created, but I do not have a chance to do so today. I am deeply concerned that the report serves no one.

**Dr Farry:** I declare an interest as a member of North Down Borough Council. My colleague Mr Ford asked me to inform the House that he meant to declare an interest as a member of Antrim Borough Council and to convey his apologies for his oversight.

I have some sympathy with those who raised the problem under discussion. However, I am bewildered that the discussion should take such a format. Essentially, the motion does nothing other than to look back on what has happened. I would not be so generous as to say that it even tries to rewrite history. The motion does not call for any action but proposes that the Assembly express its concern. However, should the Assembly go down the route of expressing concern, so what? What would happen next? The motion does not call for the Minister or the Assembly to do anything.

Notwithstanding all the confusion that would have been caused, the motion could, for example, have called for the repeal of the legislation on local government boundaries. Equally, it could have called for, or demanded, a rejection by the Minister of the final recommendations when they land on his desk. The motion contains neither, so it is a waste of time and represents a wasted opportunity.

The Alliance Party was extremely unhappy with the legislation that was passed in the Chamber last spring. The delay in the parties in the Executive reaching agreement resulted in a curtailment of the normal legislative process to allow the legislation to be rushed through.

My party supported a reduction to 15 rather than 11 councils because that number struck a better balance between local representation and the need for efficient services. Some of the council pairings, such as Fermanagh with Omagh rather than with Dungannon, did not make sense.

The terms of reference for the Boundaries Commissioner were too narrow, and the Alliance Party could have anticipated many of the problems that have since emerged. However, as far as the legislation is concerned, that ship has sailed. The Assembly followed the proper process, and the DUP and Sinn Féin voted through the tabled amendments. Although I disagree with what they did, that is their prerogative, and I respect their ability to do that in the Chamber. That is democracy, and the Assembly must now move on.

The several anomalies that have emerged in the system clearly existed last spring; none of them is new. We knew that the pairing of Fermanagh and Omagh would be problematic, as would the establishment of a single council area running from Saintfield to Crossmaglen, which makes no sense. We knew what would happen in Lisburn and Castlereagh, and that

Belfast's council area would be too small to enable it to grow and punch above, rather than below, its weight as a city and as a driver of the regional economy. All the problems that were known about last spring have been confirmed, because nothing new has been brought to the table.

I could criticise the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner for the way in which he interpreted his mandate and the scale of some of his modifications to external ward boundaries or even to internal ward boundaries. However, the proposers of the motion have not gone down that route. They have not engaged in technical discussions about what happens at a local level, which is the meat and drink of what the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner should be doing.

My only conclusion is that the motion is, in effect, a retrospective whinge about legislation that was passed by the Assembly last year. I agree with the complaints being made: it is not productive to cry over spilt milk, especially if we are not proposing to do anything about the matter.

I will make two comments on the issue of a shared future. There has been a lot of talk about governance. I want to stress that, although we can design all the fancy formulas in the world, nothing will get us away from the fact that the only way to build and sustain a shared future is through building trust and co-operation between people. For example, in North Down Borough Council, we rely on a majoritarian vote; however, we very rarely go down that avenue. There is a culture of trust and of working together among the parties in that council. Establishing that culture throughout Northern Ireland is what we aspire to.

I hear what the Ulster Unionists are saying about their commitment to a shared future in Belfast. I would like it if, when winding on the motion, they would give the House a commitment that a shared future is of genuine concern to them. If the proposed new boundaries create a situation in which Belfast happens to go nationalist, I hope that we will not see a battle emerge between unionists over who lost Belfast. That is the essence of sectarianism, not the essence of a shared future.

**The Minister of the Environment (Mr S Wilson):** When I first read the motion, I, too —

**Mr Beggs:** Will the Minister give way?

**The Minister of the Environment:** Give me a chance to start.

**Mr Speaker:** Do you want to make a point of order, or are you asking the Minister to give way?

**Mr Beggs:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Before making a statement, do the Minister and any other

Members who also serve as councillors not have to declare that fact?

**Mr Speaker:** If any Member or Minister wishes, for whatever reason, to declare an interest, it is up to the Member or Minister to do that.

**The Minister of the Environment:** I think that we are stooping to the depths of pettiness, something for which the Member for East Antrim is known. Anyone in the House who does not know that I am a councillor on Belfast City Council must be suffering from Alzheimer's disease, given that the Member who sits in that corner and who made the point reminds me of it every Question Time. However, if it pleases the Member, I will state it: Mr Speaker, I wish to declare an interest in so far as I am a member of Belfast City Council. I hope that the Member is satisfied; he will probably again remind me of that fact on Tuesday of next week.

**Mr Weir:** Will the Minister give way?

**The Minister of the Environment:** I suppose that it will fill the time.

**Mr Weir:** Just in case the Member decides to report me to the Committee on Standards and Privileges or some such body, I will state that I omitted to mention that I am a member of North Down Borough Council.

**The Minister of the Environment:** It is confession time now, Mr Speaker.

As many other Members have mused, when I first read the motion, I, too, wondered what its purpose was. I thought that the motion was, perhaps, designed to have a go at the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner, given that it states:

“this Assembly expresses its concern over the implications for strong, accountable local government and a shared future, in light of the Revised Recommendations Report of the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner.”

I thought that we would hear some comments about the report and about what the commissioner had done. Yet the Member who proposed the motion had hardly risen to his feet when he said that he did not wish to criticise the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner. We have to then ask why the man is even mentioned in the motion. That is an example of the usual hand wringing that we expect from the Member for East Antrim.

3.00 pm

The Member for South Belfast Dr McDonnell went even further. He said that he did not wish to criticise the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner, yet he proceeded to say that that man had ignored local democracy, that he had been told where to go and what to do and that he had ridden roughshod over the views of the Member's constituents. If that is not criticism, I

would not like to be criticised by the Member for South Belfast.

The implication was that the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner must have been told what to do, where to go and how to do his job by the Minister. I wrote to the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner telling him of his appointment. Since that day, we have not spoken to each other; he has jealously guarded his independence, and I have respected his independence. That is the way it has to be. He was not told where to go or what to do, and what he has done and how he has interpreted the rules has been entirely his job and his responsibility.

**Dr McDonnell:** Does the Minister agree that the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner was given very tight instructions that all or most of Castlereagh Borough Council had to be amalgamated with Lisburn City Council, whether that made sense or not?

**The Minister of the Environment:** I will come to the instructions for the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner in a moment. The rules that were laid down were agreed by the House, and when I come to talk about the rules, I shall demonstrate that he did have discretion.

Major changes to boundaries were not defined. However, given that the Executive and Assembly had decided that there would be 11 local councils that would cover the boundaries of a certain number of existing councils, the Boundaries Commissioner had to work inside certain parameters in order to respect the democratic wishes of the Assembly. He could not subvert the wish of the Assembly to have 11 councils to encompass, approximately, the areas that had been agreed. That was the circumscription and the democratic parameter within which he had to work.

Several Members, including Mr McClarty, said that the debate may be the last chance for change. I see nothing in the motion that recommends that any change should be made. The motion includes no instruction to the Minister, there is no demand from the Assembly, and no changes are recommended.

However, the Members who proposed the motion mistakenly think that it will be a mechanism to change what they see as the wrong decisions of the past. If those Members wanted change, perhaps they should have made some recommendations in the motion. If they are so incompetent in drawing up a motion, perhaps they have only themselves to blame for what happened in the past and for the votes that were taken in the past.

**Mr B McCrea:** Will the Minister give way?

**The Minister of the Environment:** No; I have already given way, and I want to get on to other issues.

The Member will have a chance to speak when he makes his winding-up speech.

There seems to have been general criticism of the Boundaries Commissioner's recommendations for Belfast: he has been criticised over whether Dundonald or Rathcoole should have been part of Belfast City Council; whether Belfast will become a nationalist city; and whether local identity has been ignored. The Members of the party that mostly made that criticism have had every opportunity to make recommendations and to argue their case to the Boundaries Commissioner.

When they went to the Boundaries Commissioner, members of that party contradicted their own colleagues; as was pointed out, councillors from Castlereagh Borough Council said one thing, while the Mayor of Lisburn said the total opposite.

I shall give the House an idea of the quality of evidence that was given by members of the party that is now so concerned with Belfast's boundaries. Some of them told us that they had spoken to taxi drivers who never took anyone from Dundonald to Lisburn. I do not believe that that was the issue under discussion. Indeed, it shows the confusion that exists about the question of identity.

Although he did not use the word on that occasion, another member of that party swore that he had been "inundated" — I am sure that Members will be aware about whom I am talking when I use that term — by representations from east and west Belfast. When asked whether he had any evidence of those representations, he replied: "Oh yes, people have spoken to me." What about a petition? He said that those people wanted him to present a petition, but he told them: "It is OK, because I am going to the Assembly." His party's adviser then intervened and said that it was already organising petitions, not realising, of course, that, as the assistant boundaries commissioner had to point out, the deadline had passed.

If that party is serious about saving Belfast, one would have thought that it would organise itself a little better. I suspect that, perhaps, the motion is not about change or criticism, but about covering up the party's own incompetence and inability to make, as the commissioner said, a cogent case.

There has been criticism of the Boundaries Commissioner's ability to take local identity into consideration, but, although the Boundaries Commissioner was given instructions, problems arose. The first is what is meant by local identity. Is it something that is shared by those who gave evidence? Is local identity measured by where people shop or by what football team they support?

I noticed in the evidence that one Ulster Unionist Party member said that he could not find anyone in Dundonald who supported Lisburn Distillery Football



Club. End of story. His argument was, therefore, that Dundonald should not be included with Lisburn and Castlereagh. Is that how the Boundaries Commissioner should make a decision on local identity? There would have been much more criticism of the report had it recommended that, because no Lisburn Distillery supporter could be found there, Dundonald must remain part of Belfast. He would have made a laughing stock of himself.

That is the sort of problem that we get into when we start to talk about local identity. How is it measured? Does local identity mean different things to different people? When the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) carried out its initial report into the review of public administration (RPA), one matter that it considered was how to measure local identity. The report said that often people do not identify with their local council; sometimes they identify with their street, estate, town or townland instead. That uncertainty and difficulty in defining local identity presented the commissioner with a problem.

I noted that the Member for East Antrim remarked that the commissioner said that, in creating a possible new mid-Antrim district council, local identity could not be considered alone. There were provisions in the instructions that the commissioner was given that allowed him to have discretion where it was felt that local identity should be taken into consideration.

The commissioner could not split townlands unless he considered it unavoidable, but of course he had the opportunity to split townlands in areas where he identified possible local identities. As far as practical, he had to ensure that a district was not wholly or substantially severed by a boundary of another district. Again, there was enough discretion to allow him to make considerations about local identity.

The commissioner had to ensure that wards should, as far as was practical, have the same number of electors. However, again, the commissioner was allowed to exercise discretion if people made strong arguments to be part of a particular ward. Therefore, I reject the argument that instructions were so tightly worded that the commissioner was unable to exercise discretion or to consider the subjective idea of local identity.

Many other arguments that have been made have focused on the shape and number of local councils, and what will happen to them in future. The House has been told that no savings have been made to date. Some Members might not have noticed, but the councils have not yet been reorganised. Therefore, it is difficult to measure savings. Mr Gallagher, whose science and politics are always behind the times, said that he was concerned about the threshold.

**Mr Speaker:** The Minister should bring his remarks to a close.

**The Minister of the Environment:** If he had spoken to his party colleagues, he would have found out about that. We must wait until the final decisions are made, after which the Assembly will discuss the matter.

**Mr Speaker:** The Minister's time is up.

**The Minister of the Environment:** In future, I want strong local government under reorganised boundaries with reorganised powers.

**Mr B McCrea:** I declare an interest as a councillor for Lisburn City Council. Today is a grave and sorry day. It is a sad day for democracy when two sectarian parties, aided by the fig leaf of the Alliance Party, conspire to destroy the democratic future of Northern Ireland.

One benefit of the Chamber is that everything that is said here is recorded. No amount of ridicule, fairy stories, and Members' claims of having been misunderstood will erase what is written in black and white. In the future, Members will consider this debate and will assess the reasons for the failure of our shared future. Members will decry the situation and, as Mr Farry said, will ask what happened to Belfast, to our local towns and to our local democracy. The people of Northern Ireland will point the finger at the parties opposite. You have failed, ladies and gentlemen. You have failed to protect all that is good about Northern Ireland. I was disappointed —

**The Minister of the Environment:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I do not think that you have failed. The Member should, perhaps, learn some parliamentary decorum and not blame you for what you have not done. *[Laughter.]*

**Mr Speaker:** That is not an appropriate point of order.

**Mr B McCrea:** I was surprised and disappointed by Mr Wilson because when he wants a reasonable debate, he is normally prepared to take an intervention from me and to argue the points. Perhaps he was unable to argue the point today and, therefore, did not take an intervention. He raised certain points on which he asked me to comment. I will now respond. When he took issue with my colleague Mr Beggs for criticising — or not criticising — the commissioner, he missed the point completely.

Members to my right pointed out that when terms and conditions are tightly set, only one or two issues can be concluded. I will make the point time and again that if we are serious about building a shared future, taking sectarianism out of politics, and building the future that the Alliance Party claims to want, we must build trust. The current proposals are not the right way to go about that.



Members can make jibes, fight petty little battles and score points on these issues, but at end of the day, it will be writ large: "Who did this deed?" The answer will be the DUP and Sinn Féin, and they were warned. Frankly, I am surprised by the stance of the Alliance Party.

**Mr Gallagher:** The Member mentioned the Alliance Party. Does he agree with me that at a time when that party should stand up for principles such as inclusion and fairness, it appears to be prepared to set them aside in the hope of taking any crumbs that are on offer from the grand alliance?

**Mr B McCrea:** I could not possibly say what has just been said, but the Member makes a fair point. I was about to come to the point that was highlighted by Mr Gallagher —

**Mr Ford:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr B McCrea:** If your contribution is short.

**Mr Ford:** It will be shorter than yours, anyway. Does the Member accept that there is a difference between the constructive role that the Alliance Party played when engaging in debate on the Local Government (Boundaries) Bill, and simply having a rant today, which has no effect whatsoever, other than to allow certain people to let off steam?

**Some Members:** Hear, hear.

**Mr B McCrea:** I normally give way to Members when they have something useful to contribute. I see that I made a mistake in the case of Mr Ford.

I have witnessed the steady, long-term decline of the Alliance Party's stance on sectarianism and a shared future. That party has sold out for the prospect of being offered the post of Minister of justice, and now all that its members want to do is to be friends with the two big boys in Parliament. That is what this is all about.

**Mr Ford:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr B McCrea:** No; you have had your chance. This is about party-political posturing in order to gain political advantage. It is a disgrace, a shame and a travesty, and, frankly, I am astonished that that party would sink to that. Mr Farry even said that he agreed with many of the points that have been made, but that he would not vote for the motion.

**Mr Farry:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr B McCrea:** No, I will not give way, because members of that party have had enough opportunities to speak. I will address a question that the Minister of the Environment, Mr Wilson, asked: what is the point of this debate? Mr McKay said much the same thing — I think he used the word "nonsense". The question that I wanted to ask in an intervention to the Minister concerned whether any Minister is bound by the outcome of any debates in the Chamber. Is there anything other than — *[Interruption.]*

I am glad that Mr Weir has discovered his voice. If he wishes to make an intervention, I will allow him to do so.

**Mr Weir:** I will ask the Member two questions. First, what is the motion calling for? How can it bind the Minister when it does not actually call for anything? Secondly, which of his colleagues on Lisburn City Council does the Member agree with, Mr Crawford or Mr Dillon, who made contradictory submissions to the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner?

**Mr B McCrea:** For the record, I agree with my party's position. Individuals may make individual submissions. The reason that the motion was brought to the House was to hold people to account, to put it on record that things are not going the way that we wish to see them go, and that the current proposals are not a good way to build a future.

Parties will rely on their mandates, but in five, 10, 15 or 25 years from now, they will have to look back. Mr Wilson spoke about Members who reuse phrases; I will use one of which I am fond: people will rue the day when they put the DUP and Sinn Féin in charge of our democratic process. That is the real travesty, and the truth will out.

I have said in this House before that I may be in a minority of one but that the truth is still the truth. Let us listen to common sense. It beggars belief that some Members say that Castlereagh is not part of Belfast but is part of Lisburn. That is nonsense. As a member of the Northern Ireland Policing Board, I have discovered that the police stations in Dromara and Whitehead are to close. Somehow, when the command structure was being drawn up, those stations were connected. That sort of fallacy will lead us nowhere; it brings places such as this into disrepute.

The Assembly must start to examine how it works genuinely with people and takes on board the views of Members. It must actively work with people and not against them for petty, party political progress reasons. This is not the way forward for Northern Ireland. I applaud my colleagues to my left and I appreciate the support of Members to my right who will stand up and shout out loud that we will not be dictated to by the massed, dictatorial voices of the DUP/Sinn Féin axis. *[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order.

**Mr B McCrea:** I conclude by saying that when it comes to the people who are prepared to tell it how it is — the people who can point things out in black and white, as Mr Gallagher has done — those issues will not be sorted out through some sort of back room deal. They will be resolved only if we can come together as fellow Members and seek to build a future and deliver services in the most effective, efficient and acceptable

way for all the people of Northern Ireland. That is the challenge that I put forward.

To the Members who say that the motion is nonsense, I say: I do not give you the liberty to tell me that what I think is important is not important. If I wish to table a motion on behalf of my party, I will do so. You will not silence us. This is a travesty; this is wrong; and you are mistaken. The future will prove us correct.

*Question put.*

*The Assembly divided: Ayes 24; Noes 51.*

#### AYES

*Mr Armstrong, Mr Attwood, Mr Beggs, Mr D Bradley, Mrs M Bradley, Mr P J Bradley, Mr Burns, Mr Cobain, Rev Dr Robert Coulter, Mr Cree, Mr Elliott, Mr Gallagher, Mrs Hanna, Mrs D Kelly, Mr McCallister, Mr McClarty, Mr B McCrea, Dr McDonnell, Mr McFarland, Mr McGlone, Mr O'Loan, Mr P Ramsey, Mr K Robinson, Mr Savage.*

*Tellers for the Ayes: Mr McCallister and Mr McClarty.*

#### NOES

*Mr Boylan, Mr Brady, Mr Bresland, Lord Browne, Mr Buchanan, Mr Butler, Mr T Clarke, Mr W Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Doherty, Mr Easton, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Gildernew, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Irwin, Mrs Long, Mr P Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Dr W McCrea, Mrs McGill, Miss McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McQuillan, Mr Molloy, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Murphy, Mr Neeson, Mr Newton, Ms Ni Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Paisley Jnr, Mr Poots, Ms S Ramsey, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Shannon, Mr Simpson, Mr Spratt, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr S Wilson.*

*Tellers for the Noes: Mr Shannon and Mr Spratt.*

*Question accordingly negatived.*

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

## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

### Children Missing from Care

**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 15 minutes.

*The following motion stood in the Order Paper:*

That this Assembly notes with concern the failure of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to monitor and maintain baseline figures relating to the number of children who go missing from care and the number of such incidents per child; demands action to address the lack of access to specialist therapeutic support services for these children across all Health and Social Care Trust areas; recognises the pressure on police resources and time in retrieving these children; calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to place greater emphasis on the needs of missing children and to ensure that his Department accurately accounts for these children in its role as corporate parent; and provides a clear strategy and resources to address the reasons for these children going missing and the risks to which they are exposed during their absence. — *[Miss McIlveen.]*

**Miss McIlveen:** In light of the decision by the Minister of Health not to be present this afternoon, and due to the seriousness of this motion and the fact that there will be no ministerial response, unfortunately and reluctantly I am not moving the motion.

*Motion not moved.*

**Mr Ford:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. We are now in the ridiculous position in which the Assembly not only has no Executive or legislative business today but two serious motions under private Members' business have had to be withdrawn, yet we have two junior Ministers who are supposed to have responsibility for children, and we are supposed to have a joined-up Executive. Will you please discuss with the Speaker and your colleagues whether it is possible to ensure that when Ministers cannot be present for good reasons, the business of the House can still take place?

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** It is up to Members to decide whether they wish to withdraw motions. As the Member will know, the Speaker has already been made aware of the situation.

*Motion made:*

That the Assembly do now adjourn — [*Mr Deputy Speaker.*]

## **ADJOURNMENT**

### **Non-acute Hospital Provision in Armagh City**

**Mr D Bradley:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Once again, in light of the absence of the Minister of Health, and since the Adjournment debate pertains to the closure of hospitals in the Newry and Armagh constituency, I will await a date when the Minister will be present before I speak to my Adjournment topic. Therefore, it will not be happening today.

*Adjourned at 3.38 pm.*





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# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Tuesday 5 May 2009

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

*Members observed two minutes' silence.*

## ASSEMBLY BUSINESS

**Mr Speaker:** During the sitting on Tuesday 28 April, Mr Poots, Dr McCrea and Mr Paul Maskey raised points of order that related to the convention on questions following ministerial statements. Before I refer to that convention, I will address a number of issues.

I have considered the remarks that were made to the Deputy Speaker by the Members concerned, and I must tell the House that I am disappointed by the manner and the nature of the challenges to which the Deputy Speaker was subjected. Let the House be in no doubt — I place a clear warning on the record today — that challenges to the authority and impartiality of the Chair will not be tolerated under any circumstances. If Members have any doubt about the seriousness of the matter, I refer them to page 220 of 'Erskine May'.

On the matter of calling Members to speak, the authority of the Speaker and Deputy Speakers is as clear in this House as it is in other places. Members must be in no doubt that the Speaker's decision to call or decline to call a Member to speak is not open to challenge. Those matters are also dealt with on page 220 of 'Erskine May' and could not be any clearer. Points of order of that nature will be considered a direct challenge to the authority of the Chair and will not be permitted.

On 26 January this year, I reminded the House that references should not be made to the Clerks of the Assembly. In relation to the remarks in question that were made by Mr Poots and Dr McCrea, I again remind the House of that ruling.

Turning to the convention on questions following ministerial statements, I would simply draw Members' attention to pages 34 and 35 of the 'Assembly Companion', where it is set out in very clear terms. Those terms should address the points raised by Members last Tuesday. I ask Members to study the companion, to reflect on all my remarks made today in

the House, and, in particular, to bear in mind that the decision on whether or not to call a Member to speak rests at all times with the Chair.

I caution the House that I do not intend to take points of order on any of the matters on which I have ruled this morning. If Members wish to raise points of order on any of the rulings that I made this morning, I will be extremely happy to talk to them outside the Chamber. If Members want to raise other points of order on the rulings that I made this morning, I will be happy to talk to them outside the Chamber as well. I hope that this morning I have made myself absolutely clear on the authority and impartiality of the Chair.

**Dr W McCrea:** Mr Speaker, on a point of order —

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I have made it absolutely clear that I am not taking any points of order on the issue on which I ruled this morning. If a Member has a genuine point of order on another issue, I am happy to take it.

## MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

### British-Irish Council Environment Sectoral Meeting

**Mr Speaker:** I have received notice from the Minister of the Environment that he wishes to make a statement on the British-Irish Council (BIC) environment sectoral format meeting.

**The Minister of the Environment (Mr S Wilson):** I am tempted to ask for a point of order, Mr Speaker, on your last ruling before I make this statement, but I will desist.

Mr Speaker, in compliance with the requirements of section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and on behalf of Minister Murphy and myself, I wish to make the following report on the ninth meeting of the British-Irish Council environment sectoral format meeting that was hosted by the Jersey Government in Mont Orgueil castle, Jersey, on 17 April 2009. The report has been agreed with Minister Conor Murphy, who also attended.

The UK Government were represented by Lord Hunt of Kings Heath, Minister for Sustainable Development and Energy Innovation and Deputy Leader of the House of Lords, who chaired the meeting. I was accompanied by Conor Murphy MP MLA, Minister for Regional Development, to represent the Northern Ireland Executive. The Irish Government were represented by Michael Kitt TD, Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. Jersey was represented by Senator Freddie Cohen, Minister for Planning and Environment. Guernsey was represented by Deputy Peter Sirett, Minister for the Environment Department. The Welsh Assembly Government were represented by Jane Davidson, AM, Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing. Scottish Ministers were represented by Stewart Stevenson MSP, Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change; and the Isle of Man by John Shimmin MHK, Minister for Local Government and Environment.

Ministers reflected briefly on the creation of a new BIC work stream, which will focus on energy. Ministers understood the need to ensure that the two work streams remained separate entities — marine energy and grid infrastructure — but recognised the need for each work stream to be kept abreast of developments in the other so that impacts and synergies could be identified. Professor John Mitchell from the Met Office Hadley Centre gave a presentation updating the group on current climate change science.

The group was also given an update on the UK climate projections ahead of this summer's launch of the sixth generation of climate scenarios. The

remainder of the discussion focused on what the group could do collectively to support the adaptation programme and how Administrations could best use the data to support their own programmes on adaptation. Member Administrations agreed that there should be a workshop on climate change in the autumn.

Ireland indicated that officials from the Irish and Manx Governments are close to completing a revised joint paper on Sellafield and radioactive waste. That paper will address current operations at Sellafield, their safety, the final disposal of radioactive waste and the control of environmental discharges. It is expected that the paper will be ready for discussion at the next ministerial-level meeting.

Members considered update papers on the Fishing for Litter initiative and from the subgroup on integrated coastal zone management. It was agreed that marine will be the theme for the 2010 ministerial meeting. To that end, Ministers were provided with a paper setting out where Administrations were able to work together on marine issues in the past. The paper put marine issues into context and reflected on the mechanisms for outputs. The group discussed how best to work together over the next 12 months and agreed a set of actions that will be reviewed in 2010 as part of the work plan for that ministerial meeting. Ministers also discussed and agreed the themes for the 2011 and 2012 meetings, which will be waste and biodiversity respectively.

The meeting concluded that the adaptation work programme will continue and that further updates will be given next year. There will be a review of the work programme on marine to include a progress report on Fishing for Litter. Ireland will submit the joint discussion paper on Sellafield and radioactive waste, and there will be a paper on waste that will outline areas for co-operation in preparation for a waste-themed event in 2011.

Finally, Ministers welcomed and noted the tenth ministerial meeting of the BIC, which will take place in London in 2010.

**Mr W Clarke:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. Will he clarify whether MLAs, particularly those from the east coast, will have an opportunity to provide input into the discussion document on Sellafield?

**The Minister of the Environment:** As the Member will know, power stations and the disposal of nuclear waste are reserved matters. However, the Department of the Environment provides input into the monitoring of radioactive waste and is responsible for legislating and regulating on matters relating to the management of radioactive waste, which includes participation in the Managing Radioactive Waste Safely programme. Therefore, MLAs have opportunities to provide input through questions and debates in the Assembly and

through issues raised at the Committee for the Environment, where departmental officials are brought along to talk about the Managing Radioactive Waste Safely programme. The programme was initiated by the UK Government in 2001. I appreciate what the Member is saying because I know that this is an issue in his constituency. The Department's participation in the programme recognises Northern Ireland's interests in ensuring that the most appropriate and safest way forward to deal with the UK's legacy of higher activity and long-lived nuclear waste is identified.

The Department has an input into the Radioactivity in Food and the Environment report, which is published annually and contains input from all of the environment agencies across the United Kingdom. In order to produce that report, the eating habits of 800 people who live in Northern Ireland are monitored and the level of radioactivity in their food is measured. To date, those surveys have shown that less than 0.5% of the radioactivity that people receive comes from sources in the Irish Sea. In fact, 50% of the radioactivity to which we are subjected comes from household items. Extensive monitoring, to which the Department has input, is ongoing, and, of course, Members can contribute to that input through activities in the Assembly

10.45 am

**Mr P Ramsey:** The Minister referred to the new work programme that will focus primarily on energy. In light of the UK Government's target that all energy — the main uses of which are electricity, space heating and transport — should come from renewable sources by 2020, will the Minister outline any plans that his Department has to increase radically the amount of renewable energy generation to be used for space heating and transport by then?

**The Minister of the Environment:** My Department is not responsible for either transport or space heating, and I do not wish to delve into matters for which the Minister for Regional Development and the Minister for Social Development are responsible. However, there are two elements in the Department of the Environment's role in meeting our renewable energy obligations.

First, the Department has a role to play in planning for wind energy generation. Given the planning applications that we have already received under PPS 18, we are well ahead of our target, and the applications that have already been granted will enable us to meet the targets that have been set for 2012.

Secondly, and this matter was touched on in the BIC meeting, the Department has a role to play in offshore energy generation, whether through wind or tidal power. The Member will be aware that under the UK's Marine and Coastal Access Bill and the Northern Ireland marine Bill, which will be brought forward to

the Assembly [*Interruption.*] we will consider how planning policies can be put in place to ensure that there is a framework that allows the development of those sources of renewable energy. Although it is not my Department's responsibility — it is DETI's responsibility here — there is considerable scope for harnessing the power of the sea and offshore wind, and my Department is responsible for developing the planning policies that will enable that to happen.

**Mr Speaker:** I remind Members to check that their mobile phones are switched off or are at least in silent mode.

**Mr Ford:** I continue the point on climate change. The Minister's statement referred to the fact that much of the discussion at the BIC meeting focused on support for the adaptation programme. Can he inform the House whether the other Administrations mentioned remediation and cutting carbon emissions, or was that his viewpoint on the matter?

**The Minister of the Environment:** If the Member had listened to my statement, he would have heard that it was agreed by me and the Minister for Regional Development; it is not my personal take on the BIC meeting. Furthermore, I do not think that the Member would expect any statement from me to the Assembly simply to reflect my personal opinion. Indeed, at the end of my statement, I summarised the points made and agreed by Ministers: the meeting concluded that the adaptation programme will continue and that further updates will be given next year. There will be a review of the work programme on marine, as agreed at the meeting. Ireland will submit a paper for joint discussion on Sellafield, and there will be a paper on waste that outlines areas for co-operation. Those were the issues that were discussed and the agreements that were made.

**Mr Boylan:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh ráiteas an Aire.

I welcome the Minister's statement. In the light of the announcement that there will be a workshop on climate change in the autumn, what input will the Minister commit to make on behalf of the North of Ireland and the Assembly? Go raibh maith agat.

**The Minister of the Environment:** The terms under which the workshop will work have not yet been agreed. However, I will receive relevant briefings and papers from my departmental officials. Given that it is a workshop, I am not sure whether there will be any requirement for the Executive to agree those papers — I think that it is only the papers for the British-Irish Council meeting that the Executive agree. Considering that we are not yet aware of the agenda for that workshop, I cannot give a conclusive answer to the Member as to what Northern Ireland's input will be.

**Mr Beggs:** In his statement, the Minister mentioned different forms of energy and the importance of having a suitable infrastructure. During the discussion, was there wide recognition of the importance of developing an electricity infrastructure so that renewable energy generation could be developed? Was electricity production, which is a significant issue, discussed in detail and recognised? Furthermore, were the opportunities for tidal power that exist around the Northern Ireland coastline discussed?

**The Minister of the Environment:** The Member is right. All Administrations — not only those in the United Kingdom, but that in the Irish Republic — need to look at the importance of having a suitable infrastructure. That matter was discussed. This is another area in which there is probably an overlap between the Department of the Environment and DETI, but discussions were held on the key issue of having a grid infrastructure that could link up the various renewable energy projects — tidal projects in Scotland or wind-power projects off the coast of England and Wales or, eventually, that of Northern Ireland — so that we could have better opportunities to use renewable energy.

The Member will know that one of my concerns about the reliance on wind energy has been and continues to be its requirement for a considerable back-up of conventional energy. That is because the wind may be blowing in one place but not where the energy is needed. Therefore, a strong grid infrastructure is required so that we can tap into renewable energy that might have been generated in other parts of the United Kingdom, including offshore in other parts of the United Kingdom.

During the discussion on the issue, the point was made that such an infrastructure will not come cheaply. The investment in the grid infrastructure will be quite expensive, and that will be reflected in energy prices.

**Mr Dallat:** Given that the Minister's statement is light in content and considering that the meeting took place on the beautiful island of Jersey, did he have an opportunity to wander around the island and pick up some good ideas on how we can clean up our environment and protect our listed buildings — that is, buildings of architectural merit that get knocked down?

**The Minister of the Environment:** I am not sure what relevance that question has to the statement. However, we had an opportunity to see round the island. I am glad that the Member asked that question, because it gives me the opportunity to put on record that the Jersey Government were hospitable and that they treated us well. One morning, we left the hotel to go to the castle where the meeting was being held.

**Mr Kennedy:** As one does.

**The Minister of the Environment:** As one does, of course. We were driven in Daimler motor cars around the perimeter of the island. I enjoyed that part.

I always like to exchange views on climate change and global warming, so I sought out the professor from the Met Office, who is originally from Downpatrick. I had the good fortune to travel in the car with him and the Environment Minister from the Welsh Assembly Government, and we had an extensive discussion on the impact of carbon on climate change. I must say that the irony of driving around Jersey in a car that does about eight miles to the gallon talking about carbon output and climate change seemed to be lost on my two travelling companions. Nevertheless, it was an enjoyable experience.

The Member may be interested to know that one of the issues that we discussed was what could be done to address the big problem of sea litter. The Welsh Minister contends that it is a bigger problem for her than it is for us because the tidal movements are such that a great deal of sea litter is carried onto Welsh beaches. The beaches in Jersey were impeccable, although I must emphasise that I saw them from afar; I did not get the opportunity to walk on them. Of course, although we try to deal with sea litter, once it comes ashore it becomes the responsibility of local councils. Indeed, in some places, it can be a considerable problem.



## MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

### Swine Flu

**Mr Speaker:** I have received notice from the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety that he wishes to make a statement on the position of the swine flu outbreak.

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr McGimpsey):** I will provide a further update on the influenza AH1N1 virus, or swine flu as it is more commonly known. Since my statement to the Assembly last week, there has been a number of new developments of which I would like to make Members aware. Many countries have confirmed cases of the swine flu virus, but outside Mexico and the United States the numbers of affected individuals remain low. As a consequence, the World Health Organization pandemic alert level remains at level 5. That indicates the increasing likelihood of a pandemic, but does not indicate, I must stress, that one is inevitable.

In the UK, 27 cases have now been confirmed, and in the Republic of Ireland one case has been confirmed. In Northern Ireland, there are no confirmed cases, and test results are pending for four individuals.

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

The lack of information and the uncertainty about the situation in Mexico makes it difficult to establish exactly what the impact of the virus will be. During previous pandemics, such as the Spanish flu in 1918, it appears that the rate of infection abated over the summer, with an increase in cases over the winter. The lower summer rate of infection was also true of the Asian flu and Hong Kong flu in the 1950s and 1960s. We must, therefore, be on our guard and prepare for a potential further wave of the swine flu virus in the autumn, which may be more widespread.

It is also important that we use our stock of antiviral drugs carefully so that the public will be protected during the winter months. Preparations are under way, for example, to increase our stockpiles of antiviral drugs, and I will return to that issue in a moment.

We must take some reassurance from the fact that, to date, anyone who has contracted the virus outside Mexico has had a relatively mild flu, similar to the seasonal flu. In addition, it appears that swine flu responds well to treatment with antiviral drugs, and, in fact, some patients have recovered without antiviral treatment.

That does not mean that we will be complacent. No one can say for certain how the virus may change or if the situation will worsen. We have been planning for a potential pandemic for a number of years, and this country remains among one of the best prepared in the world.

My officials and staff in the Public Health Agency and the health and social care sector have been working tirelessly over the past week to ensure that there is robust surveillance and appropriate testing of individuals at risk. They have also put measures in place to ensure the immediate availability of antiviral medications to those who may need them. However, I reassure Members that we have no confirmed cases and are well prepared for any cases that may emerge.

*11.00 am*

I will now set out some of the measures that I have put in place. With regard to the production of a vaccine, the four UK Health Departments have sleeping contracts in place with manufacturers. That arrangement reserves our place in the global queue should production of a pandemic-specific vaccine become necessary. The contracts ensure that manufacturers reserve production capacity for the UK should a vaccine be needed. Given that it will take several months before a vaccine becomes available, we will, in the interim, need to ensure that we have adequate supplies of the antiviral medication that is proving effective in treating the virus.

We have a stock of antiviral drugs that will cover half the population, and steps are in place to increase that stock so that there will be sufficient antivirals to treat up to 80% of the population. No previous pandemic has been known to affect more than one third of the population. We have placed supplies of the antiviral medications in hospitals and in GP out-of-hours centres. In addition, measures are in place to ensure that an adequate supply of antiviral medication will be available in community pharmacies.

We know that the complications of influenza, particularly pneumonia, may require treatment with antibiotics. Although it is expected that antibiotics will be needed for only a small proportion of individuals who may develop swine flu, it is important that there are adequate supplies, and work is, therefore, under way to increase supplies of antibiotics.

The helpline that we set up in Northern Ireland has played a most important role in providing advice to anyone who has concerns. Since it was established last Thursday, around 800 people have called the helpline on 0800 0514 142. Information on swine flu is also available from the UK swine flu information line on 0800 1 513 513.

In addition to the range of measures that I have outlined, I emphasise once again the most important message, which is that members of the Northern Ireland public should follow good hygiene practices. Those include regular hand washing, using a clean tissue to cover mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing, and remaining at home if people develop flu-like symptoms. Those are simple, highly effective

steps that every individual can take and that will make a difference. That is why those messages have been reinforced in advertisements running on television and radio. A leaflet providing further advice and information for the public will be delivered to homes across Northern Ireland from the end of this week.

I continue to receive full and detailed briefings on the situation as it develops. I also have regular discussions with ministerial colleagues in other UK Administrations and in the Republic of Ireland. That has included daily meetings of COBRA, which is activated only in cases of national emergency or crisis, or during events abroad that have major implications for the UK. Those meetings, which I attend, are chaired by Alan Johnston, Secretary of State for Health in England, and the Health Ministers for Wales and Scotland participate also.

I assure Members that this issue is being taken seriously by Governments, not just in Northern Ireland but across the world. Internationally, the World Health Organization is taking the lead in providing advice and information on the ever-changing situation. At national level, the situation is being managed through COBRA and the four home countries. Locally, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, the Public Health Agency and the health and social care service are in the lead. Daily updates on the situation are issued to the media and to all Assembly Members. I will, of course, report again to the Assembly if there are significant changes in the current situation. In the meantime, Members can remain assured that we have the necessary capability to respond to the swine flu virus. The Health Service is well prepared, and I thank staff in the service for the commitment, support and dedication that they have demonstrated in the face of a potential pandemic.

**The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mrs O'Neill):** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement to the House and for coming to the Committee last Thursday to brief members. The Minister referred to four cases here and said that the results of those are pending. When are those test results due?

I would also like to ask the Minister about the use of the antiviral drug Tamiflu. In a previous statement, and at the Committee, the Minister told us that the flu is susceptible to treatment by that drug. He said that we have a sufficient stock of the drug and referred to the need to use that stock very carefully.

I had understood that the drug was given only to people who have flu-like symptoms and who may have been in contact with an infected person. However, over the weekend, there were media reports about a confirmed case of the flu at a school in London. The school was

closed as a result, and reports suggested that the 1,200 children at the school had all been treated with the Tamiflu antiviral drug as a precaution. Will the Minister clarify whether that drug has preventative qualities or whether it can be used only to treat symptoms?

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The preventative measure comes from a vaccine that is yet to be developed. Isolation of the virus seed will allow the manufacturers to proceed with the development of that vaccine. Discussions in that regard are ongoing between COBRA and the manufacturers.

It is true that we need to be careful with our stocks of Tamiflu and other antiviral drugs. The stock is enough to cover 50% of the population, and that will rise to 80% cover. However, we are still using the regular supply of antiviral drugs and are not yet dipping into the stock. If an individual tests positive for the flu, all the contacts that that individual might have made are treated with the antiviral drugs. That is done in an effort to contain the spread of the virus, because the UK is in a containment phase.

Four tests are being run in Northern Ireland, and such tests have been negative to date. The first response has been to issue Tamiflu to those people suspected of carrying the flu and to take specimens for testing. I cannot give an exact time frame for when the results of the four tests will come through, but it will be as soon as possible.

**Mr K Robinson:** I thank the Minister for his statement to the House. I note that he is giving daily updates to the media. The public will also be kept informed by the leaflets that will be delivered to every household, by adverts in newspapers, and so forth. Can the Minister assure the House that there is a co-ordinated and clearly recognised link between his Department and local media outlets so that accurate, up-to-date and factual information will be readily available to the general public in Northern Ireland? That will ensure that needless anxiety is avoided and that the focused response to the threat is clearly understood by everyone.

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** Yes; I can give that assurance. We have made every effort to keep everyone as well informed as possible. Public awareness and knowledge is a key defence in this situation. There are messages about hand hygiene and respiratory hygiene: people are being told to keep washing their hands, to use a tissue if they cough or sneeze, and to cough it, bin it and destroy it. Those messages are a very effective part of the containment phase. We will continue to brief the media on a daily basis and to share those briefings

with Assembly Members. I continually seek to provide updates when we have specific information to provide.

The battle is ongoing. The Spanish flu outbreak arrived during the spring in the form of mild flu symptoms. It abated during the summer and returned at its most destructive in the winter; that was its pattern. I am not saying that it will be the same with swine flu. Spanish flu was an avian virus, and swine flu is a mixture of avian, human and swine elements. However, it could follow the same pattern, and we are planning for that eventuality. We plan for the worst and hope for the best. We must do that, because come the autumn, we may be facing the second wave of the virus.

**Mrs Hanna:** I also thank the Minister for his update on the situation — it is much appreciated. I also thank him for all his hard work and that of colleagues in anticipation of the arrival of swine flu. The work on the vaccine is also very welcome. As the Minister said, who knows what will happen? The vaccine may be needed later.

What is the reaction of the Minister and his colleagues to the World Health Organization's statement that it is not, at present, considering a move to level 6, which is pandemic status?

**The Minister of Health, Social Security and Public Safety:** The response is international, national and local. The World Health Organization is responsible for the international response. It took us from level 3 to level 5 rapidly, and we have set responses as each of those levels is reached.

The important message that the World Health Organization gave is that, as yet, there will be no move to the pandemic level, which is level 6. However, that should not be interpreted to mean that we should be complacent. We must continue our preparations and be on our guard. Level 5 means that a pandemic is likely, but not inevitable. That is the current situation. The world's best expert scientists and virologists cannot be certain in their predictions. We deal only with probabilities and likelihoods.

**Mr McCarthy:** I also thank the Minister for his update to the Assembly on the situation with swine flu.

I have heard that we may be able to improve upon measures that were taken at our seaports and airports with the distribution of information leaflets and precautions. Will the Minister respond to that, so that visitors, on arrival in Northern Ireland, may be reminded of the dangers?

**The Minister of Health, Social Security and Public Safety:** I take Kieran McCarthy's point, and we have been responding to those concerns since early last week. For example, I was with Public Health Agency staff at Belfast International Airport who leafleted the passengers who were coming off planes. That is a

standard practice that also happens at George Best Belfast City Airport. I thank the management of both airports for their help and co-operation.

The same precaution is taken at seaports, where leaflets are distributed. It is an important precaution to take, just in case folk who arrive here do not understand the situation.

**Mr W Clarke:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The precautions against swine flu carry serious financial implications. Has the Minister discussed them with the Executive to secure the necessary resources? What is the shelf life of the vaccine?

**The Minister of Health, Social Security and Public Safety:** The shelf life of the vaccine is limited to one year because the virus mutates annually. That is certainly the case with the annual flu vaccine. Every year, we distribute hundreds of thousands of units of the flu vaccine. Any that are not used are destroyed, because the virus mutates. Viruses are very intelligent organisms and they mutate constantly and, therefore, vaccines must change.

As to the financial implications, the cost of purchasing the vaccine — when it is available — will be considerable for Northern Ireland. I do not want to put a figure on that today. Stockpiling antiviral drugs and antibiotics will also cost a great deal. Furthermore, the effort that we put into leafleting and expanding public awareness through advertising and the provision of information will result in extraordinary expenditure that has not been anticipated.

However, none of that matters as long as we are prepared properly and are ready for a pandemic, should it hit us. It is important that we do everything possible to ensure that the population does not come to harm.

11.15 am

**Mr Gardiner:** Like other Members, I thank the Minister for his swift action in bringing the issue to the House and to the Health Committee. In fact, he has moved so fast that he might quickly earn a reputation as the 'Action Man' for the health, welfare and good of the community in Northern Ireland.

Given that we are facing an epidemic, because people in other parts of the world are already suffering from swine flu, how will the Budget be affected if extra expenditure is being used to protect people?

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** Preparations are well under way. I do not want to put a figure on it; however, our share of the national budget for vaccines will have to be met. I have seen the figures, and considerable sums of money are involved in preparing a vaccine for UK-wide distribution. Our Barnett formula share will be considerable. The costs for the other measures are only

estimates at the moment. There will be budget implications, but I do not want to get into that. My officials are having ongoing discussions with the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) officials.

**Mr Dallat:** I also congratulate the Minister. I am sure that his performance in respect of the swine flu outbreak must have accounted for his high rating in the 'Rate Your Minister' feature in today's 'The Irish News'.

I am sure that the Minister will agree that complacency is a problem. Even this morning, I note that the DUP has not asked one question in the Assembly. What does the Minister propose to do over the next few months to ensure that complacency does not creep in and that, in fact, we reap the rewards in the autumn, as some people have predicted?

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and**

**Public Safety:** Complacency is one of our enemies in this process. There is a sudden scare, then nothing appears to be of serious consequence and people get complacent. However, we are always warning people not to be complacent about this issue. I have outlined the simple measures that the general public can take, such as hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene and self isolation at home if one has flu-like symptoms. Those are the key messages, and it is important to repeat those messages. I have to make sure that the health and social care system in Northern Ireland, for which I am responsible, is not complacent and that I keep this threat uppermost in our minds, because of the inherent danger of the population coming to harm if this outbreak of swine flu follows a Spanish-flu-type pattern.

**Ms S Ramsey:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Like other Members, I thank the Minister for his statement. I also take this opportunity to commend the Minister and his officials for their handling of the issue to date and their daily updates to MLAs. It is useful that the Minister's Department can use Members as a conduit for providing information.

The Minister said that there may be an increase in the number of swine flu cases over the winter, given the recent patterns of major outbreaks of flu. Has the Minister considered increasing the number of people who are entitled to get the normal flu jab this winter to ensure that at least normal flu viruses are kept at bay and to prevent confusion between normal flu and swine flu? Given that cases of swine flu have been confirmed in England and Scotland and that one case has been confirmed on this island, is it inevitable that swine flu will hit here, and are we prepared for that?

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and**

**Public Safety:** The vaccine for the normal annual flu viruses will be issued again this autumn. Sometimes, the uptake by people for whom the vaccine is procured is disappointing. I expect, and hope, that the uptake this year will show a gain and be much stronger.

Looking ahead, I think that there is a threat of complacency and as is often the case, of appearing to wait for something to happen. Swine flu contains the inherent threat that it may follow the pattern of other viruses. If it does so, I hope that the benefits of all the measures that we have put in place will be demonstrated to everyone.

**Mrs McGill:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I do not have a question. However, as I have the Floor, I commend the Minister and his officials on their actions. Go raibh maith agat.

**Mr McCallister:** I thank the Minister for his statement. Today marks his third appearance in the House within a week, and he also attended a meeting of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

Will the Minister pledge that he, the Department and staff throughout the Health Service will continue to make swine flu their number one priority and not allow themselves to be distracted by others in the House who may wish to sidetrack them? Will the focus remain on keeping people in Northern Ireland safe and on the work in which the Minister is involved nationally?

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and**

**Public Safety:** I assure the Member that swine flu is the number one priority. Whatever I may wish, the response of the World Health Organization means that I have no choice but to make it so and to work as one of the four home nations through COBRA. Swine flu is regarded as a national challenge, a national peril and a national threat. I will ensure that Northern Ireland is fully engaged and locked into the response.



## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

### Employment and Support Allowance

**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 are called to speak will have five minutes.

**Mr Brady:** I beg to move

That this Assembly calls on the Minister for Social Development to make access to employment and support allowance easier for vulnerable claimants who have difficulty in understanding the complexities of the benefit and are unable to obtain the relevant information required to claim.

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. It is important that I explain employment and support allowance to give the House a flavour of the complexities of the benefit.

Employment and support allowance could be described as a pre-emptive strike for the rest of the welfare reform Bill that is due to be introduced soon. It is a benefit for people who are incapable of work because of ill health and/or disability. From 27 October 2008, employment and support allowance replaced incapacity benefit for new claimants and the severe disability allowance and income support paid on the basis of an incapacity for work.

The two types of employment and support allowance are contributory and income related. Many of the rules of entitlement to the contributory employment and support allowance are similar to those that applied to incapacity benefit. The income-related employment and support allowance is paid to people who meet the general conditions of entitlement to employment and support allowance but do not meet those for the contributory allowance. The income-related allowance is also paid to people who are entitled to the contributory employment and support allowance and are on a low income. Such people are, therefore, entitled to both contributory and income-related employment and support allowance.

The means test for the income-related employment and support allowance is similar to that for income support. A person who claims employment and support allowance will receive it for an initial 13-week period, during which a work capability assessment will be carried out to determine what should happen subsequently. That has replaced the personal capability assessment as the method of assessing eligibility for incapacity benefit.

A doctor from medical support services will carry out the work capability assessment. I have spoken to a number of people already who have gone through that assessment. They found it to be even more humiliating

than the previous assessment. I spoke to one lady who told me that when she went to the examination, she was asked to undress and told to put on a gown. However, the only things that were tested were her reflexes. That is hardly a comprehensive assessment of her condition, which she has had for many years.

The work capability assessment is supposed to be made up of three separate assessments. The first is the limited capability for work assessment. One aspect of that is that those who are entitled to the high-rate care component of disability living allowance (DLA) are not automatically exempt. However, it is generally accepted, as it was in the past, by the Social Security Agency that those particular people are quite disabled, otherwise — and presumably — they would not be getting high-rate disability living allowance.

The second assessment is the limited capability for work-related activity assessment. People in that category will be identified as taking part in some form of work-related activity. The third assessment is the work-focused health-related assessment. Through that assessment, additional information is collected about the things that a person can do, despite their condition.

Following the three assessments is the ubiquitous work-focused interview. Unless a person is terminally ill or has a serious medical condition, they are expected to participate in an initial work-focused interview at which a personal adviser will discuss work prospects.

I will ask this question, just as I have asked it several times before without getting an adequate answer: what type of training will those personal advisers have received to allow them to deal with vulnerable people with particular medical conditions and, in many cases, complex mental-health issues? In the North, 43.3% of incapacity benefit claimants suffer from a mental or behavioural disorder. Yet, with the introduction of employment and support allowance, along with its complexities, those people are targeted, and they are the ones who are finding the benefit most difficult to access.

I have been dealing with benefits for approximately 35 years, and I have heard all the platitudes that Governments issue when they introduce changes. We are told continually that claimants will be better off and better treated and that everything will be simplified. To date, that has never happened. Benefits get more complex, sanctions are introduced, and money saving appears to be the main objective.

For people to claim employment and support allowance, they have to complete a form that is approximately 60 pages long. It is almost impossible to access the employment and support allowance branch within a reasonable time. I once spent over 30 minutes trying to get in touch with people in that branch.

Indeed, if someone is lucky enough to make contact, staff do not seem able to explain what the benefit is about. In one case, someone who had £20 credit on their mobile phone rang the branch, ended up paying £17 for the call, and was left with £3 credit on their phone.

By definition, people who claim employment and support allowance are vulnerable already because of physical and mental-health issues. The Minister must address the administration of employment and support allowance. Obviously, it is parity legislation; we cannot necessarily change the law, but we can certainly change how it is administered and improve on that. The Minister needs to send out the message to people that we are on their side. The benefit must become user friendly and not be just another cynical attempt to dissuade people who are entitled to the benefit from claiming. The introduction of one universal benefit seems inevitable. If that happens, we can only hope that it will be easier to understand — and much easier to access — than the employment and support allowance. Go raibh maith agat.

**Mr Burns:** As Mickey Brady said, and as Members know, employment and support allowance was introduced in October 2008 as a replacement for incapacity benefit. It is a good idea in theory. People with an illness or a disability and who want to work should be given as much support as possible in getting a job. People are better off when they are employed, and not just financially; their health, general well-being and self confidence are better.

However, no one can dispute the fact that employment and support allowance is, as Mickey Brady said, a complex benefit. I am concerned that vulnerable people may not be receiving employment and support allowance or other benefits to which they are entitled.

11.30 am

It is fair to say that there have been a few teething problems with the system, especially with the call centres and the availability of forms. Those problems have not been unique to Northern Ireland; Britain has faced the same problems. The main reason for the problems in the system is the fact that the number of enquiries about employment and support allowance has been much higher than had been expected.

Those issues have not been ignored by the Minister; the opposite has been the case. As soon as the Social Security Agency became aware of the problems with the forms, many new forms were sent out to the employment and support allowance centre and social security offices. People can also now download the necessary paperwork from the Department's website. Furthermore, many new call centre staff have been recruited and trained, and the whole telephone process

has been reviewed. Things have got much better, and we expect performances to continue to improve.

The Minister cannot be accused of ignoring the problem. In fact, she has done her best to solve the problem, and the situation with the call centres and the forms really is getting better. Of course, not everyone is comfortable using the phone or the Internet. Claimants for employment and support allowance get access to a trained personal adviser, a person who they can meet face to face. They can also bring someone with them to act on their behalf. If they need personal advice, they can get it from a real person. Vulnerable people need that, and they must get it.

I shall finish with a few words of support for the employment and support allowance call centre staff and social security staff in general. The introduction of employment and support allowance was a difficult time for them. They were often snowed under with their amount of work. It was not easy, and they did their best under the circumstances. It is clear that more staff and more training are needed, and, if that is what is required to get the benefit to the people who need it, the Minister will provide that. As those measures are rolled out, I have no doubt that the situation will continue to improve in the near future.

**Mr Armstrong:** I am fully aware that there have been some teething problems with the implementation of employment and support allowance. I have some sympathy with those who believe the process to be too lengthy and over-complicated, particularly when one reads about a 50-page ESA1 application form.

We must not lose sight of the reasons why the new allowance was introduced, and we must not give in to knee-jerk reactions because all is not working out perfectly from day one. Employment and support allowance is a step in the right direction. It is designed to enable those who want and are able to work to get back into work. That will benefit not only individuals, but the economy as a whole.

In Northern Ireland, we have to be responsible to our fellow citizens in the rest of the United Kingdom and to play fair. In comparison with Great Britain, Northern Ireland has a large proportion of people who are in receipt of incapacity benefit, and our economic productivity is relatively poor. That partially explains why our average regional income is among the lowest of the UK regions. According to an article in the 'Belfast Telegraph', even when the local economy was doing well a year ago, a further 40,000 people would have been in the labour force if we had had parity with Great Britain.

There is clearly a problem with regard to the number of people who are in receipt of incapacity benefit, and the suspicion has to be that too many people are receiving benefits to which they are not entitled.

It would be irresponsible of me not to mention the ongoing problem of benefit fraud. Although it is important that people who are entitled to benefits receive their full entitlement in as straightforward a manner as possible, the fact cannot be ignored that certain members of society seek to cheat the system. Adequate checks and balances must be put in place to ensure that it is as difficult as possible for those people who wish to defraud taxpayers to do so, while ensuring that people who are genuinely entitled to benefits are not deterred from applying for them.

It is thanks to unscrupulous and deceitful people that checks and balances are necessary. If the benefits system is too lightly regulated, the likelihood is that scarce resources will be taken up by people who are not entitled to them. On the other hand, if the system is too complicated, there is danger that people who are genuinely entitled to benefits, particularly the most vulnerable, may be discouraged from applying. Obviously, a balance must be struck, particularly during the current economic climate when the number of job losses has meant that increasing numbers of people require benefits.

Finally, as employment and support allowance is a UK-wide benefit, any changes that are implemented in Northern Ireland would have implications for parity with the rest of the United Kingdom. Such a move, however well-intentioned it might be, would lead Northern Ireland down a dangerous road. The Ulster Unionist Party is extremely reluctant to support any measure that might turn out to be the thin end of the wedge in respect of disadvantaging Northern Ireland's people.

**Ms Lo:** With 2.6 million of the UK population on incapacity benefit, I agree that reform of the system is needed. However, it is important to bear in mind that the emphasis of change should be to enable people to return to work and to provide adequate support and help for them to do so.

Recent research shows clearly that work is beneficial for disabled people, the majority of whom want to work. Work raises disabled people's self-esteem, offers discipline and makes them less isolated and better integrated into society.

During the 1970s and 1980s, thousands of people were put on incapacity benefit in order to keep unemployment figures down. Many of them got caught in the benefit trap and have become dependent on the state, which is not what they want. Of people who receive incapacity benefit and employment and support allowance, 40% have mental-health problems. Their conditions fluctuate; they have good days and bad days.

It is important, therefore, that they receive the right level of support and are not forced to attend interviews or to go to work. Their personal advisers need adequate training. I am aware that the Minister is looking at that

issue. It is important that advisers have the right level of understanding and sensitivity to work with individuals who have mental-health problems.

Lack of skills, rather than disability alone, is often the barrier to people's return to work. Adequate training is, therefore, extremely important to enable them to gain new skills and qualifications and to become employable. Recently, the Committee visited the Cedar Foundation and saw the good work that it does to train or retrain people, to help them to overcome their disabilities, and to break down barriers so that they can obtain meaningful jobs in society.

The entire benefits system is complicated, not just employment and support allowance. Older people and young people, not only those with disabilities, miss out on claiming. Therefore, it is important that information is available at the right time. A straightforward application process is the key to helping people obtain work and leave the benefits system. I support the motion.

**Mrs McGill:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I want to raise some issues that have been brought to my attention by my constituents. Several Members have already mentioned the issue of phones, and a number of Assembly questions relate to the cost of phone calls and the length of time taken to answer them. I have spoken to someone who knows about those matters. The equality impact assessment (EQIA) of the strategic business review contains evidence of attempts to address those problems, and I commend the Minister and her officials for that. However, it is important to see how those attempts work out.

The EQIA mentions that it is difficult for people from rural locations to travel to Belfast, where the administration of employment and support allowance is centralised. Those people travel to their local office, but what happens when they arrive there? Can they use the phone? Is there a dedicated employee to whom they can speak? I have been told that people who use phones in those offices do not have adequate privacy. Who takes time to attend to the "vulnerable claimants" to whom the motion refers? Can employees leave their own work to help them?

In a question for oral answer, Jim Shannon said that, in his experience, it took approximately 52 minutes for someone to answer the phone. The EQIA attempts to address some, but not all, of those issues. Moreover, Mr Molloy asked a question for written answer about unanswered calls, and I was surprised at the Minister for Social Development's response. Approximately 15,000 calls were unanswered between October 2008 and January 2009. Has that issue been addressed? If not, it is important to do so, given that the motion calls on the Minister to improve access to benefits for vulnerable claimants who have difficulty understanding the complexities of the matter.



Another issue that has been raised with me is the duplication of sick certificates or, as they are known, sick notes. What is happening with that situation? Do the certificates go somewhere? Are they not being properly logged? Why have vulnerable people been asked to submit a second certificate? That issue must be addressed.

It has been brought to my attention that, when a phone is answered, the person who answers does not always know what he or she is talking about. Training may be required. I have been told that it sounds as though the employee is reading from a computer screen. Although we have to move on, and modernisation is the name of the game at this stage, where face-to-face engagement does not exist, training is, perhaps, necessary in order to help vulnerable claimants. Go raibh maith agat.

**Mr P Ramsey:** I welcome the motion. Claire McGill and other Members have talked about vulnerable people. Anybody who has worked in the benefits system over the years will know that it can be confusing and that changes can be difficult to understand. Therefore, claimants, at times, become traumatised and distressed when a new system is introduced.

Employment and support allowance is a new benefit with a new access system, and, as with any new benefit and system, there will be teething problems.

11.45 am

**Mr Brady:** When pension credits were introduced, there were teething problems, and it took the Social Security Agency in Derry, in the Member's own constituency, at least three years to get its act together. Does the Member accept that that is a reasonable time frame in which to fix teething problems?

**Mr P Ramsey:** I know only too well what happened in Derry when pension credits were introduced, and we hope that that will not be the case with the introduction of employment and support allowance. I am sure that the Minister will ensure that that does not happen.

During discussions with groups representing people with disabilities in my constituency, it became clear that there has been a positive engagement between the Social Security Agency and representative groups about problems in accessing employment and support allowance and that the agency is now dealing appropriately and effectively with many of those problems. That interaction and co-operation is needed and is most welcome.

I will outline some of the current concerns that were brought to my attention, which centre on clients with learning disabilities. The first concern is about the use of the telephone system, because people with comprehension or communication difficulties are at a disadvantage when using the telephone. Such people should be clearly directed to advocacy organisations or

properly trained Social Security Agency representatives who can deal with their cases in the most effective and diligent way. That course of action requires a high level of insight and sensitivity from Social Security Agency staff. It is important that correct guidance and help is given in every case.

The second concern that was raised with me is that people with learning disabilities are not necessarily sick and may not have, or need, a medical report; indeed, they may not even be able to obtain a medical report. The form solicits information about physical or mental-health problems, not learning disabilities. Perhaps the form should have a section that deals specifically with learning disabilities, where supporting information could be requested from education or social work sources rather than medical sources.

The third concern is that there is a problem for people with disabilities who want to work but are worried that they will be transferred from employment and support allowance to jobseeker's allowance. In many cases, people with disabilities are at a disadvantage when it comes to finding a job, particularly in the current economic climate, and they should not be put through the rigours of the jobseeker's allowance system. I do not think that the Department or agency intends that they should be disadvantaged, but claimants, particularly those with disabilities, who want to enter employment through the Pathways to Work route need to be reassured that they will not be placed on the jobseeker's allowance route. That route is appropriate for non-disabled people but inappropriate for people with disabilities.

As some Members mentioned, people have encountered problems with phone lines. In recent weeks, however, the problems seem to have been solved. Will the Minister outline the reasons for the initial problems and what actions have been taken to solve them?

Members referred to several problems, and Mr Brady raised the issue of pension credits. I sincerely hope that those people with a range of disabilities across a wide spectrum — whether mental-health problems, physical problems or learning disabilities — will not have to face the crisis that occurred in the city of Derry. Although the office or agency may be based in the city, it must represent every constituent across Northern Ireland who needs access to employment and support allowance. I am sure that the Minister will deal with that effectively.

**Mr F McCann:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The motion was tabled because of Members' ongoing experiences of speaking to people who have made claims for this new benefit. Sinn Féin Members, and Members from all political parties, have asked questions about the introduction of employment



and support allowance and the impact that it will have, and is already having, on the most vulnerable people in society who receive social security benefits.

The British Government have proclaimed that the new benefit is a major step forward that will shape the payment of benefits in the future. However, that raises many questions about why it has been introduced in the first place. We have been told that there will be winners, but we have not been told how many losers there will be when the new benefit is introduced.

In fact, many people believe that this is just the beginning of what will become a universal benefit, replacing most, if not all, benefits. It is a matter of great concern that most people believe that the introduction of employment and support allowance has more to do with reducing the number of people who receive incapacity benefit — some 100,000 people across the North — rather than providing a better service, which was the stated reason for its introduction.

Neither has the impact of 30 years of conflict on communities in the North been taken into consideration. As a result, large numbers of people are still suffering from various levels of mental illness, severe stress and depression. In the past, we have highlighted the question of the ability of a customer's personal adviser to be able to deal with different degrees of mental illness. We have argued that those advisers are not equipped to handle people who fall into that category.

I also understand that people who claim this benefit will be asked to attend medical centres for a 75-minute to 90-minute assessment of what type of work they may be able to carry out. Mickey Brady dealt with some of those issues. Such assessments will be carried out by specially trained medical doctors, according to the available information. However, most GPs do not have the necessary training to assess people who are suffering from mental illness. It takes someone with psychiatric training to deal with such cases.

The Parkinson's Disease Society has also voiced concern that, as is the case with people who have mental-health problems, people with visible impairments or with fluctuating conditions that are not recognised are likely to be worst affected by the proposals. If an assessor incorrectly classes a person as having the more manageable symptoms of Parkinson's disease, the stress of attending work-focused interviews can exacerbate the illness and can result in the condition being misunderstood and wrongly classed as manageable.

The Parkinson's Disease Society, along with the Autistic Society and Macmillan Cancer Support, have expressed a number of concerns and difficulties that they believe can have an impact on claimants. In March 2008 my colleague Mickey Brady asked the Minister for Social Development:

“to detail the training programmes that have been put in place for staff involved in interviewing people with mental health problems”.

In a written answer on 11 April 2008, the Minister responded, stating:

“A two-day training programme will be delivered to all staff who will deal with Employment and Support Allowance customers”.

She went on to state that that would include:

“a session on health and disability.”

If that is the level of training that staff will receive, it calls into question their ability to deal with people who have mental-health problems. I must ask the Minister whether she has taken those concerns on board, and if so, what steps her Department has taken to implement the necessary safeguards to ensure that people are not penalised because of their disabilities or different forms of mental illness.

It has been stated that eight out of 10 people who were questioned about attitudes to work said that they would prefer to work rather than be on benefits.

**Mr Brady:** In view of some of Mr Armstrong's disparaging remarks about people who claim benefit, does the Member accept that the Social Security Agency lost more money last year as a result of clerical errors than it did from alleged fraud?

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The Member will have an extra minute in which to speak.

**Mr F McCann:** The Member is right. He has raised the issue on more than one occasion during meetings of the Committee for Social Development.

People have said that they prefer to work rather than being on benefit — of course they would say that. If a benefits office official asks a claimant whether he or she wants to work, the answer must be yes, or the claimant risks losing the benefit. If a claimant is asked whether he or she is able or capable to work, the answer will be different. The Minister told us that there had been a few teething problems, but that the Department is on course to rectify them. Perhaps that is what her senior officials are telling her, but it does not reflect what is happening. Staff morale is low because they are not equipped to deal with the changes.

Several people came to my constituency surgery last Friday seeking assistance with claims for employment and support allowance, having been advised to go to their local Sinn Féin office by Social Security Agency (SSA) staff. The explanation for that was that the Social Security Agency office did not have the phones to allow them to make a claim. Two people were on the phone in my constituency office for 45 minutes trying to make a claim for employment and support allowance. That is becoming a regular occurrence, because no free phones exist in the local SSA offices and people have nowhere else to go.

Furthermore, many people can apply for employment and support allowance only after their eligibility for income support ceases and it can take between three and four weeks to finalise a claim. The only option left to those people is to apply to their local Social Security Agency office for a crisis loan. That can be very distressing, especially when people are ill or are suffering from mental illness and given that they are only applying for the benefit in the first place due to illness.

On 12 December 2008, I asked a question about the British Telecom (BT) telephone line that people are being asked to use to make their claims. I raised my concern that many people are not connected to BT and use either another provider or their mobile phones. When those people ring the claim line, they are kept waiting for upwards of 45 minutes.

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

**The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie):** I thank the Members who have contributed to today's discussion. I welcome the opportunity to update Members on the progress made in introducing employment and support allowance and to explain the service that the employment and support allowance centre is providing to all customers, particularly vulnerable customers.

The Social Security Agency introduced the new allowance at the end of October 2008. Employment and support allowance is an integrated contributory and income-related allowance for anyone who is claiming benefit on the basis of a health condition or disability that affects their ability to work. It provides a financial and work-related support structure, and it replaced incapacity benefits for new claimants from 27 October 2008.

Employment and support allowance focuses on how people can be helped into work. The allowance does not assume automatically that a person who has a significant health condition or disability is incapable of working. Entitlement is based on the effects that a condition has on a person's capacity to work rather than on diagnosis.

It is estimated that over £15 million more will be paid to people receiving employment and support allowance in the next five years compared with what has been paid in Northern Ireland through incapacity benefits. This is not about saving money, as some Members have said. Many of those who will benefit from the additional money are the most vulnerable customers, who will be almost £17 a week better off under employment and support allowance than they would have been under incapacity benefit.

The principle of employment and support allowance is that everyone should have the opportunity to work and that disabled people and people with a health condition should get the help they need to engage in

appropriate work if they are able to do so. The allowance focuses on what people can do rather than what they cannot do.

It is clear that Members are passionate about protecting those who are most vulnerable in society. I share those concerns and recognise the need to ensure that those people receive the necessary support to access services, and that they are dealt with sensitively. I assure Members that I recognise the need for the vulnerable in our society to access services, including advice on employment and support allowance, and that those people are dealt with in a sensitive manner regardless of their condition.

It is clear that many who claim benefits are vulnerable people, and that includes those with learning disabilities or mental health conditions. It is important to give them the support, advice and guidance that they need. When Social Security Agency officials were planning to introduce employment and support allowance to Northern Ireland, paramount in their thinking was that vulnerable customers would require additional assistance. Therefore, although the most efficient method for making a claim for employment and support allowance is via the telephone, it was recognised that some vulnerable customers may require the support and reassurance that can be provided by face-to-face contact.

Prior to the introduction of employment and support allowance, officials consulted widely with stakeholders, including political parties, customer representative advice groups and those representing section 75 minority groups. Feedback showed the overwhelming consensus to be that customers should be provided with choices as to which method of claiming best met their individual needs. Although the provision of a telephone-based claims service is undoubtedly an improvement to our services, it does not suit everyone. I instructed officials to ensure that claim forms were available in jobs and benefits offices, social security offices, and in the wider voluntary and political-advice sector.

*12.00 noon*

Therefore a range of those forms was circulated to advice centres and to all MP and MLA constituency offices, if they wanted them. In addition, a dedicated telephone line is available for MPs and MLAs who have cases that they want addressed immediately. For the more technically minded, claim forms can be downloaded from the Department's website.

The outcome is that employment and support allowance customers have more application channels than were available to those who claimed the old incapacity benefit. In March this year, 79% of callers to the employment and support allowance centre who were seeking to make a claim chose to use the

telephony route rather than to request a form. It is clear, therefore, that the telephony channel has proved to be very popular with many people.

However, recognising that using the telephone is not suitable for everyone, the Social Security Agency has alternative arrangements in place. Customers can receive assistance to complete a claim form in their local jobs and benefits social security office or at advice centres across Northern Ireland. When employment and support allowance telephony agents become aware that a customer needs help to make a claim — for example, someone who may have a learning disability — they can arrange for an urgent appointment with staff at the customer's nearest jobs and benefits social security office. Customers can also appoint a representative to act on their behalf when applying by telephone or clerically.

Customers can arrange for employment and support allowance staff to telephone them at a convenient time. The member of staff will then assist them over the telephone as they complete a clerical claim form in their own home. A textphone service is available for customers who have speech or hearing difficulties, and an interpreter service is available on the telephone or at face-to-face appointments for those whose first language is not English.

I understand the concerns that some Members have, particularly where the most vulnerable in society are concerned. The Social Security Agency has recognised the need for the employment and support allowance centre staff to be trained in how best to handle their contact with vulnerable customers. At the request of the agency, Disability Action provided awareness training for employment and support allowance staff, which helped them to see the process from the perspective of a vulnerable customer. The training also helped to identify ways in which the benefit's complexity could be explained and how staff could best assist customers who may require additional support.

In order to provide further assistance to make access to employment and support allowance easier and to improve understanding of the new benefit, my Department has implemented an outreach programme to promote the services that the employment and support allowance centre provides and to educate audiences on the telephone claim-taking process. Through that programme, the employment and support allowance centre has supported customer representatives further on the claim-taking process. That ensures that representative groups for vulnerable customers are kept informed fully of all information that is relevant to their client groups. In addition, material is tailored to cater for the particular needs of individual groups.

The Department also has a facility to ensure that vulnerable customers who have mental health issues or learning difficulties have fully understood the requirement to take part in a medical examination and work-focused interview. Those issues were raised by Pat Ramsey and Fra McCann. I should explain that, in normal circumstances, when customers do not attend their medical examinations or work-focused interviews, their benefits may be reduced or discontinued. However, in the case of vulnerable customers who have mental health issues or learning difficulties, a member of the agency's staff will visit them at home to explain their rights and obligations and to ensure that they understand the implications of non-attendance. If Members have specific cases that they feel have not been investigated fully, perhaps they will let me know, and I will ensure that officials attend to them as quickly as possible. However, the facility safeguards those customers from being unnecessarily penalised, and none of us wants that to happen.

The new employment and support allowance telephony service is part of the Department's commitment to ensuring that customers experience the most accurate and efficient claims process. The facility to make an application by telephone helps customers to get their money sooner by cutting out postal and processing delays.

There is no doubt that such a major change to the benefits system has been challenging. When I visited the centre in January, I saw at first hand the dedication and commitment of managers and staff to supporting people through the employment and support allowance claim-making process, and I was very impressed by what I saw. As is the position in Britain, the call volumes for employment and support allowance in Northern Ireland have been significantly higher than anticipated at the initial planning stage. Pat Ramsey asked about the reason for that. To address that issue, the Social Security Agency has implemented a telephony-management and process-management plan. Some 18 additional staff were recruited in January and February, and I can further advise the House that another 46 staff joined the employment and support allowance centre between February and April.

Mickey Brady, Fra McCann and Pat Ramsey mentioned the approach to people with learning disabilities. The arrangements for people with learning disabilities are similar to those for other benefits. In the majority of cases, their claims are made via third-party advocates. Social Security Agency staff do not prejudge callers. If difficulties arise during a telephone call, staff will advise that it may be appropriate to have a face-to-face meeting in a local office or to arrange a home visit. It is worth noting that staff at the employment and support allowance centre have had no complaints in respect of customers with learning disabilities. Any



possible transfer of customers with learning disabilities from employment and support allowance to jobseeker's allowance is a matter for the Department for Employment and Learning. People who are assessed as having severe disabilities will fall into the support group and be exempt from the work capability assessment.

Mickey Brady said that people feel humiliated by the medical examination and consider it worse than previous medical examinations. The agency's disability analysts, who perform the work capability assessments, are experienced medical practitioners who have a background in general practice, so they are medically qualified to carry out those assessments. Mr Brady also raised the issue of the cost to customers who use mobile phones. Staff at the employment and support allowance centre always offer callers the opportunity of being phoned back, which prevents customers from running up large phone bills. If Members know of any instances when customers have not been offered that opportunity, I ask them to let me know.

Claire McGill raised the issue of unanswered calls. In a very thoughtful contribution, she differed from her colleagues by thanking employment and support allowance staff for their very good work in recent months. Their level of performance has improved substantially, and it is set to improve further as new staff who are currently being trained return and consolidate their skills.

I wish to praise employment and support allowance centre staff for the progress that they have made. I reassure Members that the SSA has in place robust processes and systems to meet the needs of all but particularly those of our most vulnerable customers. Our overriding aim is to ensure that those customers are supported in understanding the complexities of employment and support allowance, and that they are provided with the relevant information, including the number of ways to claim employment and support allowance, so that no vulnerable customer is prevented from receiving the support to which they are rightfully entitled.

I like to think that two of the Sinn Féin Members who spoke during the debate — Fra McCann and Mr Brady — are not trying to sacrifice the vulnerability of certain people through political point-scoring, because that serves no purpose, and it definitely does not assist people who are suffering from disabilities, who are vulnerable and need all our help and assistance at this time.

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank Mickey Brady for proposing the motion. I remind the Minister that she is not that important in comparison with the needs of people who are disabled or vulnerable. Every Member has the prerogative to raise concerns. For accuracy's sake, the Hansard report should be checked. I heard Mickey Brady say clearly that the introduction of the employment

and support allowance was extremely complex and very challenging to staff. On the basis of his experience, which, he assured Members, amounted to more than 30 years, he detailed the efforts that have been made to smooth the transition and pointed out that, to date, they have failed.

Mr Brady's concerns were reflected by a few other Members. Issues about the work-focused interview were also raised by Pat Ramsey and Fra McCann. It is worth noting that, as Anna Lo explained at length, many vulnerable people who have disabilities and who face ill-health challenges want to work. However, their physical, emotional and mental capacity renders them unable to do so. To that end, everyone — apart from Billy Armstrong, whose remarks I will come to later — recognises that there is a difference between people who want to work and those who cannot. The motion provides the opportunity to outline our concerns about how to make the transition to employment and support allowance smoother.

There have been difficulties in that transition. For example, the many questions that have been asked and points that have been made in the debate indicate that there were not enough staff. Time will tell whether that has been corrected. There were massive problems with the provision of phone lines. Thomas Burns has assured Members that the form has been reduced from 60 pages to something much smaller —

**Mr Burns:** Fifty-nine.

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** OK, Thomas, to 59 pages. However, the new approach adopted by the Minister after she listened to people will make the claims process smoother and less stressful. That is something that most Members who spoke in the debate want too.

Billy Armstrong's remarks were nothing short of disgraceful. It may be every Member's prerogative to say what he or she wants to say, and many Members have exercised that right since May 2007, but Mr Armstrong's Thatcherite approach — to regard people on benefits as spongers — is remarkable. I am more convinced than ever that Billy and perhaps the rest of the Ulster Unionist Party would not know a vulnerable person from a dipped soda. I will say no more about what Mr Armstrong said in the debate. We will check the Hansard report for the accuracy of his remarks.

Mr Brady intervened to point out that more money was lost through clerical error than in benefit fraud. That is something to which we should all pay attention.

Claire McGill spoke about the issue of the phones. Claire, Anna Lo, Fra McCann, Pat Ramsey, Thomas Burns and Mickey Brady voiced their concern for vulnerable people presenting themselves at a benefits office. I urge Members to walk through that whole journey. Those people may not be able to use e-mail; they may have numeracy and literacy issues that



prevent them from filling in forms or explaining their problems to already-overstretched staff in a local office; and maybe they cannot take up the offer to use a phone.

I am delighted that disability awareness training has been given to support staff who process claims. That is not a slight on staff. We know the stress that staff have experienced and continue to experience. We also know the stress that the independent advice sector has experienced as a result of the introduction of this benefit. From chatting to other Members, I know that people who cannot get an appointment quickly enough are coming into constituency offices.

I invite the Minister to circulate those figures again, because that would be helpful. I do not know enough about such cases myself; I must lift the phone and make two or three calls to find out what the craic is.

The issue is that some claimants are being offered crisis loans. However, the very term “crisis loan” creates a crisis because people feel that they are getting into debt. That is particularly the case for older people. When people imagine a crisis and debt, they walk away. What happens as a result? People go without benefit.

*12.15 pm*

The work-focused interview was another issue that was raised. Many of us have enough experience, albeit at different levels, to know about certain issues, and I know from my experience that a lot of months ago, a wee veiled threat was made against people who have mental health problems in particular and who have missed their hospital appointments to see consultants. No one in this place made that threat, because, despite what I said about Billy earlier, a lot more sense than that is spoken here. People on programmes such as ‘The Stephen Nolan Show’ suggested that those who miss their interview should be struck off. That is ridiculous, because the people concerned are very vulnerable.

The same is happening in this instance by default. People who miss their work-focused interview may lose their benefit. They are penalised automatically until the reason that the interview did not take place is established. Sometimes that can happen a week or so later, with the result that there will be a gap in benefit. The benefit will be backdated because that is the law, but we need to take on board the journey of stress that has occurred.

I am glad that the Minister has taken on board some of the concerns that all members of the Committee for Social Development raised. Indeed, the volume of questions about the introduction of the benefit indicated that Members across the North have had clients — perhaps people who work in the independent advice sector — come to them and tell them of their experiences. I am also glad that the Minister now supports the employment and support allowance, despite having

voted against it in the Hain Assembly. However, that was then, and this is now.

The reason for the motion is that anything additional that can be done to help vulnerable people should be done. We are really interested in seeing the smooth transition of this benefit. We are also really keen to ensure that staff who work in the offices and in the independent advice sector receive additional support. The process should be made simpler and easier for people who try to access the benefit because the baseline is that people who are ill or are dependent on benefits are caught in the poverty trap and may be experiencing physical, emotional and mental difficulties. The last thing that those people need is additional pressure.

I thank Mickey Brady and my colleagues for proposing the motion. I assume that the House will give the motion its full support. I commend the motion. Go raibh maith agat.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

That this Assembly calls on the Minister for Social Development to make access to employment and support allowance easier for vulnerable claimants who have difficulty in understanding the complexities of the benefit and are unable to obtain the relevant information required to claim.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The Business Committee has agreed to meet immediately upon the lunchtime suspension. Rather than begin the next item of business, I propose, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00pm.

*The sitting was suspended at 12.18 pm.*

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

2.00 pm

## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

### Costs of Division

**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 are called to speak will have five minutes.

One amendment has been selected and published on the Marshalled List. The proposer of the amendment will have 10 minutes in which to propose and five minutes in which to make a winding-up speech.

**Dr Farry:** I beg to move

That this Assembly regrets that the Deloitte Report 'Research into the financial cost of the Northern Ireland divide', commissioned by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister in 2006 has not been acted upon; and calls on the Executive to ensure that the potential to tackle both the direct and embedded costs of division are addressed within the current, and future, spending frameworks, and that the opportunities to provide shared and integrated goods, services and facilities are fully realised.

At this time of economic recession, many MLAs and Ministers are rightly seized with the need to find efficiency savings in Government and throughout public expenditure. Indeed, it is interesting to note the increased speculation about the potential for savings from changes to the institutions, whether from rationalising the number of Departments or from cutting back on the number of MLAs. Those measures are, of course, worthy, and the Alliance Party has long been committed to reforms in those areas.

The claimed potential savings of £50 million only really scratch the surface of the inefficiencies in our society, and, even then, the scale of what is claimed will emerge not only through direct savings, but through more efficient and effective joined-up government that must address the underlying costs that people incur when engaging with the Government. Anyone who is serious about finding efficiency savings in Northern Ireland cannot afford to avoid addressing the huge costs involved with the fallacious attempt to manage a divided society, rather than attempting to build a genuine shared future.

The Alliance Party has regularly talked about the cost of division to Northern Ireland, which is in the region of £1 billion each year. Those costs are apparent in at least four respects. First, there are the direct costs

of policing riots, other civil disturbances and parades; the policing resources that are required as a result of security threats; and the costs to a wide range of agencies of repairing damaged buildings and facilities.

Secondly, there are the indirect costs of providing duplicate goods, facilities and services, either explicitly or implicitly, for separate sections of the community. Those include schools, GP surgeries, job centres, community centres, leisure centres, and even bus stops. Indeed, those costs are not just borne by the public sector, but by the private sector.

Thirdly, and related to the second aspect, there are many hidden factors associated with division that impact on the cost environment to which Departments and agencies must respond.

Finally, there are the lost-opportunity costs to inward investment and tourism. Although the Northern Ireland economy has performed better in recent years, it is still performing well below its potential capacity. Division also has implications for our labour market.

The figure of £1 billion a year and the wider theme of the costs of division have not just been made up by the Alliance Party. It is a major structural problem that has been recognised by academics and many other commentators in our society.

**Mrs Long:** Perhaps the Member would agree that the First Minister acknowledged the problem when he said that the task is large, but that that is no reason for us not to try to tackle it and that it is important to do so?

**Dr Farry:** Indeed, and I acknowledge the fact that the First Minister recognised the problem when he was the Minister of Finance and Personnel, but, sadly, that has not been reflected in formal Government policy, whether that be in the Programme for Government or the Budget.

Within Government circles, the theme was perhaps first explored, in January 2002, by Jeremy Harbison in the background paper that he provided to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM), which was intended to be the precursor for the new policy on community relations and which, in effect, became 'A Shared Future'. In March 2005, 'A Shared Future' was finally published under direct rule, and we must ask ourselves why every progressive community-relations action has happened under direct rule, rather than devolution. Perhaps that debate is for another day.

However, that document recognised that there was a strong financial and economic imperative to building a shared future, and it declared that the notion of "separate but equal" was unsustainable. Subsequently, within the first of the triennial action plans that arose from 'A Shared Future', OFMDFM commissioned a piece of research into the cost of the divide, and that

led to the Deloitte report, which was finalised in April 2007 — just before the restoration of devolution.

I do not want to spend too much time looking backwards, but it is a matter of regret that, under devolution, OFMDFM has disowned the Deloitte report. The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister dragged its feet over the publication of the report, and it took a freedom of information request from the Alliance Party to force OFMDFM's hand on it becoming public.

The big headline that came out of the Deloitte report was that the cost of division was, potentially, as high as £1.5 billion each year. Regardless of whether the cost is £1 billion, £1.5 billion or something smaller, it is a major distortion in Northern Ireland's Budget. When we talk about the departmental expenditure limits of the Budget, we are talking of only £8 billion, so one can see that this is a massive distortion. It is not a theme in the Programme for Government or the Budget. That type of situation would not be sustainable at the best of times, but in the worst of times, such as in this recession, and with the Treasury's financial tightening looming, there is a major imperative to get on and to start tackling the problem.

I am the first to accept that the Deloitte report is not perfect, but, at the least, it should be used to inform the conversation and to signpost further work on the road ahead. Deloitte worked out its figure of £1.5 billion on a crude comparison between public expenditure on social and economic needs in Northern Ireland and that of Wales. On a policy-by-policy area, the individual analysis did not add up to £1.5 billion. The report was good at identifying the direct costs of dealing with a divided society and the opportunity costs in lost investment and tourism. However, it was weaker in calculating the costs associated with the duplication of goods, facilities and services, and the cost pressures that build up from divisions.

No one will argue that £1 billion can be released in one spending round or across several rounds. The distortions may well take a generation to be unravelled fully, but it is critical that we make a start, and it is critical that we do so today. Considering the enormity of the current economic and financial pressures, that start needs to be within the current Budget framework as well as within the forthcoming comprehensive spending review.

I want to highlight a few examples of where work can begin. Over the next two years, the Northern Ireland Executive have to produce another £123 million in efficiency savings. It may be tempting for the Executive to use the additional £116 million that they will receive as consequential of the Barnett formula arising out of last month's Budget. However, those additional resources are supposed to be used for

boosting our economy through investing in training and employment, the green economy and social housing. The Alliance Party believes that the Executive now have the opportunity to seek to address that £123 million in efficiency savings by beginning to address the cost of division.

Next week, the Alliance Party will publish its own paper on how savings can be generated by tackling division and segregation in our society. It will not be easy, and, at times, we will have to invest in order to save. We will have to invest in new shared services and facilities before we can wind up the old ways of doing things, but, again, we must make a start. It may not be a case merely of cutting out expenditure, but of addressing the underlying cost pressures that many Departments and agencies are facing up to.

The biggest cost pressure arising from duplication arises in education. Northern Ireland pays a premium of as much as £300 million each year to have a sector-based education system. No one is suggesting that we move to a one-size-fits-all system, but difficult decisions will have to be made with respect to the rationalisation of the school estate. Sharing and collaboration between schools and sectors will have to be pursued more rigorously. Integrated education should be viewed at the apex of a range of options for sharing rather than, as now, as a further fragmentation of an already fragmented system. Integrated education is the financially sustainable way forward for schools.

Issues of duplication must be faced up to by the Departments of Health, Social Development and Employment and Learning. With regard to pressures on Departments' cost environments, DSD faces problems with dealing with the inefficiencies of a segregated social housing system and the opportunity costs of blighted land. DETI faces pressures in having to invest in selective financial assistance which is disproportionate with those of neighbouring jurisdictions in order to attract inward investment.

The Alliance Party recognises that a significant element of the cost of division that was identified by the Deloitte report comes from policing and justice. There are perfectly rational reasons for that, given the present circumstances. In the longer term, however, those differentials will have to be narrowed, in line with the rest of the United Kingdom. At the moment, additional cost pressures will first have to be met and addressed as we move — I hope — to a devolved system.

The SDLP amendment deletes the motion's reference to addressing the "direct and embedded" costs of division. Although the amendment mentions investment in new shared facilities, which we welcome, it ducks the structural problems that exist in the system at present. That issue was not addressed in the SDLP's recent discussion document, in which that party

claimed that a potential £400 million of new money could be found. Therefore, I am not sure exactly what that party hopes to achieve, but I will be interested to hear what its Members have to say.

I urge the Assembly to support the motion, which deals with an extremely serious topic. Northern Ireland can no longer afford to live with the current distortion of public expenditure, and we must make a start on sorting that out.

**Mrs D Kelly:** I beg to move the following amendment: Leave out all after “Executive” and insert

“to ensure that the opportunity to provide shared and integrated goods, services and facilities is fully realised to promote a shared and better future; calls on the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to revise the Programme for Government to take account of these matters and to publish without further delay the strategy for cohesion, sharing and integration; and further calls on the Minister of Finance and Personnel to revise the Budget accordingly.”

I welcome the attendance of junior Minister Donaldson. The cost of division cannot be measured solely in social and economic terms. As we in Northern Ireland know only too well, the cost of division has been lost and broken lives, so building a shared and better future for all our people must be a priority for the Assembly and its Executive. Indeed, the Programme for Government 2008-2011 states:

“Working together we can build a shared and better future for all — a society which is at ease with itself and where everyone shares and enjoys the benefits of this new opportunity. This is our commitment to you.”

Two years on from the restoration of devolution, how have the Executive measured up? The Deloitte report on the cost of division was effectively binned by Sinn Féin, whose Members refused to allow it to be discussed at the OFMDFM Committee for the flimsiest of excuses — that it was commissioned under direct rule and, therefore, has no standing today. The lifetime opportunities strategy was adopted somewhat belatedly by OFMDFM in December 2008, after several months of rubbishing it. Despite the existence of their eight special advisers, neither the DUP nor Sinn Féin could come up with any new creative thinking, so the strategy was adopted.

In proposing the motion, Dr Farry outlined the costs of division, and those segregation costs are huge. Opportunities have been lost. The Deloitte report stated that the financial cost of what was described as a “major structural problem” was almost £1 billion. The SDLP amendment calls on the Minister of Finance and Personnel to revise the Budget and the Programme for Government, not only to look at the cost of division in building a shared and better future, but to take account of the global economic constraints and financial difficulties that we all face.

Elsewhere, Governments are bringing forward emergency Budgets and revised Programmes for Government, but not this Executive. The Finance Minister obstinately refuses to bring forward a new Budget or to have a debate on the Programme for Government, which was developed in very different economic circumstances to those in which we are living.

We already know the fate of the land sales upon which much of the Budget was predicated. We also know that Workplace 2010 has been put on hold, if not binned. Therefore, the financial circumstances are quite different now. It is right that a Budget should be revisited and a new Programme for Government developed at a time when the health, education and housing budgets are under pressure to meet the needs of those who are most disadvantaged and marginalised in our community.

Dr Farry spoke about the cost of division in respect of education, and he mentioned integrated education in particular. Although integrated education has its supporters, any suggestion that it might cure all ills is either touchingly naive or indicates a lack of ideas. Teaching our children that we should not hate one community because it is seen to come from the other side and that we should not be sectarian does not fall only on the shoulders of teachers; it is a parental responsibility. Education starts in the home and must be continued throughout the community and society.

2.15 pm

Tackling the root cause of division — sectarianism — needs leadership from the top. At different times over the past two years, we have been told by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister that it would be bringing forward a strategy on cohesion, sharing and integration. In late 2008, junior Minister Kelly told the House that such a strategy would be brought forward before the Halloween recess, but that did not happen. Perhaps junior Minister Donaldson will have better news for us today. We have been told that it will be published shortly, it is on the timetable and the shared and better future strategy is in the Programme for Government, but we are not being told how it will be delivered.

The SDLP amendment calls for leadership, a revised Budget, and for the Executive to give that leadership in publishing the cohesion, sharing and integration strategy. We are told that that strategy not only deals with sectarianism but with all forms of hate crime, and race crime in particular. In Belfast in recent weeks, we have seen the outworkings of those who attack people who have come to Northern Ireland to build a better future for their families. Many of those families have had their windows broken and have been forced out of some areas. Surely we all want to condemn and tackle such activities.



The SDLP's Minister, Margaret Ritchie, has stated on every occasion on which she has had the opportunity that it is the SDLP's desire, and her mission, to tackle and improve living conditions for all and, in particular, to build a better and shared future through shared housing and through the means at her disposal in the community and voluntary unit. One can contrast only what Margaret Ritchie has said and done with what has been said by junior Minister Kelly and by the First Minister and deputy first Minister: very fine words but very little action.

I will refer to another Margaret, one who is not often praised — if ever — by members of the nationalist community. Margaret Thatcher once said:

"If you want something said, ask a man; if you want something done, ask a woman."

Perhaps that is the critical difference between Margaret Ritchie and other members of the Executive.

*[Interruption.]*

Listen to the words; do not shoot the messenger. Perhaps that is a message that Sinn Féin and others would do well to listen to. Just because someone for whom they have little regard or respect delivers a message does not make that message any less valid. Margaret Ritchie has shown that she is able to tackle the SDLP's aspirations in working for a better society and community for all.

I am somewhat disappointed by the attendance across the Chamber. No doubt those Members are engaged in other activities, perhaps promoting a message for the European election. I have carefully read the messages that some parties are publishing in their election literature: we will fight for the unionist people; we are going to Europe for a unionist voice. I am telling Members that the SDLP will go to Europe for all the people of Northern Ireland because when the party is in Europe, everybody wins.

**Ms Anderson:** Go raibh maith agat. Cuirim fáilte roimh an díospóireacht inniu.

I welcome the debate because it is about time that we had a conversation in the Chamber about the division of Ireland. The Deloitte report refers to costs incurred due to the unnecessary provision of services for communities that live side by side but do not integrate. What about the cost of dividing our country? What about the cost of duplicating almost every public service on a small island containing fewer than seven million people? What about the cost of running two health services? What about the cost of running two education systems? What about the cost of running two police services?

What about the human cost to cancer patients in the South's border counties who have to make daily trips to Dublin because the cruelty of partition prevents them from receiving treatment a few miles up the road

in the North? What about the victim of domestic violence in Letterkenny who was unable to get a bed in her local refuge and was prevented from accessing one in Derry because a legal anomaly of partition meant that her ex-partner could prevent her from crossing what is called the border? Those are the real costs of division in Ireland.

The Alliance Party calls on the Executive to ensure that the potential to address both the direct and embedded cost of division is fully realised in the current and future spending frameworks. I ask the Alliance Party to clarify whether it recognises the cost of partition as one of those embedded costs of division that need to be dealt with.

**Dr Farry:** Although I do not recognise the relevance of what the Member is saying in the context of the debate, I assure her that my party has always been clear in recognising that the division of Ireland creates inefficiencies in social and economic issues. That is why there are North/South structures in place, which are trying to find solutions that meet the needs of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Does the Member accept that even if there were a united Ireland, there would still be a divided society in what we call Northern Ireland and what she calls the Six Counties, and that there would still be the need for a community relations policy to deal with divisions between people of different identities?

**Ms Anderson:** It is typical of you to say that you do not recognise the relevance of what I am saying. Indeed, the nationalist and republican people believe that you do not care about their views. Perhaps you do not recognise the division that was so carefully fostered by an alien Government either.

Although we support partition being resolved, we do not believe that the Deloitte report will assist in that. The report on the cost of division, referred to in the motion, was commissioned under direct rule. It is not an OFMDFM report — it is a Peter Hain report — and in 2007, OFMDFM said that it would:

"not form the basis of future policy development". *[Official Report, Bound Volume 25, pWA189, col 2].*

The Deloitte report is everything that it was expected to be. It was commissioned as part of a calculated campaign to dilute the equality agenda, which is something to which the Alliance Party seldom refers. The people responsible for delivering equality have attempted to frustrate, delay and, ultimately, overturn it. The report was designed to elevate community relations to a position above the Government's primary obligation to fulfil its equality agenda, and its conclusions were expected to validate the Northern Ireland Office's flawed policy document, 'A Shared Future'. We all want a shared and better future that is based on equality and human rights.

The Deloitte report was aimed at framing future policy on a different basis than is set out in the Good Friday Agreement and the St Andrews review and enshrined in law. The report fails in every way. It fails to disentangle any cost of division from the cost of the conflict or the cost of partition, discrimination and disadvantage. The report's claim that division costs up to £1.5 billion simply does not stand up to scrutiny. Indeed, even the authors of the report admit that they cannot stand over that final figure. Partition costs more than £3 billion if one counts the costs of duplicating all the services that I have mentioned.

The report's political commentary is partisan throughout and fails to acknowledge the British state's role as central protagonist in the conflict. It refuses to acknowledge that, for generations, structural discrimination and inequality were the benchmarks against which Government policy was framed and administered by British direct rule and unionist elites. However, that is the part of the motion that the SDLP seeks to retain along with the call for a revised Programme for Government and Budget.

To start off by calling for such a revision in the context of a flawed report is wrong-headed, and, therefore, Sinn Féin will not support the amendment. Mrs Kelly, who moved the amendment, called on the Minister of Finance and Personnel to revise the Budget because it was predicated on receipts from land sales. However, the leader of the SDLP, Mark Durkan, when he spoke about the £400 million that could be redistributed among Executive Ministers, said that there should be land sales to raise that sum. Sinn Féin will not support the motion or the amendment.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Will the Member please bring her remarks to a close?

**Ms Anderson:** Go raibh míle maith agat.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Question Time will commence at 2.30 pm. I suggest that Members take their ease until that time. This debate will continue after Question Time.

*The debate stood suspended.*

2.30 pm

*(Mr Speaker in the Chair)*

## Oral Answers to Questions

### OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

#### Playboard

1. **Ms S Ramsey** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what steps it has taken to secure childcare places provided by Playboard.

(AQO 2586/09)

**The deputy First Minister (Mr M McGuinness):**

We recognise the importance of good childcare provision and have been working closely with other Departments to seek a long-term resolution to the current difficulties. In the interim, we intend to seek Executive approval for the reallocation of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) resources in the June monitoring round. Subject to Executive agreement, we will provide funding to Playboard to allow after-school clubs to continue to operate until August 2009.

The ministerial subcommittee on children and young people identified childcare as an urgent priority and established a cross-departmental subgroup to produce a report that will identify options for further provision to the ministerial subcommittee. The initial report of the subgroup will be presented to relevant Ministers shortly. Continued funding for the Playboard projects is an interim approach pending a longer-term outcome from the work of the subgroup.

**Ms S Ramsey:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the deputy First Minister for his useful answer. I take on board the facts that initial funding is available to secure some childcare places in 2009, that that is only an interim arrangement and that there will be further options.

The deputy First Minister mentioned the issue of the availability of affordable childcare places. Does he agree that, were those places to be made available, they would have a major impact on addressing child poverty? Go raibh maith agat.

**The deputy First Minister:** The Joseph Rowntree Foundation commissioned research to examine childcare and child poverty. Although it is not a simple matter to project the effect that childcare improvements could have on reducing child poverty, the data suggest that

childcare reforms could play a useful role in moving a substantial number of children out of poverty. The upper-bound estimates suggest that childcare reforms could lift out of poverty as many as half of the children who are in it today. The lower-bound estimates suggest that childcare reforms could move out of poverty one sixth of the children in it.

Those estimates are based on the current British model of childcare, which is more advanced than ours. Therefore, the reforms might have an even greater impact here. Combating child poverty is a complex undertaking, and childcare is only one of many essential elements in an anti-poverty strategy. However, we agree that it is critically important.

**Mrs M Bradley:** Has the level of investment that is needed for the number of childcare places that are required been assessed, and what plans does OFMDFM have to meet those needs? I was disappointed to hear the deputy First Minister's reply that the ministerial subgroup report will be presented shortly. I want to know a definite date for that.

**The deputy First Minister:** As I stated, we intend to seek Executive approval for the reallocation of OFMDFM resources in the June monitoring round. Subject to Executive agreement, we will provide funding to Playboard to allow after-school clubs to continue to operate until August 2009. Obviously, work is ongoing to identify whether further moneys will be available. We are very committed to doing whatever we can to deal with the issue, because Playboard does important work for the development of children and young people's play here.

Since Playboard's inception in 1985, it has campaigned, lobbied, raised awareness and developed partnerships to put play on the agenda of policymakers and resource providers. Therefore, Playboard has particular expertise in the provision of play and childcare for school-age children.

At present, Playboard funds 52 after-schools projects, 23 of which are in areas classified as rural. The remaining 29 projects are in urban areas. Seventeen of the projects are based in neighbourhood renewal areas. The projects are capable of offering 1,300 registered places, and, therefore, they account for 20% of the provision of after-school club places here. A total of 196 staff are employed in those projects.

The play and leisure policy, which received Executive approval at the end of 2008, will help to deliver the aims of the 10-year strategy for children and young people. Our aim is to improve the play and leisure provision for all children and young people of nought-to-18 years of age. We are drafting the implementation plans. In doing so, we work closely with our many partners in the voluntary and community sector and the

statutory sector, and we draw on their expertise and experience in the field.

In recognition of the diverse needs of different age groups, we plan to implement separate plans for nought- to 11-year-olds and 12- to 18-year-olds. Work on those plans has just begun, with a view to the implementation plans being agreed by autumn 2009. The development of the plans will inform the future level of required funding. All that will have to be studied before any decisions can be taken.

**Ms Lo:** The funding for PlayBoard is a short-term measure. The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety must work with the Department of Education to resolve the issue of funding for after-school activities for school-age children. Has any progress been made on that issue?

**The deputy First Minister:** The ministerial subcommittee on children and young people has carried out work that is a vital part of facing up to the issues that the Member identified. In September 2008, at a meeting of that subcommittee, it was agreed to undertake a specific exercise to consider the potential for increasing childcare provision. It was further agreed that such work should be linked to that of the subgroup on child poverty. A report that identifies various options has been submitted to the ministerial subcommittee, and I understand that a meeting of relevant Ministers has been arranged for 28 May 2009 to discuss it.

## Pledge of Office

2. **Mr McCallister** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what discussions it has had with the Minister of Education in relation to a possible failure to observe any of the terms of the Pledge of Office. (AQO 2587/09)

**The deputy First Minister:** No such discussions have taken place, as there is no acceptance of a breach of the Pledge of Office. The Member will be aware that, if he genuinely believes that a failure to observe the terms of the Pledge of Office has occurred, it is open to him to seek the support of at least 29 other Members in tabling a motion to be considered and resolved by the Assembly.

**Mr McCallister:** Does the deputy First Minister not agree that the Minister of Education has failed to adhere to the Pledge of Office, which requires her:

“to support, and to act in accordance with, all decisions of the Executive Committee and Assembly”?

Specifically, the Assembly passed an Ulster Unionist Party motion on the extension of the 11-plus for three years until a replacement could be introduced. Does the deputy First Minister not agree that the



Minister's failure to support that motion constitutes a breach of the Pledge of Office?

**The deputy First Minister:** As I made clear in my answer, I do not consider that the Minister of Education has breached the Pledge of Office.

**Mrs O'Neill:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Will the Minister outline the Executive's consideration of any proposals by the Minister of Education on post-primary transfer?

**The deputy First Minister:** It is a matter of public record that, at a meeting of the Executive on 17 January 2008, the Minister of Education submitted a draft Executive paper on post-primary transfer arrangements. It was agreed to defer the consideration of that paper and schedule a dedicated meeting of the Executive to address it. The arrangements for the Executive's consideration of the paper were raised at a number of subsequent meetings. The Minister of Education submitted a draft Executive paper on post-primary transfer reform to a meeting of the Executive on 15 May 2008, at which there was a detailed discussion of a process that could be put in place to consider that paper. However, the Executive did not consider the content of the paper.

On 27 January 2009, the Minister of Education circulated a draft Executive paper on the arrangements for post-primary transfer, but it was not discussed at an Executive meeting on 29 January 2009. On 2 February 2009, the Minister of Education made a statement to the Assembly, in which she announced that guidelines for post-primary transfer would be out for public consultation until 27 April 2009. We await the Minister's response to that consultation, which has now ended. The Assembly will, undoubtedly, hear her views shortly.

### Northern Ireland Childminding Association (NICMA)

3. **Mr Shannon** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister if it has had any discussions with the Northern Ireland Childminding Association in relation to its initiative to provide childcare.

(AQO 2588/09)

**The deputy First Minister:** As part of work that was commissioned by the ministerial subcommittee on children and young people on the future of childcare provision, the head of research in OFMDFM and the director of the Northern Ireland Childminding Association have met on two occasions. They discussed the work of the association and the relevance of its research to the development of future policy. Those meetings proved helpful in highlighting issues that are of concern to the association, including, as highlighted by its research, the falling numbers of childminders, workforce planning

and professionalism. The ministerial subcommittee on children and young people will be considering those issues at its next meeting, as it takes forward work on child-minding. As I have said, that meeting will take place on 28 May.

**Mr Shannon:** I thank the deputy First Minister for his response. Obviously, the issues that the Northern Ireland Childminding Association has brought to the attention of the First Minister and deputy First Minister have been acknowledged. Does the deputy First Minister agree that the childminder start-up package is vitally important to provide extra childcare facilities with childminders who have public liability insurance and a first-aid certificate? Does he agree that there must be a promotion and recruitment campaign, more accessible training opportunities, and, therefore, more childminders?

Can the deputy First Minister assure the Assembly that all those issues will be taken on board in the meetings that are taking place? Does he agree that the Northern Ireland Childminding Association needs to be commended for its initiative?

**The deputy First Minister:** I agree with the Member, and I commend the child-minding group. It is not for me to pre-empt the decision of the Executive. However, the ministerial subcommittee on children and young people is aware of the potential of the proposal to improve the situation, and will be considering how best to support its objectives of improving access to child-minding services. The association's literature on the subject does not include a figure. However, it suggests that there needs to be five childminder advisers, the administrative support necessary for the provision of start-up grants to new childminders, and the promotion of that initiative. The association proposed that each start-up grant be £400. Potentially, depending on the cost of the advisers and administrative support, that could add around 350 childminders to the association's existing pool of 3,500 members.

**Mr Attwood:** I want to push the Minister a bit further. He said that there is meant to be a report to the subcommittee by 28 May. Can he say definitively when the subcommittee will conclude its deliberations, when Ministers will take decisions, and when the Executive will sign off on whatever proposals might be forthcoming? Mr Shannon made some very good points about NICMA's proposals. If the deputy First Minister has not had the opportunity to read that association's documentation, I ask him to do so. Its budget line of £300,000 a year for three years would create many new child-minding places at a time when there is a severe reduction in places.

**The deputy First Minister:** I am very sympathetic to the case put by the Member. The ministerial subcommittee on children and young people has tasked



the child poverty subgroup with producing a paper outlining the historical policy context and research evidence, and to set out a range of policy options on the delivery of childcare provision.

The working group met periodically between November 2008 and March 2009. Its terms of reference for a strategic business case on childcare were to set out the background of childcare; to set out the key strategic policies and how they relate to the childcare agenda; to establish the need for childcare provision; to define objectives for future childcare provision and set out any constraints; to identify a suitable range of policy options on the delivery of childcare provision; to assess the monetary costs and benefits of each shortlisted option; to assess the risks associated with each shortlisted option; to weigh up any non-monetary costs and benefits; to assess the balance between options and present the prepared option; and to consider the arrangements for funding, management, monitoring and post-implementation evaluation.

As the Member indicated, a paper on the background of strategic policy, the needs and objectives for childcare provision, and a range of policy options for the delivery of childcare provision will be considered at the ministerial subcommittee's next meeting. That will happen on 28 May, and we will be as anxious as anyone else to see the issue progressed in a fashion that will please the Childminding Association.

2.45 pm

**Mr McNarry:** Does the deputy First Minister accept that, although some welcome action has been taken on the support of childcare facilities, the general lack of sufficient childcare facilities seriously hampers mothers who are seeking employment and who wish to get back to work? Does he agree that the matter, therefore, embraces issues of equality and anti-poverty?

**The deputy First Minister:** I concede that we must all do more and that the challenges are obvious. Through the establishment of the Executive ministerial committee and the subgroup, we have shown that we are seriously tackling those issues, which are a concern to the community. It is vital that we liberate people in households to ensure that they can access employment, particularly during the economic downturn. I agree with the Member; there are huge challenges. We can do more, and we are striving to do more. We will see what the discussions on 28 May produce.

**Mr McElduff:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Agus ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a ghabháil leis an Aire.

I thank the Minister for his answers, and I thank Members, including my colleague Sue Ramsey and also Mr Shannon, for the focus that they have placed on childcare provision.

Will the deputy First Minister clear up exactly where after-school provision fits into the equation? I know that the meeting on 28 May will look at the general issues, but organisations such as the Camowen Partnership in mid-Tyrone, which has excellent provision in Carrickmore, Sixmilecross and Loughmacrory, are anxious and uncertain about their future and are not sure where they fit in. Should they turn to the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, the Department of Education or the Department for Employment and Learning? Therefore, OFMDFM is challenged to provide an answer about who is responsible for provision.

**The deputy First Minister:** I am sure that that group will be very pleased to have been mentioned on the Floor of the Assembly.

I have no doubt that the discussions on 28 May will deal with all those issues. There has been a historical context to the issue, and, in many ways, people could allege that there has been a great deal of buck passing. The challenge for the subgroup and the Executive subcommittee is to remove any ambiguity about which Department will deal with that important area in future.

### Pledge of Office

4. **Mr Savage** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what discussions it has had with the Minister of the Environment in relation to a possible failure to observe any of the terms of the Pledge of Office. (AQO 2589/09)

**The deputy First Minister:** I refer the Member to the answer that I gave earlier to the Member for South Down Mr McCallister. My comments then are equally applicable to this question.

**Mr Savage:** Do the deputy First Minister's views on climate change most closely resemble those of the Minister of the Environment? Furthermore, is he satisfied that his Department has taken all reasonable steps —

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The convention in the House has been that, as far as possible, a Member should not read out a supplementary question.

**Mr Savage:** Is the deputy First Minister satisfied that his Department has taken all reasonable steps to ensure that the commitments of the Programme for Government are being met by the Department of the Environment?

**The deputy First Minister:** The issue of breaching the ministerial code has been raised in the past. The First Minister and I have no power to determine whether the ministerial code has been breached. It is open to Members, including the Member who asked

the question, to move a motion on the grounds that a Minister has failed to observe any of the terms of the Pledge of Office. Such a motion can be brought to exclude a Minister from office, to reduce a Minister's salary or to censure a Minister. It is for the Assembly to consider and, where it agrees, to pass a resolution. That is the only way to deal with the matter. Breaches of the ministerial code, which is a statutory document, could also be determined as a matter of law.

My attitude on the causes of climate change is probably more in tune with the First Minister's than it is with the Minister of the Environment's. However, the Environment Minister is entitled to his opinion and to express it. He has expressed his opinion on climate change, and queries about that opinion should be taken up with him. He is responsible for climate change policy. His Department has established the Climate Change Impacts Partnership with business, non-governmental organisations, the voluntary sector and other parts of Government, and it continues to work with other Administrations to inform public policy.

Therefore, although people contemplate citing the Environment Minister's view that stronger evidence of climate change must be established, it is clear that the commitments, actions and targets to tackle the problem of climate change in the Programme for Government are supported by all Departments, including the Department of the Environment.

**Mr McKay:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The deputy First Minister has already answered part of my question. Will he clarify the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister's powers and, indeed, procedures relating to perceived breaches of the ministerial code and the Pledge of Office?

**The deputy First Minister:** I have made it clear that the power to sanction or deal with any Minister whom the Assembly believes to have breached the ministerial code resides in the House. On that matter, the House is all powerful. Every Member knows and understands the procedure that must be carried out: principally, that any Member who seeks to exclude or sanction a Minister must have the support of 29 other Members in order to bring the matter to the Floor of the House for debate, discussion and decision. That is the process. It is the Assembly, and not the Executive, that is all powerful in that regard.

**Mr Speaker:** Questions 5 and 6 have been withdrawn.

## Victims

7. **Mr B McCrea** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail any discussions it has had in relation to the definition of a "victim of the troubles". (AQO 2592/09)

**The deputy First Minister:** As we stated in 2008, during the debate on the Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill, it is our intention that any alteration to the legislative definition of a victim should be discussed by victims and survivors first. They will be able to do so in the victims' forum when it is established. That remains our intention. We understand that the Commission for Victims and Survivors is developing its work on the establishment of the forum and should be in a position to say more about it soon.

**Mr B McCrea:** I thank the deputy First Minister for his answer. However, will he confirm that he disagrees with my party's position that combatants and terrorists, whether they are traitors or not, cannot be treated in the same way as real victims? Has he reached a joint decision on the matter with the First Minister?

**The deputy First Minister:** The First Minister and I are in agreement on the next step regarding victims. When the victims' forum, which will be made up of relevant people, is established it will have its own discussion on the matter and will, undoubtedly, inform us of the outcome of its deliberations. It will then be a matter for the First Minister and me to consider that outcome.

I understand that there is a risk and a danger that political parties will attempt to use victims for political point scoring over one another, particularly in the context of an upcoming election. That is a big mistake; it does a grave disservice to all victims, and it does nothing to allay people's concerns about what is laid out in legislation. Of course, it is based on clear legislation that was put in place by direct rule Ministers.

The establishment of the victims' commissioners has created a changing and evolving situation. Those people are charged with the responsibility to carry out important work on behalf of victims, and they are doing an excellent job at the moment. Part of their work is to establish a victims' forum, which the Department has asked to offer its views on the matter that the Member raised. Thereafter, we will consider those views and attempt to take the process forward.

I challenge everybody in the House to recognise the importance of not using the issue as a political football. We all know and understand that there is a lot of hurt on all sides of the community. Nearly 4,000 people lost their lives in the conflict. They came from all sections of the community — the British Army, the IRA, loyalist groups and innocent civilians. Any attempt to create a circumstance that further exacerbates existing difficulties is a big mistake.

**Ms J McCann:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his response, which has, to some extent, answered my question. Does he agree that those who lost loved ones, or were injured,

in the conflict share the same sense of loss and pain regardless of the circumstances? Go raibh maith agat.

**The deputy First Minister:** Every person who was lost as a result of the conflict represented a huge loss to their family and created huge pain and trauma for those families. All those families suffered. Regardless of what label people attempt to place on them, the fact is that all those people were hurt.

For example, Gerard Donaghy was a member of the junior IRA, Fianna Éireann, who was murdered on Bloody Sunday by the British Parachute Regiment. Where does he fit into the process? I use him as only one example. Did his family even know that he was a member of the junior IRA? He was very young at the time. Do we tell those people that they will not be treated with respect and that they are regarded as not worthy? This process represents a real challenge for us all.

At the weekend, Mickey Bradley, who was shot by the British Army on Bloody Sunday, died suddenly. He lived all his life with pain and disability, hobbling around the streets of Derry on crutches and sticks. For a long time, he campaigned for justice for those who lost their lives. His approach included the fact that Gerard Donaghy, along with all the other people who lost their lives, was an innocent marcher on the day. This is a difficult issue, and there is a lot of pain out there. We must be sensible about how we go forward. I appeal to people not to use the issue, particularly in the context of an election, as a point scoring exercise, because that does a grave disservice to all victims.

**Mrs D Kelly:** I notice that the deputy First Minister used very selective examples of victims. People outside the Chamber are listening carefully to what he has to say on this matter, none less than the families of Patsy Gillespie and Frank O'Hegarty. One of them was made into a human bomb, and the other was promised a safe passage on his return to Derry only to be found dead within a short time frame, much to the regret of his mother and father.

**Mr Speaker:** The Member must ask a question.

**Mrs D Kelly:** The First Minister and deputy First Minister are determined that the forum, once it is established, will provide the definition of "victim". If that is the case, and if they are determined that the issue will not become a political football, why is the DUP introducing amending legislation on the definition of "victim"?

**The deputy First Minister:** Before the Member contemplates asking another question on such matters, she should get her facts right. Some of her "facts" are absolutely wrong. Before she asks a question, she needs to know what she is talking about. What she has said is totally wrong.

**Mrs D Kelly:** It is in the election literature.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The Minister has the Floor.

**The deputy First Minister:** No; she obviously read those stories in newspapers. However, the reality is that she is wrong. I selected Gerard Donaghy as an example because the Ulster Unionist Party asked whether someone such as him, someone who was marching with citizens on the streets of Derry and who was shot dead by the British Army, should be considered an innocent victim.

The decision on the outcome of the work of the forum will fall to the First Minister and the deputy First Minister. We will obviously have to and are quite willing to listen to views expressed by the members of the forum. However, the final decision will be taken by us, and, I hope, it will be taken in agreement.

3.00 pm

## ENVIRONMENT

### Non-Governmental Organisations

1. **Mr McCartney** asked the Minister of the Environment what correspondence he has had with Friends of the Earth and other environmental NGOs, and if he has any plans to meet with them.

(AQO 2606/09)

**The Minister of the Environment (Mr S Wilson):** I have corresponded with Friends of the Earth on one occasion since I came into office. The subject of that correspondence was human rights issues and third-party rights of appeal in connection with my Department's planning reform proposals. I have no plans to meet representatives of Friends of the Earth. I have also corresponded with a number of other NGOs that represent the environment and heritage sectors. I have met some of those organisations and have attended many events to which I have been invited. I have meetings planned with the Quarry Products Association, the National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the RSPB, and Northern Ireland Environment Link. I will be happy to provide a breakdown of that information should the Member wish to see it.

**Mr McCartney:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas don Aire as a fhreagra. I wonder whether the Minister might think it useful to meet groups such as Friends of the Earth about his position, which he has stated with much confidence. I am sure that that group would perhaps help to enlighten him. Perhaps at the end of that meeting — we never know — they could call themselves "Friends of Sammy Wilson". Last week, I heard the First Minister respond to a question on climate change. Perhaps the



Minister should meet the First Minister, who might give him some ideas on climate change.

**The Minister of the Environment:** Friends of the Earth has never asked to meet me. It has written to me on one occasion, and I replied. However, I held a reception for NGOs at Stormont, which went down very well with about 30 different groups that attended. However, I was snubbed by Friends of the Earth. That group was invited but refused to attend. If the Member is so concerned about my meeting Friends of the Earth, my door is always open. I have even invited that group to sup with me in this Building, but it refused to do so. Therefore, if we have not had an exchange of views, it has only itself to blame.

**Mr Ross:** The Minister has referred to some of the events that he has hosted for NGOs. Although Friends of the Earth did not turn up to those events, the Minister detail to the House the purpose of those events and what came out of them?

**The Minister of the Environment:** The purpose of the event to which I invited Friends of the Earth and other NGOs was simply to meet them and to explain the work, issues and challenges that the Department faces. That was a very profitable meeting, which took place at the beginning of my period as Minister. As a result, I received many invitations to meet NGOs on site and to see the work that they are doing.

If the Speaker would indulge me, I could go through the scores of opportunities that I have had to meet on site with NGOs. However, I am not going to do that, because I realise that a lot of Members want to ask questions. Only last week I was in the Member for Foyle's constituency with one of the NGOs to plant a tree as part of work that the Woodland Trust is doing at Ervey Wood.

**Mr P Robinson:** Did you hug it?

**The Minister of the Environment:** I did not hug the tree, but I dug the hole for it and I planted it. I will go back to ensure that it is growing well. That was a very interesting experience, because the Woodland Trust has been given a substantial sum of money from the Department to purchase land to extend the forest, and it is now in line to obtain a huge lottery grant, which will, I hope, enable the whole of the Faughan Valley eventually to be planted with woodland species. That will help towards achieving the target of increasing biodiversity and extending woodland cover in Northern Ireland.

**Mrs M Bradley:** Will the Minister list the NGOs he has met that support his views on climate change?

**The Minister of the Environment:** I am amazed at the obsession that people in the Assembly have with climate change. When I meet the RSPB, the Mourne Heritage Trust, the Woodland Trust or the Ulster

Wildlife Trust, I speak to them about the work that is important to them. I do not seek to impose my views on climate change on those groups, and I do not find that they share some Members' obsession with climate change. The groups want to speak to me about the practical projects that they are undertaking on the ground and of which they are, quite rightly, proud.

On all occasions I have found the meetings to be very instructive and the people I have met to be very courteous in the way in which they have received me. I see how much good work is being done by many of those groups, supported, in many instances, by my Department and by other Departments in the Executive.

## Planning Service

2. **Mr K Robinson** asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the current level of human resources in the Planning Service.

(AQO 2607/09)

**The Minister of the Environment:** The agency has 867 staff, of whom 489 are professional planners, and there are 63 vacancies. The economic downturn has resulted in reductions in the number of planning applications and income to the Planning Service. The agency continues to closely monitor its staffing in relation to its workload.

**Mr K Robinson:** I thank the Minister for a very interesting response. I declare that, although other Members have been reported as having an obsession with the Minister, I am not one of them.

The Minister advised me in January that work on a character study for the Sandy Bay area of Larne had been shelved because of competing priorities and resource problems. Given the downturn in the number of planning applications that divisional planning offices have to process at the moment and the continuing threats to the character of that area of Larne, will the Minister redeploy staff and instruct his officials to finalise that study and use it to inform decisions on the ground?

**Mr Speaker:** Before the Minister speaks, I must say to Members — it has been the case at Question Time for some time — that they should not read out supplementary questions. If it happens in the future, I intend to move on.

**The Minister of the Environment:** I will not read out the answer in case you give me the same instructions, Mr Speaker. First, although there has been an economic downturn, the Planning Service is committed to doing a number of things: reducing processing times, which, of course, requires more staff; and reducing the backlog of planning applications, which stood at around 18,000 and has been reduced to around 14,000, although I could be corrected on that. Of course, there are other



competing priorities, including work on planning policy statements, area plans, etc.

I will bear in mind what the Member has said. I recall that I made a commitment that we would try to resolve some of those issues, and we will see what can be done. Given the economic downturn, I have left a large number of vacancies unfilled, because it is important to live within the budget that has been allocated to the Department. The economic downturn could cost the Planning Service up to £7.7 million, which would create a huge hole in the resources available.

**Mr Boylan:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his response. I hope that the “Friends of Sammy Wilson” will not be another NGO that we have to look forward to.

In light of the media speculation last week about a 20% increase in fees for planning applications, is it not appropriate to redirect some staff? I know that we have to try to keep the skilled and experienced staff who work in the Planning Service. However, in the light of the proposed increases over the next couple of weeks, will there be any opportunities to redirect staff to areas of the Department where there are gaps, such as enforcement and area planning or where junior case officers are currently being employed? Go raibh maith agat.

**The Minister of the Environment:** Members from all sides of the House ask me why staff are not being used for all sorts of purposes, but I will address some of the issues that the Member mentioned. He has lobbied me, for example, to ensure that PPS 21 applications are processed. In that instance, there was a huge backlog of approximately 1,800 planning applications to deal with, and resources had to go into that. Other Members have lobbied me about the backlog of general applications in some divisional offices, of which Craigavon is a good example. We put extra resources into those divisional offices and brought the backlog down very quickly in response to the issues that the Member mentioned.

We are currently unable to carry out strategic environmental assessments because of challenges that have been made against area plans. Planning will have to be devolved to councils before we have a mechanism that allows us to proceed with judicial reviews. Given the challenges to area plans, work on them, although it may be useful, may not be the best use of resources. We are targeting additional resources at enforcement, at reducing the backlog of applications and at meeting the Programme for Government requirements for processing times, and we are making good progress on those fronts. The Planning Service moves resources around when matters have to be addressed, and, when it does so, it has proved that it can get results.

**Mr I McCrea:** I thank the Minister for his answers so far. Service delivery is a theme that has been raised today. Will the Minister assure me that the Planning

Service is taking positive action to ensure that staffing shortfalls do not affect service delivery?

**The Minister of the Environment:** That is exactly what we have been doing. There has been some criticism, but one reason that we increased planning fees was to ensure that resources are available to us.

I will take this opportunity to assure the House about those increases, because some Members have been unfairly critical. The Department has looked for efficiencies, such as reducing overtime and leaving vacancies in promotion programmes. It has also sought, through the first increase in planning fees for four years, to obtain additional resources. All that is designed to ensure that we have a Planning Service that can deliver on planning applications, which are essential for economic growth in Northern Ireland. Furthermore, as several concerned Members said, we must ensure that we do not hand over to councils, if we get to that point in 2011, a Planning Service that is under-resourced.

**Mr Speaker:** Mr Ford is not in his place to ask question 3.

### Planning: Enforcement Procedures

4. **Ms Lo** asked the Minister of the Environment what proposals he will bring forward to expedite planning enforcement procedures, particularly where residents have to suffer detrimental circumstances while an issue is being addressed over a lengthy period.

(AQO 2609/09)

**The Minister of the Environment:** I have no plans at present to introduce new legislative procedures on enforcement. In 2003 and 2006, changes to legislation introduced new powers and strengthened the Department's existing enforcement powers in line with the remainder of the UK. New measures included increases in the level of fines for offences; the ability to serve a breach-of-condition notice to streamline enforcement procedures for breaches of conditions; and temporary stand-alone stop powers to halt a breach of planning control for up to 28 days as soon as a breach is identified without first having to issue an enforcement notice. However, enforcement by its very nature can often be a lengthy and complex process. Although the Planning Service can work to internal timescales, it is largely at the final stages that delays occur. It is largely outside the control of the Department because, when there is an appeal against an enforcement notice, the timescale for the hearing of the appeal and reporting on it might be lengthy. That is an issue for the Planning Appeals Commission, not the Planning Service. Similarly, when court action has been taken, the Department depends on the courts to bring cases forward and make judgements on them.

3.15 pm

The current legislation does not allow offenders to reopen arguments in court on the planning merits of the case. When those arguments have been dealt with by an enforcement appeal to the Planning Appeals Commission and when an appeal is pending, it is not possible to proceed with summons action.

**Ms Lo:** I thank the Minister for his very thorough answer. I understand that he is bringing forward planning reform proposals. Will he consider making it a criminal offence for people to proceed with a development before receiving planning permission to do so?

**The Minister of the Environment:** I am glad that the Member has raised the issue. I would love to have the planning reform proposals out in the open. Had I been able to do that, I think that she would have been pleasantly surprised.

I will give away some secrets. One of the planning reform proposals is to consult about the criminalisation of breaches of planning applications. It is one thing for people to take a chance, but, if they think that they are going to get a criminal record, they may not take that chance.

In certain circumstances, criminalisation will not apply; rather, it will depend on how serious the breach was. That is one of the proposals that is coming forward in the planning reform. Once the party opposite finally gets its head round those proposals, they can then go out for consultation. The information that I am getting from all those involved in the planning process — applicants, objectors and various groups — is that they wish to see those proposals out for consultation and implemented as quickly as possible.

**Mr McClarty:** Is the Minister aware of the perception among the general public that planning enforcement in Northern Ireland is weak and inconsistently applied? Will he assure the House that the review of the Planning Service will strengthen the powers of the enforcement officers? Finally, has the Minister seen the BBC1 programme ‘The Planners are Coming’, which paints a picture of much stricter enforcement of planning laws in England?

**The Minister of the Environment:** Unlike the Member, I unfortunately do not have the time to sit and watch television, so I have not seen the programme to which he referred. I am sure that since the Member has the time to watch television — I do not know if it is daytime, night-time or what kind of television programme that is — he can inform me what actions are taken by planners.

I am aware that there are criticisms about enforcement. Some of them are occasionally unfair, but I take enforcement seriously. There is no point in having planning laws if people feel that they can breach them with impunity. An enforcement strategy has been

drafted and will be published in the near future. I look forward to the response to that.

The strategy will identify revised enforcement priorities so that resources are put into resolving the most serious breaches in which rules and regulations are flouted, and it will limit resources used in pursuing minor breaches, thereby causing no harm to immunity. For example, a high-priority case will involve the demolition of a listed building or a comprised development that may adversely affect or destroy a site of nature conservation. We will, therefore, be seeking ways to establish priorities. However, I repeat the point that I made to the Member for South Belfast Ms Lo: the ineffective part of enforcement is very often when it leaves the hands of the Planning Service. When people make an appeal to the Planning Appeals Commission, enforcement has to stop, of course, for the duration of that appeal. That can take some time, and then it appears as if someone has been able to get away with breaching planning law without any immediate action being taken. Also, if a case goes to court, again, enforcement action has to stop.

Therefore, yes, there are occasions when the Planning Service could, perhaps, be more proactive. However, Members must also understand that the divisional planning offices sometimes feel frustrated, because they cannot make progress when matters are taken out of their hands.

**Mr Moutray:** In that case, will the Minister indicate whether there are priorities for enforcement in the Planning Service?

**The Minister of the Environment:** There are priorities at present. Where there is an immediate threat to a building or where there is a development that will have a disproportionate impact on an area, one would expect enforcement officers to act fairly quickly. I have seen instances and Members have drawn instances to my attention in which enforcement action has been quickly taken.

It is a case, first of all, of the planning breach being identified, and, secondly, of deciding what resources are available to deal with it. Breaches can sometimes occur, for example, at holiday times, when it is not immediately possible to bring the Planning Service into the picture and take action. That is one of the reasons why, in my answer to the Member for South Belfast, Ms Lo, I indicated that on such occasions criminalising the offence might be the ultimate deterrent in order that people do not feel that they can chance their arm in a holiday period to get away with a breach of planning control.

**Dr McDonnell:** I urge the Minister to take whatever action is necessary, including criminalisation of those who ride roughshod through planning. I also raise the possibility of third-party appeals, about which people scream at me day and daily. There was a blatant, high-

profile case in Newcastle during the summer. I thank my colleague from South Belfast, Ms Lo, for raising the issue of planning enforcement procedures, because day and daily in south Belfast there are planning breaches. The conservation area there has almost become a bit of a joke, because only the decent, honest people observe it. I urge the Minister that not only developers who breach planning controls but architects who draw up false plans in order to get around —

**Mr Speaker:** I ask the Member to come to the question.

**Dr McDonnell:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am sure that the Minister has got my point.

**The Minister of the Environment:** I think that I got about three questions out of that, so the Member got good value. The first question I have already answered: the planning reform proposals will contain a proposal to make breach of planning control a criminal offence.

I am not so sure that even the example that the Member gave would have been dealt with by a third-party appeal. However, one thing that I want to achieve through the planning reform proposals is to speed up the planning process, while not losing the accountability and local input that should exist. The planning reform proposals have a better way of getting the views of local people, which is by front-loading the consultation process so that, when a developer goes into a community and before they submit a planning application, they must first show who they have consulted, what they have consulted on, the responses to those consultations and what action they have taken. A lot of controversial development proposals could be defused if all of that was done first of all. Once the planning application is submitted with that type of information, then and only then will it be processed, and it should be processed much more quickly. That is a much better remedy than third-party appeals, which are legalistic, tend to favour those who can spend money on consultants and barristers and do not necessarily give the outcome at the end of the day but only slow the process.

### **Water Abstraction and Impoundment (Licensing) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006**

5. **Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of the Environment to give his assessment of the effectiveness of Statutory Rule No.482 Water Abstraction and Impoundment (Licensing) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 which came into operation on 1 February 2007.  
(AQO 2610/09)

**The Minister of the Environment:** The Water Abstraction and Impoundment (Licensing) Regulations provide an effective risk-based authorisation process to

control and regulate water abstraction and impoundment activities. That is quite a mouthful.

Since the introduction of the regulations in Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Environment Agency has issued licences to control more than 90% of water abstracted from the natural environment. That is making a valuable contribution to the protection of our natural water resources.

**Lord Morrow:** I thank the Minister for his answer, but he should be aware that I have tabled a number of questions for written answer on the matter. Will he outline in detail the difference between his Department giving authorisation and his Department issuing a licence for the abstraction of water? Does he have any plans to amend the legislation, as it strikes me that it is toothless?

**The Minister of the Environment:** The regulations are there to meet the water framework directive and the habitats directive. We are considering plans to introduce a charging scheme for the issue of licences, and we are considering who will be subject to the regulations. The regulations will deal with people who abstract large amounts of water from aquifers. Those people will be public and private abstractors who take more than 20 cubic metres of water per day. They will be subject to the regulations, and they will require a licence.

**Mr McKay:** Does the Minister believe that enforcement of the regulations will be effective, and is it being given the appropriate resources? What is the level of compliance with the regulations from the various stakeholders?

**The Minister of the Environment:** As I said, more than 90% of people who extract water are controlled by licensing. Therefore, the licensing regime covers the vast majority of people who extract water. When people apply for a licence, we become aware of who is extracting the water and of any breaches of the regulations. If breaches are reported, we can readily identify who is involved and take action accordingly.

**Mr McCallister:** Does the Minister accept that, if water extraction were unregulated, it could endanger fish life and other ecosystems and natural habitats that he spoke about, particularly during dry summers?

**The Minister of the Environment:** Some people think that it is just water, but the water framework directive ensures that the examples that the Member outlined are protected. As he pointed out, the extraction of water, especially from aquifers, can have an impact on the environment. The whole idea was to try to ensure that there was no unregulated abstraction to the point where there was damage to the environment.



## Department of the Environment: Vehicles

6. **Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of the Environment what consideration his Department gives to fuel economy and the road tax bracket when purchasing new vehicles. (AQO 2611/09)

**The Minister of the Environment:** When purchasing new vehicles, my Department considers what vehicles meet the demand of the businesses for which they are required. If several vehicles are identified as being suitable, the Department will consider and take into account, as one would expect, the fuel economy of those vehicles.

**Mr Beggs:** I thank the Minister for his answer, but, in a previous answer, he indicated that his Department had 10 vehicles in tax band F, including eight Shogun Sports no less, which are not renowned for their fuel economy. Has the Minister of the Environment set an example by disposing of his own 4x4, which is an environmentally unfriendly vehicle?

**The Minister of the Environment:** I am glad that we have got to this question. I was hoping that we would get to it. The Member continually goes on about the vehicles that the Department uses, but, if he had actually thought about his question, he might have considered that it might not have been a wise question to ask. Is the Member really suggesting that the Department of the Environment and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, which usually purchases vehicles to take people over rough terrain into mountains to follow river courses, should employ electric cars or solar-powered cars?

The Department uses 4x4 vehicles because they are most suitable for the terrain in which the officers must work. Indeed, when I look across the valley from my house to the Member's farm, I do not see electric tractors driving up and down the fields. I do not see environmentally friendly, small vehicles. That is because, in order to spray fertiliser on fields and to go through muddy fields, he needs a big, diesel tractor with a huge engine, which emits lots of CO<sub>2</sub>. Therefore, if Mr Beggs can choose a suitable vehicle for those jobs, my Department is equally entitled to choose a vehicle that is suitable for its purposes. *[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order.

3.30 pm

## FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

### 2012 Olympic Games

1. **Mr I McCrea** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the procurement opportunities for firms in Northern Ireland in relation to contracts associated with the 2012 Olympic Games in London. (AQO 2626/09)

**The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Dodds):** After the Minister of the Environment's answers, I am tempted just to say, "Try to follow that", but I will proceed with the answer to this question.

I visited the Olympic Park site last month to see at first hand the procurement opportunities available to Northern Ireland firms to bid for contracts associated with the London 2012 Olympic Games. Those games give our local companies a tremendous opportunity to bid for valuable contracts.

I met John Armitt, the chairman of the Olympic Delivery Authority (ODA), who confirmed that many opportunities are available from contractors that have already been appointed by the ODA and from its supply chains. I strongly urge all local firms, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises to bid for supply-chain contracts by using the CompeteFor web portal that was launched in Northern Ireland by Invest Northern Ireland.

In addition to bidding for contracts using the CompeteFor service, local companies can use the eSourcing NI tendering system that was launched by my Department's Central Procurement Directorate. Three Northern Ireland companies have already won work with the ODA, which proves that local firms have the expertise and capability to challenge for and win work beyond Northern Ireland's shores.

**Mr I McCrea:** I am sure that the Minister agrees that opportunities, some of which he outlined, exist for businesses in Northern Ireland to benefit from any procurement that comes from the 2012 Olympics. Will he tell the House the extent to which Invest Northern Ireland has been involved in promoting procurement opportunities connected with the Olympics?

**The Minister of Finance and Personnel:** The CompeteFor web portal was launched by Invest NI, the trade division of which has carried out activities with local companies. In my former capacity as the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, I attended a conference in 2008 about work that was being done through Invest Northern Ireland to encourage local companies to investigate Olympics-related procurement opportunities.

Invest Northern Ireland also organised five seminars in October and November 2008 at which training was



provided that enabled 96 companies to develop a professional tendering approach for 2012 contracts. I understand that 27 companies were taken to the Olympic Park to receive presentations from main contractors and supply-chain specialists. I know that Invest NI planned to launch a dedicated, Olympics-related page on its website.

Therefore, a lot of work is being done in relation to opportunities available through the Olympic project in London. It is important to ensure our local companies are given whatever support is available so that they can take advantage of that tremendous expenditure.

**Mr McLaughlin:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he inform the House whether indigenous businesses now enjoy more success because of the steps that he and other Ministers have introduced to open up the procurement process? Will he set out some of the details?

**The Minister of Finance and Personnel:** I presume that the Member's question relates to the overall situation, not just the Olympic Games. As he will be aware, work has been done through the procurement task group, which was set up recently and has met regularly. I think that a report will come forward this week at the procurement board meeting. That very significant piece of work has been undertaken by Central Procurement Directorate and by representatives from industry and small and medium-sized enterprises. It has resulted in a great deal of consensus about how procurement should move forward. The Construction Employers Federation and representatives of industry and business have engaged positively in that work and are optimistic about its outcomes, and they confirmed that when I met them recently.

Since our announcement, in December 2008, about efforts to ensure that no money would be lost as a result of legal issues in relation to frameworks, we have been able to ensure that £400 million worth of contracts came to market without being held up in legal disputes.

As I have said to the House previously, it is important to note the measures to assist local firms to avail themselves of procurement opportunities, including the introduction of the electronic procurement portal, eSourcing NI, and other work. Over 95% of public-sector construction works in Northern Ireland are now awarded to local firms, the majority of which are small and medium-sized enterprises. Historically, that figure is about 60% in Scotland and about 50% in Wales. That is very positive news for small and medium-sized enterprises and for the construction industry in Northern Ireland.

**Mr P Ramsey:** Further to the Minister's answer, does he agree that a huge opportunity was missed — in relation to legacy issues as well as the construction

industry and the creation of jobs — by not going ahead with the multi-sports stadium at the Maze site? Will the Minister explain what direct benefit will come to Northern Ireland as a result of the Olympic Games in London?

**The Minister of Finance and Personnel:** I have already indicated the tremendous amount of significant work that has been done to provide local companies and firms with opportunities to bid for work in relation to the Olympic Games. As I mentioned, a number of companies have already won work. I hope that other companies will win more contracts as a result of that work.

The Member referred to one particular project. He should bear it in mind that, as part of the delivery of the investment strategy, 30% more was spent in the last financial year on helping and supporting the construction industry in Northern Ireland than was spent in the previous year. That is £1.6 million in gross expenditure. Despite the downturn, that is a very significant increase in the amount of activity in relation to capital expenditure in Northern Ireland. It provides much-needed support to large and small construction companies. That is a major improvement on the situation the year before.

### Senior Civil Service: Bonus Scheme

2. **Mr Attwood** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if, in light of financial pressures on Government Departments, he will abolish the Senior Civil Service Bonus Scheme. (AQO 2627/09)

**The Minister of Finance and Personnel:** My officials are currently preparing options for this year's Senior Civil Service pay award for consideration. Therefore, I have not yet made any decisions regarding any element of the Senior Civil Service pay award for 2009, including non-consolidated bonus payments.

**Mr Attwood:** I welcome the news that options are under preparation. This issue has had a high profile for some time.

Bearing in mind that permanent secretaries in England no longer receive bonuses, that the Minister's own permanent secretary recently gave evidence to the Committee for Finance and Personnel to the effect that he is largely in agreement with arguments for the removal of Senior Civil Service bonus payments, and that, in a meeting on 22 April 2009, the head of the Civil Service advised the SDLP that he largely disagrees with those arguments, what is the Minister's opinion on bonus payments to senior civil servants?

**The Minister of Finance and Personnel:** Options are under consideration, and we will make decisions in due course. The Member mentioned the fact that permanent secretaries in Whitehall are voluntarily waiving bonus payments for 2009. Due to grading

differences between permanent secretaries in Great Britain and those in Northern Ireland, the head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service is the only person at an equivalent grade to that group. Bonus payments will remain part of the Senior Civil Service pay award for 2009 in England, Scotland and Wales. Nevertheless, the Member raised a number of points, and I will certainly consider all those matters in due course. It should be said that the overall Senior Civil Service pay bill in Northern Ireland is falling as a result of its reduced size, from a peak of 237 senior civil servants in 2005 to the present figure of 209. Nevertheless, this is a subject for discussion and debate, and, in the coming weeks, I will look carefully at all options.

**Mr Hamilton:** Understandably and rightly, there is a focus on the cost of the Civil Service, particularly the cost of bonuses to senior civil servants. Given that there is much talk about that matter, will the Minister outline the actual cost of the Northern Ireland Civil Service, and, more importantly, how that cost compares with other regions in the United Kingdom?

**The Minister of Finance and Personnel:** It is important to view bonuses and the Civil Service pay bill in perspective. In fact, the Senior Civil Service in Northern Ireland is proportionally smaller than that in England, Scotland or Wales. I had some research carried out on the subject and, in the past 12 years, the size of the Senior Civil Service in Britain has generally increased, whereas its size in Northern Ireland has gone down. However, we must investigate what more we can do to achieve efficiencies and value for money.

In March 2008, the total Senior Civil Service pay bill was approximately £13.2 million. In 2006, that bill was £14 million. There is an issue not only with bonuses but with respect to the generally high public-sector wages that are paid at a senior level, and we must consider that matter carefully as we go forward.

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. As the Minister said, there is public concern about the high level of pay for senior civil servants. In line with the Committee for Finance and Personnel's suggestion, will the Minister consider a comprehensive review of the salary structure, including bonuses, of the Senior Civil Service, which comprises some 200 people?

**The Minister of Finance and Personnel:** As I said, the figure is 209. Options for 2009 are being prepared, and I will carefully consider the submissions when they are made. However, it would be wrong of me to pre-empt that work today. Nevertheless, I am aware of the Committee for Finance and Personnel's and Members' views on those matters and, in the days to come, we will carefully consider them before reaching a decision.

## Northern Ireland Block Grant

3. **Mr McNarry** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of how the Chancellor's efficiency savings of £5 billion in 2009-2010 and further efficiency savings of an additional £10 billion from 2011-2012 will impact on the Northern Ireland block grant. (AQO 2628/09)

**The Minister of Finance and Personnel:** The Chancellor of the Exchequer has not announced plans for efficiency savings of £5 billion in 2009-2010.

3.45 pm

**Mr McNarry:** I have written in my notes that I will thank the Minister for his answer, so I suppose that I had better see that through and thank him for whatever it was that he said. Perhaps I will try to ask the question in another way. Given the recent national Budget announcement, will the Minister indicate what additional impact the decrease in GDP from 3.1% to only 1.3% by 2013-14 will have here? Can he say that the steps that he is taking now will ensure that by 2013-14, when he is no longer in office, there will be a viable strategy in place to cope with the severe financial restraints and cutbacks that will be kicking in for some time in the future, as I hope he recognises?

**The Minister of Finance and Personnel:** I answered the main question as I did because the Member asked me for my assessment of how the Chancellor's efficiency savings of £5 billion in 2009-2010 and further efficiency savings of an additional £10 billion will impact on the Northern Ireland block grant. I simply said that the Chancellor did not announce efficiency savings in 2009-2010; the Member was wrong. Furthermore, the Chancellor did not announce additional savings of £10 billion for 2011-12.

**Mr McNarry:** Just answer the question.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The Minister has the Floor.

**The Minister of Finance and Personnel:** I am entitled to point out inaccuracies. Perhaps that is a fault of putting down a question — *[Interruption.]*

The Member asked a question, and now he does not want to hear the answer. That is part of the problem, because the Member submitted his question before the Chancellor announced his Budget.

The Chancellor announced efficiency savings for 2010-11, and they were offset by additional Barnett formula consequentials of £116 million over this year and next year. The Executive will not receive a funding allocation for the period beyond 2010-11 until after the next UK spending review. Therefore, we do not yet know what the block grant position will be, and we can only make those decisions in the context of the outcome of the UK comprehensive spending review. I know that

that fact will not impact too greatly on some Members, but it is a fact.

As the Chancellor announced and as we know, there is a downward trend in public expenditure growth. The Member will be all too aware of that because, I suspect, his party colleagues at Westminster will have told him that their plans for public expenditure in Northern Ireland are draconian. I did some research, and I found out where the £5 billion —

**Mr McNarry:** What about answering the supplementary?

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I warn the Member not to speak from a seated position.

**The Minister of Finance and Personnel:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I discovered from where the £5 billion in 2009-2010 came. It did not come from the Chancellor; it was proposed by the spokesman of the Member's party in Westminster.

**Mr McNarry:** The Minister did not answer my supplementary question, so what is the point of asking one?

**Mr Speaker:** Order.

**Mr O'Dowd:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I will not get involved in the toing and froing over what figures in the British Budget are correct or incorrect, but it is clear that we are facing a major economic downturn. The figures that were published by the EU are actually worse than those forecast by the British and Irish Governments. I accept that the next comprehensive spending review has not been set out, but, as part of our forward planning and financial and fiscal planning, will the Minister examine the possibility of the Executive taking on more fiscal freedom?

**The Minister of Finance and Personnel:** I recognise the code. The call for more fiscal freedom is, usually, a call for tax-raising powers. The Member should spell out in more detail what he means by fiscal freedom. Our position as an open, regional economy that is part of the United Kingdom can barely be compared with the Irish Republic, for instance, in the euro zone. There is no doubt that being part of the United Kingdom in the current situation has proved to be immeasurably beneficial and helpful to Northern Ireland. These days, we do not hear any talk about the Celtic tiger, and we do not hear anyone say that Northern Ireland should be linked to the Irish Republic as a member of the euro zone — or in any other sense. Therefore, those who talk about fiscal freedom from the United Kingdom must be honest and admit that they are really saying that people in Northern Ireland should have to pay more in tax and charges than they currently pay under the British Exchequer.

**Mr O'Loan:** I think that everyone accepts that from 2011 onwards there will be heavy cuts in the Northern Ireland block grant. What adjustment will the Minister make to budgetary allocations in the current CSR period to align with present needs and prepare for the future?

**The Minister of Finance and Personnel:** The Member talks about what might happen from 2011 onwards. We must wait to find out the outcome of the UK spending review to know what the block grant will be. As far as the current CSR is concerned, we know the position up until 2011. Despite predictions that there were to be £600 million in efficiency cuts over the current CSR period, we now know the figure for Northern Ireland for the next two years: £123 million, offset by £116 million in extra Barnett consequentials.

What happens after that will depend on the outcome of the UK-wide comprehensive spending review, and we do not know what the figures will be. Indeed, nobody knows what they will be; Whitehall Departments do not know what they will be. As I said, we know that both the Labour Party and the Conservative Party at Westminster are saying that public expenditure will generally be very constrained. However, until we know what the block grant will be, we cannot set out our spending plans.

**Mr Ross:** Does the Minister agree that, rather than make savings that impact adversely on front line services, savings would best be made by cutting back on unnecessary bureaucracy? Mr McNarry's time might be better spent having a word in the Health Minister's ear about that.

**The Minister of Finance and Personnel:** I thank the Member for his question. There is a need for efficiency savings to ensure that front line services are protected and improved at the cost of bureaucracy. That is why I and a number of colleagues welcome the efficiency review that has now been set up to look at the structures of government. Suggestions have been made, not least by us, about cutting the number of Government Departments, which would release £50 million a year into front line services. Those suggestions should be considered immediately. We could do that during the current CSR period, if parties are willing to consider what could be done with less bureaucracy, less government and fewer Departments in Northern Ireland.

### Senior Civil Service: Women

4. **Ms Anderson** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if he will take steps to combat the under-representation of women in the senior Civil Service and in professional and specialist grades.

(AQO 2629/09)

**The Minister of Finance and Personnel:** Steps have been taken and will continue to be taken to address



identified under-representation in the Northern Ireland Civil Service. Across the NICS as a whole, the percentage of female staff at grade 5 and above has increased steadily from 16.8% in 2003 to 27.4% in 2008. To attract as wide an applicant pool as possible, the Civil Service makes extensive use of open recruitment to fill senior posts and those at professional and specialist grades. Where appropriate, job vacancies are advertised in specialist and professional publications and promoted at careers events in universities and at job fairs. Again, where appropriate, recruitment advertisements include a statement welcoming applications from under-represented groups, including females. However, appointments are, of course, based on merit.

**Ms Anderson:** Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Does the Minister agree that the decentralisation of departmental offices and functions will assist women who wish to advance their careers while having a work/life balance? Obviously, I have a particular interest in the decentralisation of functions to Foyle and the north-west.

**The Minister of Finance and Personnel:** The decentralisation of Government services and departmental staff is the subject of the Bain Report, and there is a paper on that before the Executive that, I hope, will be discussed shortly.

I am not convinced that providing enhanced opportunities for females will significantly help to combat the under-representation. However, it is important to stress that the Civil Service is committed to balanced employment across genders, and, as I cited in my previous answer, significant improvements have been made with regard to the figures from 2003 to the present day. Officials are undertaking an in-depth analysis of the gender composition of all grades and disciplines across the service, and it is hoped that the results of that analysis will be available in the next few months. We will then be in a position to consider further what action can be taken to address areas of under-representation in general.

**Mr K Robinson:** What steps has the Minister taken in manpower, or womenpower, planning for the next decade to ensure that the Civil Service will have a pool of specialist expertise, thereby negating the need to employ consultants, especially those who have retired recently from the Civil Service?

**The Minister of Finance and Personnel:** I understand where the Member is coming from, especially his reference to consultants. However, in every case where consultancy projects are required, they are subject to a value-for-money assessment, and consultants are used only if suitably qualified staff are unavailable in Departments.

The Member raised the point about ensuring that suitable expertise is available, and it is important that

we ensure that people of appropriate quality are recruited to the Civil Service. As the Member will be aware, a view exists in many circles that, in some senses, we should be looking at downscaling, as opposed to the other perspective. However, the Member has made an important point, and I will bear it in mind.

## Building Regulations

**5. Mr Neeson** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to provide an update on the development of new building regulations. (AQO 2630/09)

**The Minister of Finance and Personnel:** The Building Regulations (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2009 received Royal Assent on 2 March 2009. Work has now commenced on a revision of the suite of building regulations subordinate legislation to incorporate the new and amended provisions of the Act. Officials will use that opportunity to provide a technical uplift to four parts of the building regulations, namely: Part C, "Site preparation and resistance to moisture"; Part F, "Conservation of fuel and power"; Part G, "Sound insulation of dwellings"; and Part K, "Ventilation". It is anticipated that that will take between 20 and 24 months to complete.

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

In addition, officials are preparing amendments to the current regulations that will amend Part A, "Interpretation and general"; Part D, "Structure"; and Part J, "Solid waste in buildings". It is anticipated that those amendments will be made in November.

**Mr Neeson:** Does the Minister have any plans to introduce into Northern Ireland the code for sustainable homes targets for all newbuild homes to be zero-carbon rated by 2016?

**The Minister of Finance and Personnel:** The UK Government recently issued a policy statement, 'Building a Greener Future', in which they announced that all new homes would be zero-carbon rated from 2016, a target that has also been adopted in Scotland and the Republic of Ireland. The setting of that target and the progression towards its achievement were designed to inform the construction and manufacturing industry and to give it time to ensure that it would be in a position to meet those targets. I have already advised Members that, to ensure that changes to Northern Ireland's standards keep pace with changes in the other jurisdictions, officials will work with their counterparts in other jurisdictions to introduce energy efficiency amendments that will maintain Northern Ireland building regulations at the same standards and at similar timescales as have been established in other Great Britain jurisdictions.



**Mr Shannon:** The Minister is well aware that the construction industry is under tremendous pressure across all constituencies in Northern Ireland. The building regulations could add more financial pressure. Will the Minister assure us that the building regulations will not add significant financial pressures on to the already depressed construction industry?

**The Minister of Finance and Personnel:** I understand the Member's point; it is a valid one that people in the construction industry are, no doubt, concerned about. It will take some 20 to 24 months to make the amendments that are proposed, and there will also be a period between the making of the regulations and their coming into operation. The proposed timescale will be identified in the public-consultation exercise, and consultees will be given the opportunity to comment on it. I offer an assurance to the honourable Member that my officials will continue to liaise with stakeholders as the work progresses.

4.00 pm

**Rev Dr Robert Coulter:** I thank the Minister for his answers. What measures are in place to ensure that there is uniformity of practice between councils in matters of building regulation, and how does the Department oversee that uniformity?

**The Minister of Finance and Personnel:** The Department's role in this matter is to propose regulations, which are passed by the Assembly in subordinate legislation. They set out the context and framework within which all the work has to happen. It is then up to councils and others who are charged with enforcement and regulation to interpret them.

The Member raised the importance of consistency between councils across the board, and the review of public administration should make that work easier and more consistent across Northern Ireland. However, I will make sure that the important issue that the Member raised about consistency of application is drawn to the attention of the appropriate officials in my Department.

## ASSEMBLY COMMISSION

### Travel Abroad

1. **Mr Lunn** asked the Assembly Commission to outline how much money has been spent since devolution on trips abroad by MLAs on behalf of the Assembly Commission, the Assembly Business Trust and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. (AQO 2646/09)

**Mr Butler:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Since devolution, a total of £45,299.45 has been spent on visits by MLAs on behalf of the Assembly Commission, the Assembly Business Trust and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

**Mr Lunn:** I am pleasantly surprised by that low figure. Does the Member agree that it is important that we keep a tight grip on that kind of expenditure, particularly in the current economic climate?

**Mr Butler:** Yes. All trips by Members on behalf of the Assembly, whether within these islands or to another part of the world, go before board committees to be assessed for value for money and to establish what benefit they will bring to the Assembly. I agree with the Member that we need to keep a keen eye on what trips Members make and what money the Assembly spends, particularly in the current economic climate.

### Car Parking

2. **Mr Molloy** asked the Assembly Commission to outline what steps it is taking to address the problem of car parking for staff and visitors to the Assembly. (AQO 2647/09)

**Mr Neeson:** The Assembly Commission acknowledges the growing problem with car parking on the estate, particularly on sitting days. The Assembly Commission has responsibility for the management of the upper-east and upper-west car parks at Parliament Buildings. All other car parking on the Stormont estate, including the lower-east car park, is the responsibility of the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP). Staff from the Assembly regularly co-ordinate and communicate with DFP colleagues on all car-parking issues. DFP recently granted the use of limited spaces in a small overflow car park south of the lower-east car park for staff and visitors to Parliament Buildings.

During the summer recess of 2008, a programme of work was carried out in the upper car parks to address drainage problems. The opportunity was also taken to modify the car park layouts to maximise the number of available spaces. There are no plans for any further adjustments to be made to those car parks.

The Assembly Commission, in conjunction with Departments, recently signed up to a workplace travel plan that aims to encourage the use of public transport and initiatives such as car sharing in a bid to reduce the number of cars that come into the Stormont estate.

**Mr Molloy:** The Commission must know that support staff cannot find parking spaces. Staff find that very disruptive, and they have to carry heavy baggage and structures into the Building. In addition, vehicles are parked along the roadways in the estate, which is

unsafe. It may be healthy for people to walk, but for those carrying baggage and materials, it is inconvenient. What will the Assembly Commission do about that? It is a difficulty that must be resolved.

**Mr Neeson:** I know what the Member means. Other MLAs have spoken to me about this recently and it is an issue that we will keep under review, but it is a difficult one to resolve. One of the most important things is to encourage staff to use public transport. I know that there are issues related to the public transport facilities and the Commission will address them.

**Mr K Robinson:** Further to Mr Molloy's point, office and party staff have to come to and from the Building in a variety of guises. They must travel out to constituency and party offices, and so forth. That means that they must come back and forth all the time. As has been said, they sometimes have to carry bulky items. Is there no short-term measure that the Commission can consider to alleviate the problem for staff going about their lawful business, communicating with Members and parties?

**Mr Neeson:** We do not need a short-term response; we must consider long-term issues. The number of MPs for which the Building was intended is much smaller than the 108 Members that we have at present. Clearly, we must consider whether we can provide a further facility for car parking on the Stormont estate. As I said to Mr Molloy, the important thing is to encourage people to use public transport.

**Mr Shannon:** It has been brought to my attention, and we are probably all aware of it, that taxis and buses must often leave passengers at the bottom of the hill, away from the security gates. Has the Commission considered the possibility of a providing a turning circle for taxis and buses?

Last Friday, the Older People's Policy Forum attended the Assembly. Many old people had to walk 100 yards. Some of them are healthy, but some are not. I thought it unfair to ask them to walk that distance. We have already asked that this matter be considered. I ask the Member again to direct the Commission to address the issue. A turning circle might not be pleasing, aesthetically or visually, but it is something that we must have on grounds of health and safety.

**Mr Neeson:** I take on board the issue Mr Shannon has raised. However, elderly people and those with disabilities can be disembarked at the east car park gate. We are mindful of the needs of those people, and we will consider the Member's point about a turning circle.

### Assembly Website

3. **Mr Brolly** asked the Assembly Commission what plans it has to provide an Irish-language version of the

Assembly's website, and its other publications.

(AQO 2648/09)

**Rev Dr Robert Coulter:** On 3 March 2009, the Assembly debated a Commission motion relating to a new engagement strategy aimed at improving public engagement with the Assembly, its Committees and MLAs. As a part of the strategy, and included in the recently devised corporate plan, the Assembly Commission has committed itself to a full and effective review of the Assembly website. The Commission will invest in the complete redevelopment of the website over the next 18 months.

The Assembly Commission's information leaflet, 'Your Assembly — Working for You', is available in 10 languages, including Irish. All versions are available on the Assembly website. The Assembly Commission is also considering the development of a languages policy. As part of the development of that policy, the Assembly Commission will initiate a full consultation exercise on its content and will consider any implications for the redevelopment of the website and future use of Assembly publications.

**Mr Brolly:** Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. In general, what is the Commission doing to fulfil its obligations under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages?

**Rev Dr Robert Coulter:** At present, the Assembly Commission recognises its obligations under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in respect of Irish and Ulster Scots, and is represented on the interdepartmental charter implementation group. The Assembly Commission will consider any further guidance that arises from the work of that group. In addition to English, many other languages are used in Northern Ireland, including indigenous minority languages, Irish, Ulster Scots, minority ethnic languages, British sign language and Irish sign language.

The Assembly Commission has a number of statutory and other obligations to consider when dealing with correspondence, requests for information, etc, in languages other than English. For example, under the Assembly Commission's equality scheme, which was drawn up in accordance with section 75, we undertake to make the information that we hold available in different formats and in all languages on request.

**Mr McNarry:** I might have a better chance of getting an answer to my supplementary question under the auspices of the proficient and well-mannered Dr Coulter. His answer will at least be better than the one that the Finance Minister provided the last time.

How much money does the Assembly spend on Irish translation services? How much taxpayers' money is being spent on this latest piece of mischief-making, and how many members of the public request Irish-only documents?

**Rev Dr Robert Coulter:** I thank the Member for his supplementary question. To date, £1,270·38 has been spent on the translation of Assembly publications into the Irish language through our existing print contract. As far as future costs are concerned, the print contract for the Assembly is out to tender and is due to be awarded during the summer recess.

Allied to the main printing requirements that are covered by the contract, there will be a requirement for a number of associated services, of which written translation will be one. I cannot give the Member any definitive costs at present as those will be based on the demand for such a facility.

### Parliament Buildings: Emblems

4. **Mr McCartney** asked the Assembly Commission what steps it is taking to ensure that emblems and symbols, inside and outside Parliament Buildings, reflect the culture and ethos of both traditions.

(AQO 2649/09)

**Rev Dr Robert Coulter:** The Assembly Commission recognises the importance of providing an environment in and around Parliament Buildings that is welcoming, harmonious and enjoyed by all sections of the community.

The Assembly Commission is responsible for Parliament Buildings and its immediate curtilage. The Assembly Commission is working on the development of a good relations policy and strategy. Indeed, at a meeting of the Commission on 2 April 2009, members agreed that an internal working group will be established to take forward and make recommendations on an appropriate strategy for the Assembly Commission.

To inform that work, the Assembly Commission has also agreed to arrange a consultation event that includes key stakeholders. It is hoped that that first event will inform the Commission of the main issues surrounding the development of a good relations strategy. Emblems and symbols will be one of the issues that the group will consider. It is hoped that Members and parties will engage fully in those deliberations. We recognise that that will be a significant undertaking for the Commission. I assure the Member that we have given and will continue to give our full commitment to addressing the issue over the coming months.

4.15 pm

**Mr McCartney:** Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhalta as an fhreagra sin.

I thank the Member for his answer, and I welcome the establishment of a working group. Does the Commission know when that group will complete its work? In the interim, does the Member have any examples of where in the Building steps have been taken to reflect the many other cultures?

**Rev Dr Robert Coulter:** At present, there is no indication of when the work will be completed. The Commission is due to go on two away-days, during which those issues and their cost, among other things, will be considered. The Commission will provide an answer to the Member's question at an appropriate time.

### Assembly Roadshows

5. **Mr McElduff** asked the Assembly Commission for its assessment of the series of Assembly roadshows and to outline the main issues and concerns raised by the public at the roadshows. (AQO 2650/09)

**Mr Moutray:** The Assembly Commission is convinced of the need to increase the public's understanding of the Assembly. Members will be aware of the work that the Commission has undertaken to develop an engagement strategy. In addition to that important work, the Commission decided to hold a series of roadshows across Northern Ireland. However, the Commission was conscious that roadshows were a new concept that had not previously been trialled by the Assembly. Moreover, the level of public interest was unclear.

As Members know, more than 600 people attended the nine roadshows that the Commission organised across Northern Ireland. At each roadshow, the main concerns raised were similar and included health matters, such as autism; spending on health; post-primary transfer; student tuition fees; the devolution of policing and justice; and the future of the Maze project.

The consensus of Members who sat on the panels was that the roadshows were useful in increasing the public's understanding of the Assembly.

**Mr McElduff:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a ghabháil leis an Chomhalta fosta.

I thank Mr Moutray for his answer, and I agree with much of what he said. I seek a commitment from the Assembly Commission to repeating the exercise annually —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order. To seek a commitment is not to ask a question. You must ask a question, Mr McElduff.

**Mr McElduff:** In light of your comment, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will reword what I said. Does tone or intonation count? Is there a commitment from the Assembly Commission to repeat the exercise annually — question mark?

Similarly, will the Assembly Commission also consider using venues in the heart of communities to ensure that local people are able to have their say? Perhaps the Commission could review the location of venues.

**Mr Moutray:** I thank the Member for his supplementary question. After studying the report that will evaluate the exercise, the Commission will consider the potential for holding further roadshows in the remaining 10 constituencies. To date, the feedback has been positive.

**Lord Browne:** How much did the roadshows cost, and were they value for money?

**Mr Moutray:** The costs have not yet been fully finalised, but I can give the Member some estimates: the hire of the venues cost £4,000; advertising costs were £25,000; £1,000 was spent on printing; and materials and labour came to £13,000.

Every Member has an obligation to ensure that the public understand the role of the Assembly. In addition to the roadshows, there was a major publicity campaign on the work of the Assembly. I also highlight that through hiring venues across Northern Ireland and placing advertisements in local papers, the roadshows injected expenditure into the economy. Given the current economic climate, that is important, and I have no doubt that the roadshows were good value for money.

**Mr Kennedy:** I thank Mr Moutray for his earlier answers. Will he confirm that no Member who participated in the roadshows was paid to do so but that all Members contributed voluntarily from a sense of public service and duty?

**Mr Moutray:** I am happy to confirm what Mr Kennedy said. It is true that no Members received any remuneration for taking part in the roadshows.

## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

### Costs of Division

#### *Debate resumed on amendment to motion:*

That this Assembly notes the Deloitte Report 'Research into the financial cost of the Northern Ireland divide', commissioned by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister; and calls on the Executive to ensure that the potential to address both the direct and embedded costs of division, and the opportunity to provide shared and integrated goods, services and facilities, are fully realised within the next Programme for Government and the Comprehensive Spending Review. — [*Dr Farry*]

#### *Which amendment was:*

Leave out all after "Executive" and insert

"to ensure that the opportunity to provide shared and integrated goods, services and facilities is fully realised to promote a shared and better future; calls on the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to revise the Programme for Government to take account of these matters and to publish without further delay the strategy for cohesion, sharing and integration; and further calls on the Minister of Finance and Personnel to revise the Budget accordingly." — [*Mrs D Kelly*]

**Mr Kennedy:** I am not sure that I am being paid for this one either.

It is quite clear that the cataclysmic nature of the financial and economic situation that Governments across the globe find themselves in will dictate significant changes to every Government's plans and policies. Things that were affordable before the recession clearly may no longer be affordable. The motion, therefore, is framed by a very different set of circumstances than those that prevailed when the Deloitte report was devised. If, as we hear, the Democratic Unionist Party is already talking about major structural change in the numbers of Departments and Assembly Members, it is a comparatively small thing to reconsider the cost of division as being too great to support in the changed financial climate.

When you mention the cost of division to the man on the street — certainly the man on the streets on which I walk — he immediately thinks of the cost of things such as the Irish language, the Equality Commission and a range of similar issues. There is a lot of information in the public domain, especially from the Deloitte report, which I believe needs a great deal more scrutiny than it has received to date. Although the report broadly identifies a cost to the public of £1.5 billion per annum, a careful reading of it suggests that that figure is incredibly misleading.

The report includes, for instance, the cost of policing riots and civil disorder, which, of course, are not unique to Northern Ireland. It includes support for the victims of past terrorist violence. However, put simply, victims cannot and must not be abandoned to satisfy accountants. It includes the costs associated



with certain administrative changes under the RPA — changes that have been broadly welcomed across Northern Ireland as a means of saving money in the long term. It includes the cost of community relations programmes. Given the hard and vital work undertaken across Northern Ireland to promote better relations in our society, it is, to say the least, slightly strange that the cost of such efforts is implied to be a waste of public money.

The Deloitte report does not factor in the danger from republican dissidents and the additional costs that that demands. It does not factor in the fact that Northern Ireland is the back door to the United Kingdom for dangerous criminal activities, such as the drugs trade. It does not factor in the additional policing costs associated with having a land border with another state. Although the report may point the way to what we should be thinking, it is only a first attempt at a true evaluation of the costs of real division. More has to be taken into account.

The estimated saving for education, at almost £80 million per annum, is based on a guess that savings between 1% and 5% could be made in school provision. That is an unproven figure; it is an estimate.

Experience has shown that savings made from Government reorganisations are never as great as claimed. I sound a note of caution about the wild assumption that £50 million can be saved by cutting the number of Departments. The bulk of the costs will remain as long as the function remains. Departments may be reorganised into fewer units, but that will only save the salaries of a few permanent secretaries and deputy secretaries. As a rule, costs are only saved as functions are shed. The only way to make significant savings is to carry out a cost-benefit analysis of all the functions of Government. The question is: should we really do that?

Although I give broad support to the idea behind the motion, I caution wisdom and prudence in applying such generalised and sweeping principles to cut the costs of our division or to save a huge sum at a stroke. In particular, I caution Ministers against sacking large numbers of public servants or civil servants.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

**Mr Kennedy:** That is the only way that £50 million could be saved.

**Mr McLaughlin:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The motion and the amendment are somewhat predictable. In saying that, I do not mean to be offensive to the Members who tabled them. In fairness, the Alliance Party has addressed the issue of the cost of division on a number of occasions in the Assembly. However, it is obvious that that party's reliance on the report takes no cognisance of its

authors' repeated health warnings that they could not substantiate their calculations. Indeed, they admit in the report that the headline-grabbing figure of £1.5 billion could be considered to be the upper limit of the cost of division. That is a guesstimate at best, and the report makes no mention of an estimate of the lower limit.

However, there are costs of division in this region. As Martina Anderson pointed out, the costs are enormous when the island-wide context is considered. The Alliance Party asked a series of questions to Ministers and can have been left in no doubt that the report would not determine policy in that area. It was not authorised by this Assembly but by a previous Administration. Therefore, it is not relevant to the Assembly.

The report is dated in that by the time of its publication, the issues that it addresses had already been affected fundamentally by the decision to set up the Assembly. The existence of the Assembly has made a significant impact on the traditional divisions and fault lines in society. It is a matter of regret that, like Sisyphus, the Alliance Party used the motion to attempt to push the rock up the hill no matter how often it rolls back down over the top of it.

The SDLP amendment once again demonstrates the single-transferable sound-bite approach that so characterises the party's approach to any and all motions in the Assembly. Notwithstanding the issue, the SDLP sticks in an amendment so that it has an extra 10 minutes in which to speak and considers it to be all the better if it can intervene when other Members are speaking. It is a question of never mind the quality, feel the width. It is genuinely difficult to take such transparent gimmickry seriously.

The amendment makes the usual token reference to reopening the Programme for Government and the Budget process, so there is no surprise with that either. The SDLP contributed a paper to the economic debate in which it promised an elephant and produced a mouse. I admit that it was a glossy production; there is no doubt about that. Unfortunately, for some inexplicable reason, it took no account of the fact that the British Government have already held their spring Budget, which was a response to the economic downturn. It seems that only the SDLP was unaware that that would have a significant impact on this region. Its document asked: where is the money? That might well be a suitable title for a TV game show, but it is hardly a policy or the type of response that is needed for the economic downturn or the critical matter of the divisions and tensions in our society.

The wider issue, which neither the motion nor the amendment have addressed, is the steady progress towards a sustainable political accommodation that

represents our entire society and which has already transformed the situation in the North. It has also transformed the cost-benefit analysis of the responses that the Executive and the Assembly would take.

The benchmark that will govern the success of the application of Executive policy will be the delivery of equality, and it is the responsibility of the Assembly to hold the Executive to account in that respect. Go raibh míle maith agat.

4.30 pm

**Mr McCallister:** I thank the Members who tabled the motion and the amendment. The Ulster Unionist Party is prepared to support the motion if amended, which makes for a more practical and realistic response to some of the problems that society faces.

The motion brings up two major issues. First, the Alliance Party still has an unrealistic approach to a shared future. It fails to recognise that changing people's attitudes and our society involves a process. Thirty years of violence and division cannot simply be wished away. Having listened to Martina Anderson's contribution, in which she blamed everything on the British, I am greatly relieved that Northern Ireland belongs to the United Kingdom, with the National Health Service and an education service that works — despite the efforts of a Sinn Féin Minister.

Secondly, although the Alliance Party is, perhaps, too optimistic about the immediacy of change, Sinn Féin and the DUP appear to be completely incapable of addressing the issue. Their inability to push the cohesion, sharing and integration strategy, and their carve-up of politics and policies to date, show that both Sinn Féin and the DUP are more interested in freezing division than building trust and co-operation between the two traditions in Northern Ireland.

The Ulster Unionist Party welcomed the Deloitte report when it was published. It made a positive contribution to the wider debate on a shared future. However, as well as not being comprehensive, it has flaws. The first is that it is too reductive. Although the Assembly must always seek to protect the public purse by removing waste and inefficiency, we cannot merely reduce the cost of division to pounds and pence. We must always take into consideration the human cost of the past 30-plus years of terrorism and violence.

Many of the figures in the report are misleading. The figure of £1.5 billion per year includes many ambiguous sums. For example, it includes support for victims of past terrorist violence. I consider money that is spent in that area to be crucial to delivering a shared future, and not a cost of division. It includes the cost of policing civil disorder, which all Members should consider a necessity and which is, in fact, not unique to Northern Ireland. It includes costs that are associated

with certain administrative changes under RPA, which have been broadly welcomed by the Assembly.

Another problem with the Deloitte report is that it does not outline a process by which those costs can be reduced. Merely closing a leisure centre will not remove the segregation that people face; it simply removes a particular community's facilities.

Likewise, the Executive cannot be prepared to force people into integrated education. That would not be the right thing to do. That is why the Assembly needs OFMDFM to publish its strategy on how society moves forward to deliver a shared future. To date, however, it appears to have come to few decisions that do not entrench division further, rather than lessen it.

I am bemused, therefore, by what appears to be the Alliance Party's ongoing courtship in an attempt to take the justice brief. If it does —

**Mrs D Kelly:** Surely not.

**Mr McCallister:** Who knows?

**Mr Ford:** I wonder whether the Member was in the Chamber earlier to hear Ms Anderson's contribution. If he describes that as a courtship with the Alliance Party, he has a funny idea of what I understand to be a courtship.

**Mr McCallister:** I remind the Member that, at one time, Ms Anderson was in charge of unionist outreach. It was almost as successful as her courting of the Alliance Party.

**Mr McElduff:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr McCallister:** Well, why not?

**Mr McElduff:** I congratulate the Member on his recent engagement.

**Mr Kennedy:** He will soon be as happy as the rest of us.

**Mr McCallister:** I am grateful to Mr McElduff for that useful intervention. I hope that my engagement will be a happier one than the Alliance/DUP/Sinn Féin carve-up.

The SDLP amendment outlines a much more realistic approach. The Ulster Unionist Party has been calling for a revision of the Programme for Government for some time in order to better reflect current economic and social problems.

In the context of a shared future, any such revision would be correct and sensible. However, to date, we have not been led by much common sense, as a certain party's absence from the Chamber appropriately highlights.

To achieve a shared and better future for the people of Northern Ireland, we must not rely on freezing hostilities, but on a process of developing mutual understanding, recognition of our reliance on one

another and a plan that will break down historical barriers that have been built over many years. No golden ticket will deliver that outcome, but we will certainly not progress in the right direction with Sinn Féin and the DUP in charge. The Ulster Unionist Party supports the amendment.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I am grateful to the Member for returning to the subject matter of the debate.

**Mr O'Loan:** I support the motion as amended by the SDLP. The motion needs to be amended, because a shared future is vital, and the Alliance Party's approach to the matter, not only in respect of this motion, is somewhat simplistic. Attaining a shared future is considerably more complex than that party's analysis suggests.

On many occasions, the Alliance Party has quoted a figure of £1 billion as the cost of division emerging from the Deloitte report. That report does not validate the accuracy of that figure, but has considerable value nonetheless. The Deloitte model refers to three areas: quantified costs — or, perhaps, quantifiable costs; costs that are identified but not quantified; and economic lost opportunities. That is a correct way to frame the situation. On quantifiable costs, the report refers to the example of policing, whereby one can place some hard figures. However, some Members, including Danny Kennedy, indicated that even those figures are debatable. Deloitte is open about the fact that other major potential costs of division often cannot be quantified. Therefore, any figures could rationally be argued as the cost of division.

Martina Anderson outlined a different perspective on the matter. Her argument is perfectly sustainable and every bit as valid as that of the Alliance Party. The figure of £3 billion that she latched onto is as defensible or indefensible as any other figure. There are huge social and economic costs of division, but it is important not to trivialise the issue, as often happens.

**Dr Farry:** I am grateful to the Member for giving way. He mentioned accuracy of figures. Will he respond to the Belfast Harbour Commissioners' criticism of the figures in the SDLP's economic document of last month?

**Mr O'Loan:** The Member is shifting the debate. That, perhaps, indicates a weakness in his position. I could debate that matter, but I will not use my time to do so.

The situation that arose at a Tesco store in Antrim last week highlights the need to address this issue. There were objections to young people wearing GAA club jerseys during a charity collection, and we are told that it is "understandable" that Tesco asked them to wear plain T-shirts. That was the wrong reaction. The right response would have been to face down the objectors and to treat those young people in the same

way that any other team that collected for charity in Tesco had been treated in the past.

I raise that matter because it is representative of a wider approach to such matters. Some people think that a shared future can be built by smoothing out all aspects of diversity — I disagree. Some people support a similar approach to Catholic schools. Some people, but not all, who support integrated schools advocate such schools as the sole model for education. I do not attribute that view to Stephen Farry. Although at one point he described integrated schools as the apex of his policy approach, he did not say that it was the only model that should be considered.

There is a tendency by some to think that that would be the ideal type of structure in some sort of perfect state. Dolores Kelly rightly offered counterpoints to that argument that must necessarily be heard.

Many at the extreme end of that spectrum — as I said, I do not put Stephen Farry in that category — adopt a very intolerant approach and ignore the great added benefit to society of faith-based education and the contribution of its values system and community-based approach.

There is no doubt that Northern Ireland has a deeply dysfunctional society and that there are huge costs of division. The fundamental resolution must be a political one. Such resolution is not easy; it involves a process, and it is not just about smoothing diversity. We are in a better place today as a result of political agreement, and it is no accident that the community is more settled. Leadership matters, and leadership must not falter. There is a shaky relationship between the DUP and Sinn Féin, as witnessed in their failure to agree on a programme for cohesion, sharing and integration.

I will comment briefly on unionism. The First Minister was exemplary in his approach to the Massereene murders when he said that there is no turning back. However, from Diane Dodds we hear talk of smashing Sinn Féin and republicanism. One cannot have it both ways. We need to hear the message that there is no turning back, particularly in relation to North/South development.

Sinn Féin is in an equal quandary, so much so that it halted movement for five months and then started from exactly the same place. That party does not know whether it is working for or against the DUP and what stance it should take in regard to its own approach to violence over the past 30 years.

The message is that unionists and republicans should resolve those dilemmas: that is the superstructure for a shared future. Then we can build the internal walls, as expressed in my party's amendment.

**The junior Minister (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister) (Mr Donaldson):** At the



outset, I welcome the opportunity afforded by the Alliance Party's motion to discuss the costs of division and the work that we are doing to address the many legacies of the past and to build a fair, cohesive society and a shared and better future for all our people. This is a debate worth having; it is a discussion that we need to have, along with continuing dialogue.

I welcome the contributions that have been made by Members across the Chamber. We may differ on aspects of the issue, but within the Assembly, there is a desire to tackle the costs and causes of division in Northern Ireland.

I will refer to some of the comments made by various Members. The debate was opened by Dr Stephen Farry for the Alliance Party. He quoted the First Minister who, he said, recognised the problem, but he also said that the issues had not yet been addressed in the Programme for Government. We accept that the strategy for cohesion, sharing and integration (CSI) needs to be reviewed. It is being reviewed at the moment. That strategy is the core piece of work that will determine our policies and priorities in tackling the causes of division in Northern Ireland in the coming years. I stress that that is a revision of an existing strategy. There is a strategy at the moment, but we accept that it needs to be updated in light of the political progress that has been made and changing attitudes in society.

Dr Farry referred to the Deloitte report, which is mentioned in the Alliance Party's motion. He accepted that the report was not perfect. During the debate, others described it as "incredibly misleading", "flawed", and so on. The diverse opinions on the report that we have heard this afternoon and the fact that even its proponents have been critical of it is recognition that the report does not offer the basis for tackling the problems. There is information in the report of which we can make use, but there are aspects that I, too, feel are flawed and inaccurate.

That is why we must look at the bigger picture. The revised CSI strategy provides us with an opportunity to do so.

I look forward to the publication next week of the Alliance Party's paper on savings in public services that can be made under the banner of tackling the costs of division. We will look carefully at the Alliance Party's contribution to the ongoing debate.

4.45 pm

In proposing the SDLP amendment, Mrs Kelly said that the SDLP wanted the Programme for Government to be revised to take account of the recession and the cost of division and how we tackle those issues. However, the Programme for Government clearly sets out our commitment to building a shared future. The revised CSI strategy will give us a basis on which to

move that work forward. Therefore, we do not necessarily believe that there is a need to review the Programme for Government.

Progress is being made. There are differences between the DUP and Sinn Féin representation in OFMDFM on some of the detail of the revised strategy, but we are working our way through those differences and we are hopeful that we can publish the revised strategy in the near future. That will, in turn, invite responses from the parties that are represented in the Assembly.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel is more than capable of speaking for himself about the need to revise the Budget. If the revised CSI strategy has budgetary implications, we will examine those at the appropriate time. However, our position on the recession remains the same. We believe that the Budget and the Programme for Government form a sound basis for tackling Northern Ireland's economic problems.

On behalf of Sinn Féin, Martina Anderson estimated that the cost of partition stood at £3 billion a year. However, I suggest to Sinn Féin that the cost of partition to Northern Ireland, given the recession and our position within the United Kingdom, is a lot less when one factors in the economic situation in the Republic compared with that of the UK. Northern Ireland is a lot better off as a result of partition than it would be if we were part of an economy that, alongside Greece, is in serious trouble in comparison with other EU countries and which has just lost its triple A-star rating on the international money markets. We are satisfied that we are in the right place.

On behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party, Danny Kennedy described the Deloitte report as "incredibly misleading" and cited the issue of victims. He said that it was wrong to conclude that funding support for victims of the Troubles should be regarded as a cost of division. It is certainly part of the legacy of the Troubles and of the consequences of conflict. In that sense, it could be argued that it is a consequence of division. However, we cannot remove the funding for victims. Indeed, we have increased significantly the amount of funding that is available for victims to £36 million over the current three-year period. We recognise that bringing about healing for the victims of the Troubles is part of the strategy to address the causes of division. That cost can be set on the other side of the balance sheet, because it is about addressing the causes of division. It is about healing for those who have suffered as a consequence of a divided society in Northern Ireland. I concur with the points that Danny Kennedy made in that regard.

John McCallister said that the DUP and Sinn Féin were the main reasons for the failure to address the cost of division in Northern Ireland. I do not agree



with John at all. I can speak clearly for the Democratic Unionist Party when I say that it is committed to building a shared future. It is somewhat bizarre to criticise parties for seeking to include another political party within the power-sharing arrangements to make the Executive inclusive of all the main parties in the Assembly and then say that that is not the product of building a shared future.

Why, if we are building a shared future, would we want to exclude one element of the Assembly from it? It is the ambition of those who want to build a shared future to be more — not less — inclusive. There is a contradiction in attacking the DUP and Sinn Féin for carving things up and, at the same time, attacking us for seeking to include even more people in the power-sharing arrangements in Northern Ireland.

Mr O'Loan, on behalf of the SDLP, gave the example of Tesco in Antrim, where some people who were packing bags to raise funds were objected to because they were wearing their GAA team's shirts. He said that the objectors should be faced down; however, we need a common approach to those issues. In other places, people have objected to staff wearing poppies, for example.

I want to see the day when such things are not a matter for objection; when an Orangeman can wear his sash and people do not dance up and down because they find it objectionable; when a member of the GAA can wear his GAA shirt and people do not find that objectionable; when a man who got a Glasgow Rangers tattoo in his youth, because that was his favourite team, is not restricted from joining our Police Service, given that the tattoo would be covered almost all the time.

That, sadly, is an example of division in our society, and I agree that we need to tackle it. We need to find ways of dealing with those issues that ensure that people do not get hung up on sporting symbols and that we can learn to live and let live. It works both ways.

The restoration of devolution has been a key step in ensuring a more stable society in Northern Ireland. Devolution also sends a strong, clear message about working together for the benefit of all.

This week marks the second anniversary of devolution in its current phase, and it is appropriate that we are once again discussing this important issue. Working together is not always easy, but, ultimately, we remain united in our determination to strive to build a shared, better and brighter future for all. That was indicated in the clearest terms when all parties in the Chamber stood together in condemnation of those three terrible murders. For many people, the reassurance of their political leaders standing together at that time sent a powerful message that there is a commitment to building a shared future and that we

will not allow those who want to destroy the prospect of a shared future to drag us back to the past.

Not long ago, we debated the possibility of removing the peace walls that exist in many places, particularly in Belfast. At the time, I said that the emphasis should not be on an imposed programme of demolition but on ensuring that we support local communities that have been divided by those barriers to build strong, supportive and trusting relationships and to develop joint working on areas of common concern. That will ultimately make the so-called peace walls unnecessary.

The costs of division are symptoms of the causes of division. We need a shared approach to tackling the causes of division, because in tackling the causes, we deal with the costs. However, one cannot deal with the costs without dealing with the causes; that is why the CSI strategy is important. It is why the ongoing work in OFMDFM and in other Departments, in building community capacity, in helping communities to reach out to one another, and in breaking down barriers, is continuing. That work is slowly but surely helping to bring down barriers and to help people to sense what it might be like to have a shared future. OFMDFM remains committed to continuing that work.

Conflict and violence have left a profound legacy. We should not underestimate the effort and time that are needed to mend relationships in local communities. I fully realise the importance of striking the right balance when it comes to being realistic about the scale of those challenges. Undoubtedly, considerable challenges exist — for example, to change long-standing housing patterns, to encourage greater sharing in education or to ensure changes in employment patterns. Those challenges will require commitment across Departments, statutory agencies and the private sector to build a solid framework that is based on the promotion of equality and the fostering of good and better relations among all sections of the community. Tolerance, respect and safety are integral parts of that work.

Economic growth and prosperity are also important. Those are underpinned by stability, and sharing that growth will further promote that stability. There can be no place in our society, or in any society, for inequality, racism, sectarianism or prejudice. We must keep working to tackle those attitudes, because they are at the heart of the causes of division in our local communities. We need a peaceful society in which our children can play together, people can work together, and families can live happily side by side regardless of their community or ethnic background or their religious beliefs. That is something for which, I believe, we all want to strive.

This is a time of peace and opportunity in Northern Ireland. It is a challenging time in economic and social terms, but I believe that everyone's mindset is that we will deal with those challenges best by moving forward

together. As we work to build and to mend the relationships that will overcome the divisions that we have experienced, we must recognise that a headline figure is not seen as immediately or easily recoverable in savings. However, we want to make those savings, because they can be reinvested in other ways.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Will the junior Minister please draw his remarks to a close?

**The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson):** As I said at the outset, I welcome this debate. It is a good opportunity to cover the issues, and I hope that colleagues across the Chamber can continue to work together towards building that shared future.

**Mr Attwood:** I want, by and large, to thank everyone for their contributions to the debate, but more about that later.

Many Members have, quite properly, bored into the Alliance Party motion and outlined how it is a flawed basis on which to proceed. However, the one question that I want to ask Alliance Party Members — I would ask them to reply in a few minutes' time — is simply this: does the Alliance Party believe or not believe that to deal with the issues of our divided past and to create a shared future, including in the current spending period, the Budget needs to be revisited? That is my question, because, curiously, Dr Farry, when he outlined the reasons for the motion, said that an opportunity could be presented to deal with issues of a divided past and create a shared future by using the proposed £123 million efficiency savings between now and 2011 as a mechanism to try to build in more opportunities for shared services.

My question is, therefore, is that the height of it, or is the Alliance Party now on board with the SDLP in saying that if we want to deal with issues about our divided past or shared future, and all issues about the Budget, we need to consider the entire Budget? We cannot consider only efficiency savings and quarterly returns but must examine the entire Budget so that we can deal with all the issues that are not being dealt with because of the inadequacies of the Budget that was forced through the Assembly two or three years ago.

That is my question, and it deserves an answer. Otherwise, John McCallister is right to say that the motion is part of a courtship ritual with the DUP. Perhaps it is about trying to address the financial issues at the heart of this Government, including the financial issues about a shared society?

The junior Minister gave a fairly soft and defensive reply, but the hard end of his response worried me because he said that issues such as wearing poppies, football jerseys, or other symbols or emblems that identify people must be dealt with in the round. You are wrong, Minister. What happened in Tesco should have been dealt with on its own merit. When young

people and children become the front line of the legacy of our past, and the only answer from Government is that we have to deal with it in respect of all the other issues about flags, emblems, clothing or uniforms —

5.00 pm

**The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson):** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Attwood:** I will give way. I think that you are putting the issue on the sideline, rather than dealing with the fundamental issue, which is that a few people decided to put a small group of young people on the front line of our divided society, and Government, including you, Minister, should have dealt with that on its own merit.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order. All remarks must be made through the Chair. This is not the first time that I have reminded you about that, Mr Attwood. Please make your remarks through the Chair.

**Mr Attwood:** I give way to the junior Minister.

**The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson):** I stress that I was referring to tackling the attitudes that result in those problems. I was also making the point that those attitudes do not belong to one side of the community or the other. It is about changing mindsets. The incident at Tesco was a symptom of the problem. I am not saying that it did not need to be dealt with there and then. I am saying that it is symptomatic of an attitude that we need to tackle across the board.

**Mr Attwood:** I thank the junior Minister for that, but that is different from what he said. The point is that the Tesco incident was the time for the people of Antrim to make a stand about past attitudes and about what was and was not acceptable.

**Mr T Clarke:** Will the Member give way?

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

To allow that moment to pass allowed those past attitudes to prevail, but things cannot be done that way. People have to take a stand when the moment arises. By all means, deal with the broader issues and the inherited baggage that we all have. However, issues must be dealt with when they manifest themselves, as this one did on the floor of Tesco.

The most worrying speech came from Sinn Féin. Having endorsed the SDLP's proposals around North/South making sense, Martina Anderson said:

"Perhaps you do not recognise the division that was so carefully fostered by an alien Government."

We need to have a debate about how division was fostered, or not, in the past. However, to make no hint, reference or comment, in six minutes of speech, to the divisions brutally inflicted on the people of Ireland for 40 years against their will is an enormous indictment

on someone who says that they want to promote a shared society. Divisions were forced upon people, but those divisions were compounded by a very small minority who, even when there was a democratic alternative, decided that violence, and killing 1,800 people out of the 3,600 people who were killed, was a way to create a shared and better future. They were wrong then, they are wrong now, and they should have said it in that speech.

**Mr Ford:** It is clear that we in this society need a meaningful community relations strategy, whether it is a shared future strategy, a strategy for cohesion, sharing and integration, or some new document. At the moment, anything from the Executive will be welcome. We have had promises from the junior Minister this afternoon, but we have seen very little product over the past two years.

A huge range of issues need to be tackled, and Stephen Farry spoke of some of them. We need specific obligations in every Department, not just something that is sidelined into a small section of OFMDFM, to encourage desegregation and to look at the long-term costs of failing to tackle the manifestation of sectarianism across society. Far too many decisions are being taken by public officials; they are short-term expedients and are damaging, in the long term, to a good relations strategy.

In the same way as we have equality impact assessments for new policies, we need to have some logical way of proofing for sharing rather than separation.

If we are serious about promoting a shared future, it must be an essential part of every aspect of new policy. We must see those policies applied regardless of which Department or public agency is carrying them out. Active attention to the needs of victims and to the promotion of good relations will save money elsewhere in the Budget. The most obvious example is mental health, which is not an either/or matter — one benefits the other.

It is unfortunate that many of the comments made by Members during the debate were not entirely on topic in respect of the motion, and did not take account of some of the points that were made by the proposer. However, I welcome the significant degree of engagement on the part of most parties in the Assembly.

When Stephen Farry proposed the motion, he set out the costs that we suffer as a segregated society — and they are costs. Some of them are entirely necessary and appropriate to meet the needs of victims; others deal with the direct cost of violence or the duplication of services. The cost of lost opportunities for tourism and inward investment due to our past divided society are unquantifiable, but clearly very large.

In proposing her amendment, Dolores Kelly broadly supported the motion. Perhaps that was no surprise, because we can be sure that there will be broad agreement. I confess, however, that I thought that in some respects, the amendment somewhat represented a dance on the head of a pin. I make it clear to Mrs Kelly, Declan O'Loan and Alex Attwood that the Alliance Party agrees that the Budget must be revisited. However, our motion was about a shared future, rather than merely restating the issue of revisiting the Budget. That is why we phrased the motion in the way that we did.

We accept that the SDLP amendment is phrased slightly differently. It does not do as good a job as our initial motion, but, frankly, there are many more significant issues than just debating the minutiae of exactly what way those measures will be funded.

Dolores Kelly spoke about the need for leadership from the top. I follow the leadership that Naomi Long gives — another effective woman whom Mrs Kelly can place alongside Margaret Ritchie.

Martina Anderson talked a fair bit about the cost of division on a North/South basis, which is something of a red herring in the debate. Over the years, it has been absolutely clear that the Alliance Party has no problems with North/South structures that meet our economic and social needs and that share the cost of administering certain services across the whole island.

At the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation, which met in Dublin in the mid-1990s, I remember Alliance Party members talking about the sharing of healthcare facilities and about the recognition that that was more than a cross-border issue — for some specialist services, it was an all-island issue. Therefore, we do not need entirely tangential lectures from Ms Anderson on that point. Since she talked about the “primary issue” of equality, perhaps I should remind her that we all know that section 75(1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 refers to the equality duty. However, perhaps Ms Anderson and some of her colleagues, including Mr McLaughlin, need to read section 75(2), which states:

“Without prejudice to its obligations under subsection (1), a public authority shall in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.”

Section 75 is not the equality section; it is the equality and good relations section. It is time for people who lecture us on section 75(1) to read section 75(2) in order to make those lectures accurate, because Sinn Féin's incapability of reading the Act, as it stands, is getting a little bit annoying.

**Mrs D Kelly:** Does the Member share my surprise that given Sinn Féin's talk of equality, and despite the Equality Commissioner writing several months ago to the First Minister and deputy First Minister to ask that



amending legislation be introduced to update equality laws, no such legislation has been timetabled?

**Mr Ford:** I am afraid that the Member must ask that question of OFMDFM rather than the mere, humble leader of the opposition in this place.

**Ms Anderson:** I assure the Member that Sinn Féin knows the equality agenda inside out. Two little words in section 75(1) state the requirement to have “due regard” to promoting equality of opportunity. Section 75(2) uses the exact wording that the Member cited. However, section 75(1), which states the primary duty, mentions “due regard”. That is the law.

**Mr Ford:** I am baffled; I thought that I could read the Act. We have just had the perfect example of Sinn Féin’s inability to read section 75(2). I thank the Member for that helpful intervention.

Danny Kennedy’s comments demonstrated the ongoing love affair between the Ulster Unionist Party and the SDLP. Clearly, there is greater agreement between the two parties that are either side of me than there is between us and the SDLP on some matters. Nonetheless, the points that Mr Kennedy made about the inadequacies of the Deloitte report were addressed by Stephen Farry during his speech. Similar points were made by Mr Kennedy’s colleague John McCallister, although neither of them is present at the moment.

Mitchel McLaughlin’s argument that the Deloitte report is not ours seems just a little dubious. Is the validity of a report entirely assessed on who commissioned it, rather than on the quality of that report? I also point out to Declan O’Loan that the Alliance Party made its estimate of the £1 billion that is wasted each year on the costs of segregation about a year before the Deloitte report was published. We entirely accept, and have argued from the very beginning, that there are faults in the Deloitte report. However, we also believe that there are some broad general accuracies in it that need to be taken into account, and that the flawed methodology in certain parts does not invalidate the general tenor of that report, or the issue that we must address today.

**Mr O’Loan:** I hope that this point will be taken in full seriousness: does the Member not agree that to attempt to oversimplify this debate by attaching a single figure to it — whether it be £1 billion, £1.5 billion or £3 billion — does not do justice to a very serious argument?

**Mr Ford:** I agree. We have always said that the estimate was broad. The issue is the cost of segregation, not whether we calculate it to the nearest £100,000.

I welcome some of the comments that were made by the Minister, who seems to be in a degree of disagreement with his Back-Bench colleagues on the other side of the Chamber. Sadly, we did not hear from

his Back-Benchers. It seems that he quite seriously talked about the need for the acceptance of people across this society. I assure him that if one competed in the Belfast marathon, one would hear banter and jokes thrown at the leader of the Alliance Party in every part of this city. However, one would also run past peace lines at Bridgend, between the Clonard and the Shankill, and on the Whitewell Road. Those issues have to be addressed and have to be taken seriously.

I welcome the words of the junior Minister, but this corner of the House wants to see some degree of action on the matter. Unfortunately, we have not seen that.

**The junior Minister (Mr Donaldson):** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Ford:** I am sorry; I have only about 20 seconds left.

The position is quite clear: it is not just words that we need at this stage; we must see signs of serious action. Unfortunately, OFMDFM has batted words around, but nothing is being carried through. Since 1999, successive Government programmes have failed to take serious account of the need to take real action on the promotion of good relations.

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

**Mr Ford:** The obligations are contained in every part of section 75. Divisions hurt everyone at a human level and they must be addressed.

*Question put, That the amendment be made.*

*The Assembly divided: Ayes 17; Noes 40.*

#### AYES

*Mr Armstrong, Mr Attwood, Mr Beggs, Mr D Bradley, Mrs M Bradley, Mr Burns, Mr Cobain, Rev Dr Robert Coulter, Mr Cree, Mr Gallagher, Mrs D Kelly, Mr McCallister, Mr B McCrea, Mr McFarland, Mr McGlone, Mr O’Loan, Mr P Ramsey.*

*Tellers for the Ayes: Mrs D Kelly and Mr O’Loan.*

#### NOES

*Mr Adams, Ms Anderson, Mr Boylan, Mr Bresland, Lord Browne, Mr Buchanan, Mr Butler, Mr T Clarke, Mr Dodds, Mr Donaldson, Mr Easton, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Irwin, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Dr W McCrea, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McQuillan, Mr Molloy, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Murphy, Mr Newton, Ms Ni Chuilín, Mr O’Dowd, Ms S Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Shannon, Mr Spratt, Mr Wells, Mr S Wilson.*

*Tellers for the Noes: Mr Irwin and Mr Shannon.*



*Question accordingly negatived.*

*Main Question put.*

*The Assembly divided: Ayes 16; Noes 16.*

#### AYES

*Mr Attwood, Mr D Bradley, Mrs M Bradley, Mr Burns, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mr Gallagher, Mrs D Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr McCarthy, Mr McGlone, Mr Neeson, Mr O'Loan, Mr P Ramsey, Mr B Wilson.*

*Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Lunn and Mr McCarthy.*

#### NOES

*Mr Adams, Ms Anderson, Mr Boylan, Mr Butler, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McLaughlin, Mr Molloy, Mr Murphy, Ms Ni Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Ms S Ramsey.*

*Tellers for the Noes: Mr F McCann and Mr McLaughlin.*

*The following Members voted in both Lobbies and are therefore not counted in the result: Mr Bresland, Mr Buchanan, Mr T Clarke, Mr Easton, Mr Hamilton, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr McQuillan, Mr Moutray, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Shannon, Mr Spratt, Mr Wells, Mr S Wilson.*

*Main Question accordingly negatived.*

*Motion made:*

*That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Mr Deputy Speaker]*

## ADJOURNMENT

### Management of Assets and Pensions at Visteon Corporation

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes in which to speak. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes. Members should note that the Speaker has been advised that, for reasons related to the appointment of administrators to the company, there will be no ministerial response.

**Mr Adams:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ar dtús, ba mhaith liom a rá gur ábhar an-tábhachtach é seo átaimid a phlé inniu. Ba mhaith liom a rá fosta go gcuirim fáilte roimh na hoibrithe ó Visteon atá sa Tionól inniu agus a bheas ag éisteacht leis an díospóireacht.

On behalf of the Assembly, I welcome the Visteon workers who are in the Public Gallery. They have conducted their campaign with great dignity and unity and staged a sit-in at the plant for the past 36 days. As a result of those efforts and the public support for their campaign, the Visteon Corporation has been forced to negotiate a resolution. The pay-off that Visteon has offered goes some way to addressing the workers' rights to redundancy packages, but the corporation has differentiated between workers even in that. Moreover, neither Visteon nor Ford has made any effort to reinstate employment and manufacturing in Belfast, and those companies still have to answer for the workforce's pension funds.

The behaviour of the board of Visteon UK and the Ford Motor Company, and the treatment of the workers here and in Britain, has been shameful. Indeed, I believe that aspects of that behaviour amount to fraud, corruption and sharp practice. It is important that we highlight those matters and bring them to the attention of the Assembly. We must seek to ensure that the relevant Government and statutory agencies, including the Pensions Regulator, carry out the necessary rigorous assessments and investigations into the conduct of those companies.

The immediate background to the Visteon dispute began on 31 March, when the directors of Visteon UK put their company into administration. On that day, 210 men and women employed at the Belfast plant were told that their jobs ceased to exist. That information came by letter from the management of Visteon UK. The statutory 90-day consultation period was not afforded to the workers. No information was given to

them about their rights and entitlements. They were denied any right of reply. Moreover, their right to Ford terms and conditions, including the lifetime protection of their discretionary pension in payment increases contained in the:

“Agreement governing the separation of the Ford Visteon organisation”

was binned by the company.

That is unacceptable. It is contemptible behaviour by the management of those two companies. In the light of it, the workers rightly and courageously took over the plant and refused to leave until Ford and Visteon negotiated a satisfactory agreement on redundancies and pensions. The workers refused to be cowed or intimidated by threat of legal action, and they lobbied and fought for their rights. Their actions encouraged their union colleagues in Britain. I congratulate the workers on their principled stand against injustice, and I commend them for the example they have set in defence of workers’ rights.

The activities of Ford and Visteon raise serious concerns about the management of assets and pensions by both companies, including passing the burden for paying pensions on to the public purse; in other words, the taxpayer. Sinn Féin also has concerns about information provided by Visteon UK about future plans for the Belfast plant and the use of Government investment in new production lines. We have provided that information to the administrator, and we intend to place it on the record in this debate. It is too much material for one Member to present in the time available, so my colleagues will continue presenting it when I am finished until the full information is on the record.

Sinn Féin believes that the closure of the Belfast plant has not been a reaction to unprecedented financial difficulties. It is not the result of what is happening globally. It is the result, indeed it is the objective, of strategic decision-making by the Ford Motor Company in conjunction with Visteon Corporation, which includes Visteon UK.

Visteon UK would not exist but for the Ford Motor Company. The workforce came mostly from Ford, and the workers were transferred to Visteon under what is known as a “spin-off agreement” in 2000. That agreement was negotiated and signed by the Ford Motor Company. The agreement that governed the formation of Visteon UK said:

“For the duration of their employment, terms and conditions of existing Ford employees, who transfer to Newco”

— that is, Visteon —

“will mirror Ford conditions (including discretionary pension in payment increases) in their respective countries (lifetime protection).”

Ford has claimed that it has no responsibility to the workforce under the terms of the spin-off agreement.

Yet one of the signatories to the agreement was J R Walker, the vice-president of Ford in Europe. The agreement itself was faxed from his office, the Ford office in Cologne, Germany, on 25 January 2000.

The Belfast workers worked for Ford. Some of them have given up to 30 years’ service to that company through the worst times of the conflict. When they were presented with an assurance by Ford that they would have mirrored terms and conditions in employment and pensions, with lifetime protection, they agreed to the spin-off agreement. In Sinn Féin’s view, Ford cannot evade its moral, ethical and contractual obligation to the workers. Ford has a duty to ensure that workers who have given loyal service receive their full rights and entitlements.

The information shows that, since 2000, Visteon UK was not a company that lost its way due to unexpected economic difficulties. Of course, the prevailing economic circumstances are hostile to manufacturing, especially in the automotive industry. However, it is clear that shortly after Ford established Visteon UK, the rundown and closure of Belfast and other plants was already on its agenda. Visteon UK never made a profit from the time of the spin-off. The viability and profitability of the Visteon UK plant in Belfast was entirely in Ford’s hands. Ford had been the owner of the plant; it then became the sole customer of the Belfast plant.

Visteon UK secured the transfer of the Swansea plant to new owners only because the Ford president and chief executive officer, Allan Mullaly, approved a sourcing agreement for the manufacture of global flywheels.

5.45 pm

If Ford helped to form Visteon UK and then controlled supplies and sales, it is no accident that Visteon UK was struggling to be profitable. In fact, it has been argued that by cynically creating a separation between Visteon UK as a parts company from Ford as a car maker, Ford has benefited from the increased competition for parts, thereby driving down costs.

It also ensured that loss-making aspects of Ford production no longer appear on Ford’s books; that gave, and gives, Ford the appearance of being more profitable than it might otherwise have been. If it still had responsibility for the production of those car parts, it would not be in that position. In addition, with the failure of Visteon UK, Ford hoped to bury the promise that was made to local workers in January 2000.

Sinn Féin’s primary concern is with the rights and entitlements of the workforce and sustaining local employment. During meetings in 2005 Sinn Féin learnt that Visteon UK was considering the position of its four plants, and in December 2005 I visited the Belfast plant to meet workers and management. At that time, the company indicated that it expected to make a

decision about the Belfast plant by the end of March 2006. Management made it clear that it wished to renegotiate workers' terms and conditions, including the Ford spin-off agreement.

In July 2006, I facilitated a meeting in Parliament Buildings between the management and the workforce. It was agreed then that the management and workers would reconvene to commence the process to spell out in detail a viable future for the plant and to address, explore and seek to resolve the concerns of the Belfast workforce. However, information has come to light that shows that Visteon UK was working to a different agenda.

In 2001, the year after the spin-off agreement, Visteon commissioned the Stone study on the future of the Belfast plant. The only three options that were considered were closure in 2001, closure in 2007 or a substantial reduction in the Belfast plant. Visteon UK chose to shrink the plant and assets, which included selling off all the land on which the Belfast plant was based. The money that was accrued from those sales amounted to £114 million.

Meanwhile, some components that were manufactured on site were moved to other locations. Then Visteon UK leased back part of its old site. All of that was consistent with the objectives that were set out in the Stone study of 2001. None of it represented an earnest attempt to consolidate the Belfast plant; in fact, it amounted to sharp practice.

In 2007, Visteon formulated another confidential plan named project Protea that stated that Belfast's geographical location made it a financial liability. The project strategy proposed to engage Ford for assistance in transferring products to new locations or, in other words, out of Belfast.

On the issue of fuel rails, which were one of the main components manufactured in Belfast, the confidential document stated:

"This business is marginally profitable in Belfast...under Project Protea it will be transferred to the Visteon Port Elizabeth facility."

That facility is in South Africa.

Another report that signalled Visteon's ulterior agenda was Visteon UK's confidential Cummins D3 strategy, which is dated February 2008. It reiterates Visteon's intention to transfer manufacturing from Belfast to other locations, including South Africa. Steve Gawne of Visteon UK led the Project Cummins D3. At the same time, Visteon published its annual report for the end of 2006. The report stated:

"In 2009 and beyond, we will have our restructuring mostly behind us and will begin to see the full benefits of our efforts to move Visteon to sustained profitability and a stronger global market position."

That was at the cost of workers in Belfast and Britain as well as taxpayers' money.

In a confidential paper entitled 'European Cycle Plan Actions 2005-2009' Ford scheduled its exit from certain manufacturing lines in Belfast and signalled its intention to seek an alternative buyer.

Despite examining a basis for closing the Belfast plant, Ford and Visteon continued to seek and receive Government grants. In 2003, Visteon sought funding of almost £110,000 from Invest NI. Of that amount, £97,210 was paid for research on, and the development of, fuel rails. However, Visteon spent the past two years planning to move that product to South Africa.

Invest NI said that its letter of offer to Visteon stated that the company's acceptance of the money precluded its exploitation of the project outside the European Union without Invest NI's written consent. From our discussion with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Sinn Féin understands that she is examining ways to claw back that money. Although Ford owned the Belfast plant, it is worth noting that the IDB, which was Invest NI's predecessor, also invested public money. The exact detail of that investment is not known, but Sinn Féin is seeking to uncover it.

Sinn Féin wants to put on record in the Chamber that there must be a full, rigorous investigation and assessment of how the situation can be resolved in the interests of justice, the workforce and the economy. Later in the debate, one of my colleagues will continue from where I leave off. Go raibh míle maith agat.

**Mr Donaldson:** I welcome the opportunity to participate in this afternoon's debate. I appreciate that the Member for West Belfast brought the matter to the Chamber.

I, too, visited Visteon on several occasions in 2005, when I met the management and unions to discuss a particular matter. The DUP has met the workers on a number of occasions since the announcement of the closure of the Belfast plant. The DUP deeply regrets that decision, because the Belfast plant could have been sustained. I agree with the Member for West Belfast that the company has been working to an agenda for some time. Under Protea, Visteon has systematically attempted to unload services and manufacturing from Belfast to other plants, most notably to South Africa. Every time workers made efficiencies or stepped up to the mark to meet management requirements, they were presented with yet another hurdle. Regrettably, the company came up with more reasons to lay off workers or transfer work from Belfast.

However, the manner in which the workers have been treated, particularly in relation to redundancy, is even more regrettable. When Ford transferred ownership of the company to Visteon UK, it amounted to nothing more than a paper transfer because, as the Member for West Belfast stated, Ford continued to be the sole

customer of the Belfast plant. In effect, therefore, Ford controlled manufacturing in Belfast.

However, when Visteon UK was established, Ford's management agreed to guarantee the workers their redundancy and pension rights in perpetuity. Those rights were guaranteed not for the lifetime of the Belfast plant, but for the working lifetime of the individual workers. Therefore, their redundancy rights were guaranteed for as long as the workers remained employed, and their pension rights were guaranteed until they reached retirement age.

Yesterday, here at Stormont, I met workers from Nortel in Monkstown. It is a matter of regret that the rights of the Visteon workers have been similarly ignored. When the closure of the Belfast plant was announced, the previous agreements with Ford on redundancy payments were discarded arbitrarily and without consultation. I am thankful that, through negotiation by the unions, notably Unite, Visteon UK has now made an offer, at least to those workers who were employed by Ford and transferred to Visteon UK in 2000.

On Sunday, a ballot took place, in which the majority of workers in the Belfast plant voted to accept Visteon's proposal for the plant and its redundancies.

**Dr W McCrea:** Is it not regrettable that Visteon has deliberately tried to divide workers and to take away the rights of people who have given excellent service to the firm? In light of what the company has done, does the Member agree that the Department must act immediately to take back any money that Visteon received wrongfully?

**Mr Donaldson:** The Member for South Antrim makes a fair point. It is important that the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment investigates what has been done, and whether taxpayers' money can be recovered from Visteon. Although I accept entirely their right to go along with the proposals, the difficulty with the deal that the Visteon workers accepted on Sunday is that it leaves a number of workers at the Belfast plant in a disadvantaged position.

That brings me to the similar situation at Nortel. From our meeting with Nortel workers yesterday and the discussions that we have had with Visteon workers, it is clear that there is a weakness in the law here, which big corporations are exploiting to the detriment of workers. We need to look at that urgently. When looking at their global coverage, it is clear that companies are focusing on plants in the UK, specifically those in Northern Ireland, and they are making workers redundant although it is clear that those plants are competitive, effective and efficient. Plants are being closed because, as one Nortel manager said, they are seen as a soft touch.

Our employment laws must be looked at. We must look at how we can protect the rights of workers, including those who have lost out at Visteon and Nortel. We need to pursue the issue of pension rights, because the agreement that was reached with the union did not cover the pension rights to the extent that would protect the entitlement of workers. There are issues remaining, and, for our part, we will work with the other parties, and with the unions and the workers, to try to secure those rights and entitlements.

**Mr B McCrea:** Success has many claimants; failure, as they say, is an orphan. When I attended the May Day march, and listened to the fine speeches, I had to pause to reflect on who really won this battle. As far as I am concerned, it was the local workers and the local union; it was they who made the case. I do not know if other Members had the same experience, but I received a number of sharp e-mails, which brought to my attention the plight of the workers in the plant. I had the privilege and the pleasure of being at the plant on three occasions. Apparently, I will get a medal that has been stamped for me, for breaking the law like the rest of the workers. However, I did so for a very good cause and an appropriate course of action.

The case was laid out in full by Mr Adams. Looking at the paperwork, one cannot escape the feeling that there has been shoddy work at play, that people have not acted fairly, and that a particularly hardworking and conscientious workforce has been done down by multinational machinations.

I fully support the debate, and I thank the Member for tabling it. We will do what we can to assist. Although it is useful for us to put these matters on the record, the real battle over pensions will come in the courts. Perhaps people are not sure whether that battle will be successful; however, I understand that the initial indications are quite positive.

As Mr Donaldson said, the issue is about how we can help people. Perhaps we can look at who should be fighting those court cases, and at what we can do when multinationals fail to honour their obligations. Perhaps the Minister can look at that area to see whether we can assist.

6.00 pm

At the risk of regurgitating arguments that will be made more fully by others, I must say that the issue raises questions about capitalism, the economy and the way forward. It is clear that we want investment from multinationals. As a relatively small part of the world that is isolated from the big consumers, we need to find a way of getting the skills base to come in to attract investment and to gain access to the markets. When we consider how to toughen legislation, we must be careful not to toughen it so much that we end up not getting the investment that we need. However,



that is a challenge for Government. Given that our Government placed the economy at the centre of their Programme for Government, consideration should be given to devising schemes to ensure that the cute financial moves that people made in such areas as land, equipment, buildings and elsewhere are not allowed. Perhaps public ownership has to be taken of those buildings when bringing companies through.

I do not wish to prolong the debate. I have been really impressed by the way in which the workers have stood together and how they have forced the issue to the top of the agenda against a number of setbacks from people who thought that they were simply an irritant. They proved that they were not an irritant and that they had right on their side. Many other trade unionists have taken heart from the way in which those workers have conducted themselves and the successes that they achieved.

The House should find ways of supporting the Visteon workers and getting justice for their very real concerns and demands. I know that it is not to everyone's liking because not everyone did as well as others, but, in the circumstances, the deal is generally a good one. I have asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, Sir Reg Empey, to see what he can do for the people who were not as fortunate as some of the others and to put his best foot forward.

**Mr Attwood:** I also welcome the debate, and I join other Members in acknowledging that, over the past few weeks, the front line has been the workers, their partners and their families. They have had to carry the burden of the doubts and the uncertainties about the matter, and they, more than anyone else, deserve our acknowledgement and our appreciation. I say that for a number of reasons. It is not coincidental that, within hours of the start of the occupation, even the London news had the story about the Visteon workers as one of its headlines. It is no coincidence that, even yesterday morning, the RTÉ morning news had the story as one of its headlines. The actions of the Visteon workers, on their own behalf and on the behalf of other workers here and elsewhere, have laid down standards against which those sorts of issues should be judged in the future and against which we as politicians and as the Northern Ireland Assembly should judge ourselves.

The first of those standards is that the workers nailed the lie that, when workers' rights are put in jeopardy, whether that is because of the manipulation of Visteon/Ford in this case or because of the recession or other reasons in other cases, there is nothing that can be done. We hear that view occasionally, even in the Assembly Chamber. On this occasion, however, the Visteon workers powerfully demonstrated that there are things that are within our capacity, control or influence. Led by them, we as a political community followed in support of what they were doing and in

support of doing something when others said that nothing could happen.

The second standard that has been laid down, as other Members mentioned, is the principle that the rights of workers, which have been hard won over decades, must not now be casually put in jeopardy. For various reasons, the workforce in the North is particularly vulnerable. It is vulnerable to corporations that, as Jeffrey Donaldson said, see the North as an easy touch.

If the Assembly takes one broad response to the Visteon/Ford situation, it should be to set up urgently an inter-ministerial group that will sit down and identify where there are legal and policy gaps in workers' protection and move rapidly to fill them. In doing so, lessons can be learned from the Visteon/Ford experience in order to protect other workers who may yet be vulnerable to the ravages of recession or the manipulation of evidence and information from corporations that want to withdraw.

The third lesson is that, although all workers will not get all their entitlements and other matters are yet to be resolved, they demonstrated that, if one takes a stand, one can sweep down the mightiest walls of resistance. In recent weeks, the SDLP had a meeting about that and other matters with a senior civil servant who came from an IDB background. That official said that there was no point in pursuing Ford because it had left the North years ago. Well, Visteon workers demonstrated that there was a point in pursuing people who had got million of pounds of taxpayers' money and profits off the backs of workers in the North and who thought that they could cut and run. That is a lesson for INI, Ministers and Government: they must ensure that any corporation that invests in the North cannot do again what Visteon did to its workers — cut and run through manipulation of events or in response to the recession.

Finally, a situation can never again arise in which any business in this part of what is referred to as the United Kingdom can do what Ford Europe tried to do: not even return the phone calls of a Government Minister. After the dismissal of workers in such a manner, nothing demonstrated Ford Europe's high-handed approach more than that. It did not have the will, wish or obligation to respond to a political appeal. Never again can Ford or the likes of it get away with that sort of behaviour.

**Ms J McCann:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank my colleague Gerry Adams for bringing this important Adjournment topic to the Assembly. I will take up where he left off.

Visteon Engineering Systems Ltd is another member of the Visteon family. It has not been put into administration. It was incorporated on 9 June 2007. The company's chairman, Steve Meszaros, is vice-

president of Visteon Corporation. One of his fellow directors of Visteon Engineering Systems Ltd is Len Drury, who was director of human resources at Visteon UK. Subsequently, 148 managers chose to move their pensions out of Visteon UK and into a new pension scheme under Visteon Engineering Systems Ltd. That asset transfer was scheduled to be complete during 2008.

Another new company called Automotive Products Ltd was incorporated on 4 February 2009. That resembles the name that was given by Ford to its component supplier called Automotive Products Operation. In 2000, that company was renamed Visteon. The name and address of the main shareholder in that new automotive product company is Visteon International Holdings, with Eric Sachs and Michael Lewis authorising the documentation on behalf of Visteon. The company has the same address and postcode and has the same company secretary as Visteon Engineering Systems Ltd. One of the company directors is Stephen Gawne, who is a former managing director of Visteon UK.

From the time of Visteon's spin-off from Ford, workers were assured that their terms and conditions, including any redundancy or pension payments, would mirror those that were promised by Ford. However, they were also told that they had no option but to move their pension schemes to Visteon. That, as my colleague outlined in his opening remarks, now smacks of sharp practice — a confidence trick on the workers. Management, on the other hand, were treated very differently from ordinary workers.

As far back as 2003, questions arose about the commitment of Visteon and Ford to meeting their pension obligations to employees of Visteon UK. From close to its outset, the Visteon UK pension plan had a deficit of \$49 million. In April 2008, the chairperson of Visteon UK trustees wrote to Visteon Corporation to remind its board that the transfer of funds from the Ford plans to the Visteon UK plan left a substantial deficit. The chairperson reminded Visteon that commitments had been given to sponsoring the plan as an ongoing concern and to meeting fully its funding responsibilities on a statutory and fiduciary basis.

In October 2007, company management was invited to move pensions out of Visteon UK and into a new pension scheme under Visteon Engineering Systems Ltd. Although Visteon UK continued to examine options for closing plants and transferring products, 148 managers chose to move their pensions. That asset transfer was scheduled to be completed during 2008.

Visteon did not engage with the Pensions Regulator when making the asset transfer. In total, around £22 million was transferred from Visteon UK. During 2008, other assets were transferred from Visteon UK's pension plan, and Ford and Visteon maintained

communication on each other's pension plan liabilities while the restructuring of Visteon UK continued. Moreover, they shared information about employees, the reason for which has still not been explained.

In April 2008, at a meeting of the trustees of the pension plan, it was confirmed that approximately £18 million would be transferred to Ford under a scheme named Firefly. That impacts on the assets that are available to the administrator that now handles the company. More importantly, the massive divestment from Visteon UK's pension plan that was arranged by Ford and Visteon impinges on the workers. It is still unclear what was shared with or approved by the Pensions Regulator. However, it is clear from the available information that vast sums of money were moving out of Visteon UK's pension plan and into other companies during 2007 and 2008.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The Member should draw her remarks to a close.

**Ms J McCann:** One of my colleagues will pick up where I finish. Go raibh maith agat.

**Dr McDonnell:** I do not want to repeat what has been said during the debate. I thank Gerry Adams for securing this important debate, and I welcome the opportunity to discuss this issue, which is of particular concern to me and to my constituents, a number of whom were Visteon employees and are now former Visteon employees.

I welcome the large number of former Visteon employees who are watching the debate from the Public Gallery. I congratulate them; their determination and dedication to stand up to naked corporate greed and manipulation and to fight for their honour, dignity and livelihood is supported by their families, neighbours and all in the Chamber and across Northern Ireland. Their courageous and dignified stand has shone a glaring light on the appalling way that Visteon and Ford treat loyal and committed employees. Moreover, it has shone a glaring light on the way that several companies — not only Visteon; others operate the same scams — try to use the cloak of the recession to abdicate their responsibilities to workers, many of whom have given a lifetime of service and built those companies into world-class enterprises.

The Member for Lagan Valley Jeffrey Donaldson, mentioned a similar situation in respect of Nortel. I could continue, but I do not want use my time to discuss Nortel. That company is still trading, but somehow managed and thinks that it can manage to —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order. The Member should stay on the subject of Visteon and not deviate to Nortel.

**Dr McDonnell:** I am not deviating; I am highlighting comparable issues.

6.15 pm

As other Members have said, there is clear evidence to show that, since Visteon was established, the management have not been committed to the long-term future of the Belfast plant and that the problems being experienced, although exacerbated by the current recession, were not due entirely to that recession but go back much farther and were in fact planned perhaps seven, eight, or nine years ago. In fact, there is a lot of evidence to show that the Visteon plant was being deliberately run down, with work being actively outsourced to South Africa and other places.

Through all of that, the workers in the Belfast plant — sometimes aware or suspicious, sometimes perhaps a little oblivious to all the manipulation that went on — worked with management to examine ways of cutting costs in order to increase the sustainability of their company, their employment and their livelihoods. What did they get in return? As far as I know, most of them got little more than six or seven minutes to pack their belongings and get out when the decision was taken.

Respect is a two-way process, but our insolvency laws and the way we allow administrators to operate so ruthlessly take all respect for and responsibility towards the worker out of the equation. Where are the respect, dignity, fairness and justice in the system? The Visteon workers stood up against that very unjust system and, through their own grit and determination, forced the employer to come out of hiding behind the cloak of the administrator and sit around the table. I find it amusing, because, as my colleague Mr Attwood said earlier, the employers ignored a call from a Minister and the Executive, yet a few days ago there were phone calls and e-mails flying all over the place in an effort to try to curry favour for themselves as pressure from the workers built up.

The workers have now voted to accept an offer on the redundancy pay, but that still leaves the issue of pensions to be resolved. I intend pursuing the issue, with their support, to the best of my ability. The Prime Minister has agreed to meet me to discuss the situation of the Visteon workers; I understand that that is likely to take place next week, and I will certainly be pushing the issue of pensions. I will emphasise to the Prime Minister the need for Visteon to be held to account and to live up to its moral and legal obligations to fulfil the repeated commitments made by the management at the time of the separation between Ford and Visteon.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The Member will draw his remarks to a close.

**Dr McDonnell:** I know that a deal has been struck in recent days, but I want to see it completed before I will be satisfied.

**Mr P Maskey:** Go raibh maith agat. Like other Members, I thank Gerry Adams for bringing this Adjournment debate to the House, and I also thank

other Members who have taken part. It has been a very good debate. Basil McCrea said earlier that he was entitled to a medal; a large number of people will get a medal, and fair play to the staff of Visteon who have actually produced that medal. It is a good keepsake for us all. Thank you, the staff who have worked hard.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order. All remarks should be referred through the Chair. Members should not refer to the Public Gallery.

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Without challenging the ruling of the Speaker, every Member who spoke has referred to the Public Gallery. I want that on record.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Members have referred to the Public Gallery, but they have not referred directly to the Public Gallery.

**Mr P Maskey:** OK, a LeasCheann Comhairle, this is an important debate, and I am not going to get involved in any squabbles. I will add a lot of information to that provided by Gerry Adams and Jennifer McCann.

Knowledge and information about pensions and liabilities was being shared among the same management of Visteon and Ford who were sharing knowledge and ambitions to close down Visteon UK. At the beginning of March — the same month that Visteon UK was put into administration — Visteon Corporation paid a performance bonus of an unspecified amount to 2,700 salaried workers worldwide. That included the senior management of Visteon Corporation and Visteon UK. That was the final insult.

We know that information and documentation is under examination by the Pensions Regulator and that there is a case for a full investigation. However, before any final assessment is made, it is imperative to establish whether any of those involved in the confidential projects detrimental to the future of the Belfast plant and Visteon UK were also involved in or aware of the transfer of assets out of the company.

A LeasCheann Comhairle, at the beginning of the year, the Visteon Corporation began a process that purported to be a feasibility study of the future of Visteon UK. The parent company asked the managing director of Visteon UK to produce proposals by 31 March 2009 that would ensure its financial viability. That feasibility study was a cosmetic exercise that was designed to cover the decision to close the Belfast plant and the other two remaining plants. When Visteon UK asked the Visteon Corporation for a subvention, it knew what the answer would be and that administration was next. Visteon UK knew that a 90-day consultation would not be provided and that the company would try to pass on responsibility for the pensions of existing and former workers to the public purse.

Sinn Féin recognises that there have been many job losses in recent times. Many people are finding it tough to make ends meet, and local businesses are



being hurt as well as local workers. However, the Ford/Visteon scandal is unlike any other job-loss situation. Sinn Féin believes that it is in the interest of the workers, their families and their communities that a full and rigorous examination of this scandal is carried out by the proper authorities and goes beyond its impact on individual workers, the loss of manufacturing jobs and its status as a case study of global capitalist malpractice.

The Visteon Corporation has declared a stake in Visteon Engineering Services (VES) and Visteon Automotive Systems UK. It has confirmed that VES and Visteon UK were part of the same corporate family. The Visteon Group makes parts for Ford car production. In real life, if someone falsely claims material separation from a partner to try to draw down social welfare, no effort is spared by the state in investigating such a fraud. In a legalistic, superficial and expedient way, Ford and Visteon have claimed separation, but when Ford talks to Visteon, it is looking at itself in the mirror. Their legal representatives have, presumably, advised them on the legality of their manoeuvres. Sinn Féin believes that Ford and Visteon have been engaged in corporate fraud. This scandal has been a decade in the making. It not only deserves but requires a rigorous and comprehensive investigation. All the information that has been revealed today has been placed in the Assembly Library for reference.

A LeasCheann Comhairle, in conclusion, Sinn Féin has furnished copies of that information to the Pensions Regulator, the Minister for Employment and Learning, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the private company that is handling Visteon UK's administration. We will draw this scandal to the attention of the New York State Comptroller and other interested parties in the United States Congress. Go raibh maith agat.

**Mr Butler:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Tá mé iontach sásta cead cainte a bheith agam sa díospóireacht seo faoi Visteon. I thank my colleague Gerry Adams for securing the debate and the contributors from other parties for the support that they have given to the workers at the Visteon plant. The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Arlene Foster, and the Minister for Employment and Learning, Reg Empey, are not here today, but I hope that they take the debate on board and read carefully the report that Sinn Féin has presented of the sharp practice and corruption that has occurred and of the way in which the workers have been dealt with.

It is a credit to the 200 workers who were left at the Belfast plant that they stood up to a multinational company, Ford and Visteon, and won. They refused to leave the plant and were threatened with court action by Visteon, which did not work. They were united and stayed together. The Unite union and the trade union movement stood by them through thick and thin. Although the issue of pensions has still to be resolved,

the workers have voted in favour of a redundancy package. However, it is important to say something about how those people were treated throughout this episode. People came to the plant to tell workers that they had lost their jobs, workers who had given 30 or 40 years' service and had been loyal to Ford.

I visited the plant on several occasions. Some of the workers who could have taken redundancy over the past couple of years did not do so because they were loyal to Ford and to their fellow workers. They wanted to make the plant a going concern; they stayed on, yet they were on the receiving end of sharp practice by Visteon and Ford.

I hope that both Ministers will take on board what has been said. Our colleagues gave us a great deal of the detail of what happened at Visteon, and I take on board what Members from Lagan Valley and West Belfast said. Gerry Adams, Jennifer McCann and Paul Maskey set out the crux of the matter: pension funds being moved to other companies — the pension funds of the workers who are here today — and how the redundancy exercise was handled.

The other important point is that the workers are staying in the plant until the redundancy packages are in their bank accounts. It is no wonder that they are doing so, given how they have been treated by Visteon; we can believe nothing that comes out of its mouth. We should keep a watching brief to ensure that Visteon honours the deal and stands by it.

The workers in the Visteon plant have inspired workers across Britain and Europe by their stance. There were times when they felt demoralised and thought that they would get nothing, but they stood together. They were very encouraged by the support of people from all political parties in the Assembly who visited the plant and stayed with them. This debate is encouraging for them.

I hope that the Minister for Employment and Learning takes note. It is important to get as many as possible of those who have been made redundant into training programmes to secure other employment for them. I hope that the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment will investigate why some of the money that Invest NI put into the plant was to develop products that were moved to South Africa, as Gerry Adams pointed out. When I visited the plant some of the workers told me that they had gone to South Africa to train people before Visteon and Ford moved production there.

This useful debate has brought a focus on the issue.

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

**Mr Butler:** I hope that the debate inspires other workers to take the same stance as the workers at Visteon. Go raibh maith agat.

*Adjourned at 6.28 pm.*



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# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Monday 11 May 2009

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

*Members observed two minutes' silence.*

## ASSEMBLY BUSINESS

**Mr Adams:** On a point of order, a Cheann Comhairle, perhaps you are aware that there was an attack on the home of a Member last night. Although I am sensitive about not abusing points of order, I consider this to be a very serious situation.

You may be aware that one group has threatened to kill Sinn Féin representatives. The attack on the home of Mitchel McLaughlin and his wife Mary Lou is the third such attack. I just want to bring that to the attention of the Ceann Comhairle and send a message of solidarity to the McLaughlin family and place on record our revulsion at and opposition to the attack. Go raibh maith agat.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker, we are moving into a very difficult time. Therefore, it behoves us all to do our very best to encourage and strengthen those who are standing out against the sort of incident that was witnessed last night. I think that it is only right that the House declare plainly and clearly where it stands on this issue and how those Members who were put here by the electorate to represent them feel about that part of the electorate that is trying to kill them and their friends. Irrespective of politics, the basis of democracy is that we believe that people should be elected, that they should serve, and that they should be given the freedom to serve the people whom they have been elected to represent in this House.

**Mr Durkan:** Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker, I know that there are probably procedural difficulties in this area, but I think that it is appropriate that an opportunity be found in the Assembly to show a united response to that attack and to the threat that was attached to it, and, indeed, to the threats that were made previously against the deputy First Minister.

In recent weeks, the Assembly has shown a real unity of purpose and determination to defend these institutions and the wider democratic process against murderous attacks on soldiers and police officers. It is also important that we unite to make it clear to the tendencies that are behind the attack that, when they attack one member of the democratic process or one party in that process they are attacking us all, and we all unite to defy them.

**Mr Kennedy:** Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I join others in condemning any attack on individuals or on property. On behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party, I condemn all such attacks unreservedly and without equivocation, and I encourage the wider community to co-operate with the PSNI in its investigations into any such incidents. I wish to place that clearly on record.

It is important that we investigate means by which these matters can be raised under urgent matters of the day, rather than under points of order, which is not appropriate.

**Mr Ford:** Further to those points of order, Mr Speaker. On behalf of my group I wish to be associated with the sentiments that have been expressed. There is no doubt that attacks on soldiers, police officers, elected politicians or ordinary civilians are entirely unacceptable in this society. Each and every one of us must resist them, wherever they come from and whoever they are aimed at. I am pleased to add my voice to the sentiments expressed by others.

**Mr Speaker:** The procedure concerning matters of the day can seem very restrictive. Perhaps the Committee on Procedures might consider the matter to allow Members to raise such issues. I know that I speak for everyone in the House and for the public in condemning these attacks.

## MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

### North/South Ministerial Council:

#### Transport Sectoral Format

**Mr Speaker:** I have received notice from the Minister for Regional Development that he wishes to make a statement on the North/South Ministerial Council transport sectoral format meeting.

**The Minister for Regional Development (Mr Murphy):** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. In compliance with section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I wish to make the following report on the sixth North/South Ministerial Council transport sectoral format meeting at the Curran Court Hotel in Larne on Friday 3 April 2009.

The Executive were represented by the Minister of the Environment, Sammy Wilson MP MLA, and me. The Irish Government were represented by the Minister for Transport, Noel Dempsey TD. The Council noted progress made since the last meeting, in May 2008, and welcomed the opportunity to meet to discuss opportunities for cross-border co-operation on strategic transport planning.

The Council discussed the latest position on the A5 north-west gateway to Aughnacloy and the A8 Belfast to Larne road projects and noted progress made to date. I advised the Council that development work was progressing well on both projects. In respect of the A5 project, I was pleased to report that I had announced the completion of the first significant milestone — the preliminary route corridor assessment — ahead of target on 7 November 2008. Public exhibitions that illustrated several potential routes within the preferred corridor were held during February 2009, with more than 3,000 people attending, including elected representatives and council officials.

Roads Service anticipates that the selection of the preferred route will be completed on target in mid-2009. I welcome the ongoing co-operation at the cross-border interfaces, particularly the Aughnacloy to Clontibret route. The Council also noted that the procurement process has commenced on the project, with a view to the appointment of contractors and designers in the autumn.

The next significant milestone will be the publication of the draft statutory orders, which are due to be published by late 2010. In the current economic climate, the Council noted the recent reassurance in relation to the £400 million contribution from the Irish Government and looked forward to seeing further advancement of this unprecedented scheme in the coming months.

I reported to the Council a similar position in relation to the A8 project. The scheme will provide 14

kilometres of dual carriageway between Belfast and Larne. I advised that delivery is anticipated on a similar time frame to that of the A5 and confirmed that the project has also achieved its first significant milestone — the preliminary route corridor assessment — ahead of target. The second key milestone — the preferred route — is also anticipated to be on target for mid-summer 2009. In addition, the procurement process is due to commence shortly.

The Council noted the report commissioned by Fermanagh District Council and Sligo County Council which analysed the need for upgrading the N16/A4 Belfast to Sligo route. I was pleased to report that extensive works are in progress to upgrade the A4 between Dungannon and Augher.

More than 20 kilometres of dual carriageway are being constructed between Dungannon and Ballygawley. A further four kilometres of widened two-plus-one single carriageway are being built between Ballygawley and Augher. My Department's investment delivery plan for roads also includes proposals for bypasses of Enniskillen and Fivemiletown, which will further relieve congestion and bottlenecks on that route and enhance regional journey times. Consultants have been appointed to start development work on the Enniskillen bypass.

The North/South Ministerial Council also noted the publication of the Irish Department of Transport's smarter travel policy. My Department is already progressing initiatives on sustainable transport and travel. I advised the Council that officials are proactively engaged on a sustainable transport and travel agenda and are progressing initiatives that underline the all-Ireland dimension. The Council also agreed to the ongoing work on a jointly-supported car-sharing website for the north-west region, with a tentative commencement date in autumn 2009.

Ministers reviewed progress on proposals for improving the Dublin-Belfast rail service and noted the findings from the work carried out by Iarnród Éireann and Northern Ireland Railways since the Council's previous meeting. Ministers agreed that identifying the capital and revenue funding required to improve on the frequency of the Enterprise service remains an objective but in the knowledge that the financial position is likely to be difficult in the years ahead. They also agreed that in the meantime operating companies should examine the case for reconfiguring Enterprise trains to increase their reliability.

Ministers discussed the intention of the Irish Department of Transport to deal with freight issues in a more integrated way through, inter alia, preparing a specific strategy for the freight sector. The Council also noted that the Department for Regional Development will consider issues relating to freight in

the review of the regional transportation strategy. It was agreed that the Department for Regional Development and the Department of Transport should work together to organise a freight forum in the latter part of 2009 involving North and South interests.

The Council noted and welcomed the continuing progress on the Irish Government's proposals for restoring the cross-border bridges at Annaghroe and Knockaginney. It also acknowledged the excellent cross-border co-operation to date that has led to formal planning approval in both jurisdictions. Construction work will commence soon. Replacement of the bridges will enhance cross-border links and the social and economic well-being of the immediate areas. In relation to Narrow Water bridge, the Council noted that Louth County Council has completed significant work and is to undertake further appraisal of the proposed project prior to progression through the statutory processes.

I reminded the Council that my Department's Roads Service has employed consultants who have undertaken a feasibility study for a Newry southern relief road to link the A2 Warrenpoint Road to the A1 just south of Newry. I was recently made aware of the findings of that study, and I welcome the continuing co-operation on the project between officials from Roads Service and Louth County Council.

The Council noted the studies carried out to date on the Ballynacarry bridge by Monaghan County Council. The ongoing appraisal for that bridge is expected to be completed in mid-2009, after which the authorities in the South will further consider the level of priority to attach to the project. Go raibh maith agat.

**The Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development (Mr Cobain):** I thank the Minister for his statement. Will he share with Members the findings of the feasibility study on the Newry southern relief road?

**The Minister for Regional Development:** I received that report recently, but more work will be done on developing the findings. I hope to be able to share the information with the Regional Development Committee, elected representatives and the public in that part of the world in the near future.

The project is important. Roads Service and the consultants it has engaged have undertaken significant assessment work. The project is particularly important to Warrenpoint port's ability to continue to grow and to serve as an economic driver in the east coast region. As I said, I have received some preliminary findings, which will be developed, and I will have further discussion with officials on the matter tomorrow. We hope to be in a position to present the report's findings soon.

**Mr Wells:** I note the Minister's comments about the A5. He knows that the £400 million that has been made available by the Irish authorities is guaranteed.

Will he absolutely and categorically assure Members that as a result of his meeting there is no question or any doubt about the future of that funding?

**The Minister for Regional Development:** I am happy to do so. Any time that we have raised that issue with the Minister for Transport, we have been very forcefully assured by the Minister, his officials and the National Roads Authority in the South that that funding will be forthcoming. As the Member has said, it is a very important component of not just the A5 but the A8 Belfast to Larne route.

I refer the Member to the comments of the Taoiseach during a dinner he attended a number of weeks ago with the CBI, in which he again reaffirmed the Dublin Government's financial commitment to that project. We have been given very firm assurances at every stage at which we have enquired about funding, and I am happy to repeat those assurances to the Member.

12.15 pm

**Mr Boylan:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh ráiteas an Aire. I welcome the Minister's statement and draw his attention to the Ballynacarry bridge. He is well aware of the lobbying that local councillors have done through the East Border Region Committee (EBRC) on that matter. Arising from the NSMC meeting, can the Minister tell us whether he feels that dealing with the issue is a major priority? Go raibh maith agat.

**The Minister for Regional Development:** I met the East Border Region Committee, and I know that the group of councils that is represented on it is very supportive of the INTERREG money available for the area going to the Ballynacarry bridge project. It is on a very dangerous stretch of the route between Cullaville and Castleblayney and has been the scene of quite a lot of accidents, so there is strong local feeling that it is a very important project. Monaghan County Council is conducting an assessment for the project. The council has not yet assessed its priority status, but it intends to do that in the near future. We will have more information at that stage.

**Mr Dallat:** I also welcome the Minister's statement. I note that the Minister of the Environment, Sammy Wilson, who has overall responsibility for road safety, also attended the NSMC meeting, at which, it is my understanding, road safety was discussed. Given the number of people who have lost their lives North and South of the border, I understand why he was in attendance. Will the Minister therefore explain why that issue was not included in his statement? Will he tell me what exactly was discussed about road safety?

**The Minister for Regional Development:** A broad range of issues that fall under the DOE headline was discussed at the meeting. Road safety is always discussed at those meetings, and I think that all

Members have an interest in the matter. The Minister of the Environment had some issues with parts of my statement. If he wishes to make a statement about the issues that were discussed at the meeting that are specific to his Department, that is a matter for him. I am sure that he will sort that out with you, Mr Speaker.

A range of other matters was discussed, including the sharing of information on car registrations and other issues that have been developed. As a member of the Committee for Regional Development, the Member will know that ongoing work has been a regular feature of North/South Ministerial Council transport sectoral meetings.

**Mrs Long:** I thank the Minister for his statement and particularly for mentioning public transport issues. The statement referred to progressing initiatives that underline the all-Ireland dimension of public transport. However, after that, the focus on public transport seemed to come down to the Dublin to Belfast rail link. Will the Minister outline some of the other public transport initiatives that were discussed?

On the Dublin to Belfast rail link, the statement also revealed that it was agreed that operating companies should examine the case for reconfiguring the Enterprise trains to improve their reliability. Can we have some clarification about what that reconfiguration may mean?

**The Minister for Regional Development:** One of the items under discussion was a policy paper on sustainable transport initiatives that the Department of Transport in the South developed. Although my Department is doing quite a lot of work on developing its own sustainable transport initiatives, that policy paper is a fairly comprehensive document from which there is much to be learned. Minister Dempsey shared with us some of the sustainable transport initiatives that are being developed in the South.

The Belfast to Dublin railway line is obviously one very important issue, not only from a public transport perspective but economically. It is a very important route on the island. Although the objective remains to improve the service and its frequency, in these difficult financial times that we face, both North and South, there is recognition that some of the initial ideas that we had will have to sit for some time, until the finances — capital investment and ongoing revenue investment — are available to develop them.

The ongoing work is of a technical nature. I presume that the Member, being an engineer, may understand it a bit better than I do. However, I know that one of the causes of engine failure is the fact that engines are also responsible for air conditioning and heating on trains. A separate system will make the trains more reliable, because engines are less likely to break down if they do not have to perform dual functions.

I will endeavour to get more information on that and share it with the Member. However, that is my understanding, as a person who is not well versed in those matters, of what they intend to do.

**Mr Bresland:** I also welcome the statement. Will there be more public consultation after the final route for the new A5 has been selected?

**The Minister for Regional Development:** Yes. The preferred route option will be launched in mid-2009 — I think that it may be in July — and that will be accompanied by public exhibitions, at least in a number of areas along the way. As I said in my statement, there was a very high level of public interest in the announcement of the potential routes within the corridor, and 3,000 people attended at locations such as Strabane, Omagh and Ballygawley along the way. I anticipate that the same exercise will take place when we select the preferred route shortly. The route will go on display in public settings where the general public, elected representatives from the area and others who have an interest can come along and view it. The decision will be of particular interest to landowners whose lands and properties will be affected by the route selected. They will have an opportunity to discuss the issue with Roads Service and with the consultants. Therefore, there will be ongoing public consultations on the final route for the new A5.

**Mr Molloy:** Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for the statement. During the talks on transport and travel, was there any discussion about free travel in the transport system North and South for the over-60s and for those who accompany or who help people with a disability. Furthermore, as regards the Belfast-Dublin rail link, is there any guarantee at this stage that people who buy a ticket — in particular, people with a disability — will get a seat?

**The Minister for Regional Development:** There was specific discussion on companion travelling and concessionary fares for those with disabilities. The Member will know that there is a differential between what we provide in the North, which is free travel for people aged 60 and over, and what is provided in the South, where the age is certainly 65 and may be 66.

I know that an argument has been made for companion travelling, but there are still disabilities for which we have not been able to provide concessionary fares. Although we bid for some money at the start of the budgetary period for concessionary fares, we did get resources for the over-60s. However, there is another range of disabilities that might attract half fares but not full concessionary fares, and should more money become available to us we will want to ensure that all who have disabilities are covered by concessionary fares. People will continue to make the argument for companion travel as well.



In relation to the people's ability to get seats, if there is a particular problem arising about that, I will be very happy to raise that service matter with Translink.

**Mr G Robinson:** Will the Minister assure me that none of the projects, welcome as they all are, will impinge financially on the Dungiven bypass scheme in my constituency?

**The Minister for Regional Development:** Who said that all politics are local? That is certainly not the intention. Last week I was in Dungiven, and we launched the preferred route for the Dungiven bypass, which is long awaited and long overdue, as I am sure that most people in the north-west will agree. People have been working for some time to identify that route. More work is being done as a result of the public consultation; there will be a more detailed design, and then we will move into the statutory processes. As far as I am concerned, that will not be impinged upon by any other road project.

**Mr Elliott:** I thank the Minister for bringing this matter forward. As regards the N16 and A4 Belfast to Sligo route and the report commissioned by the two councils there, a corridor identification process was to commence. Will the Minister update us on when that will take place and when we can get the report? Secondly, as regards the Annaghroe and Knockaginney bridges on the Monaghan/Tyrone border, did the Minister recognise the wave of public opposition to that work in the immediate area?

**The Minister for Regional Development:** With respect to the Member's second question, I know that concerns on the issue were raised when Mrs Foster was Minister of the Environment; indeed, those matters were discussed at the North/South Ministerial Council meeting. Nevertheless, I am aware that there was fairly substantial consultation in that area and a recognition that re-opening the bridges would be a good thing. Perhaps not everyone shared that view, but that was the general feeling. Every effort was made to ensure that the public were consulted fully. Indeed, there was further consultation with people who had not felt comfortable about engaging in some of the official exercises.

I do not have any further information about the route corridor assessment. We discussed briefly the fact that Fermanagh District Council and Sligo County Council had submitted a report on it. Obviously, we were able to update people about our ongoing work programme, including the Dungannon to Ballygawley and the Ballygawley to Augher road improvement schemes and the identification of the Fivemiletown and Enniskillen bypasses. With respect to the particular report to which the Member referred, I will endeavour to find out what work has been carried out and get back to him.

**Mr Durkan:** Mr Speaker, before I ask the Minister a question about his statement, for which I thank him, I believe that a procedural point has arisen for you and the House authorities to consider. The Minister indicated that a matter on which he wanted to report was discussed at the meeting; however, he did not make that report. Accountability and transparency are supposed to mean that, when matters are discussed at such meetings, they should be duly reported on. It seems bizarre that a party that very much insists on that has prevented the Minister, through no fault of his own, reporting on the matter in question. Therefore, the matter must be addressed, because an awkward precedent will be created if it is allowed to stand.

I thank the Minister for what he said about the A5 north-west gateway, and I welcome his further comments about money coming from the Irish Government. We received those commitments from the Taoiseach privately, and I believe that they will be repeated publicly this week. However, is the Minister concerned to ensure that every effort will be made to expedite the delivery of that project? Although the project may not be under financial pressure, does the Minister accept that, in the coming years, there will be significant pressure on the transport investment strategies in the North and the South? Is there perhaps a need for a more integrated strategy, and will the sectors North and South begin working to that end?

**The Minister for Regional Development:** One of the objectives of the North/South Ministerial Council meetings is to ensure a high degree of integration between the transport sectors, and that is what we are striving towards. The A5 road improvement scheme is a good example of that sort of approach, as is the Newry to Dundalk link.

Over the years — not just since 2007 — excellent working relationships have been developed between the Roads Service and the National Roads Authority, and, out of the public spotlight, formalised working groups have done quite a bit of careful work to ensure that there is a degree of co-ordination and integration on cross-border transport matters. Work involving not just roads but public transport will go on.

If the downturn continues, I have no doubt that pressure will build on the Budget; however, we are operating and planning on the basis that moneys that have been identified will be available to us. In the interim, that is all that we can do.

I am sure that the Member will be pleased to hear that the first target of the A5 improvement scheme — the announcement of the route corridor options — was achieved ahead of schedule. I think that in July we will be in a position to announce the preferred route for the corridor, and we will then be able to get down to more

detailed work. A significant amount of work has been ongoing and is ahead of schedule.

As I said about the A6 project, people assume that roadworks have started only when they see plant and people in high-visibility jackets at the side of the road. However, a significant amount of work has been carried out on design and on undertaking the statutory processes for both the A5 and A6 routes, as is the case for projects on many other major road networks. The work is ongoing and is ahead of schedule, and I anticipate that that good work will bear fruit in that the project will be completed within its agreed timescale.

**Mr Speaker:** On two occasions, points have been raised about the requirements of ministerial statements and whether another Minister should be present. The role of the Speaker is to ensure that ministerial statements conform to the requirements of Standing Order 18A.

It is not the job of the Speaker to examine and agree the terminology of ministerial statements. That is an issue for the Executive and individual Ministers. It is important that I say that. The Speaker has a role to play, and I am content that Mr Murphy's statement meets the requirements.

12.30 pm

**Mr McCartney:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a ráiteas. I thank the Minister for his statement. He is initiating a freight forum. Will the terms of reference for that forum be shared with the Assembly and the Committee for Regional Development?

**The Minister for Regional Development:** The terms of reference will be shared with the Committee for Regional Development, as will all such matters. It is intended that the forum will explore areas such as economic competitiveness and environmental sustainability issues that relate to freight transport, including the realistic potential for rail freight; the rationale for priority freight routes catering for vehicles with greater loads; the scope for the promotion and development of key logistic centres in the interests of sustainable urban mobility; the opportunities for optimising existing network capacity with desirable competitiveness and sustainability outcomes through the rescheduling of deliveries in urban areas; the incentives needed for greater uptake of fuel-efficient vehicles; and the potential of intelligent transport systems and services to improve efficiency and, ultimately, competitiveness. It is intended that representation on the forum will be drawn from industrial development agencies, industry representative bodies and the Departments. All that is at an exploratory stage, but I will be happy to update the Committee and the Assembly as the work progresses.

**Lord Morrow:** The Minister assures the House that £400 million from the Irish Government is still in place for the A5 project. What about the contribution from the other Government — our Government? Is it in place? When does the Minister expect the A5 project to commence?

**The Minister for Regional Development:** The A5 project has started. As I said already, most people assume that road building has not commenced until workers are visible on site. A huge amount of work has been undertaken on the development of the A5 project. The first milestone was completed ahead of schedule, and we will be able to announce the preferred route in July, which is also ahead of schedule.

We have a strong commitment to this important project. The Irish Government's financial commitment adds to the importance of the project, and it places an imperative on the Executive to ensure that they uphold their side of the bargain, as well as the imperative that is on them to ensure that the work continues.

I am satisfied with developments to date. Work is ongoing, and the preferred route corridor will be announced. After that, we will get into the statutory processes, which will take some time, and further design work will be done on the route.

Given that the Member represents a rural constituency, he will know that the A5 scheme will run through some 80 km of countryside. That means that there will be many instances in which landowners and properties will be affected. In such cases, people are entitled to proper compensation, and issues such as access to and from farms must be sorted out. There is much work to be undertaken, but I am satisfied with the progress to date and that we will continue to make good progress on the scheme.

**Mr Kennedy:** I am grateful to the Minister for his statement. He will know that I am not an enthusiastic supporter of the Narrow Water bridge project. His statement referred to the role and attitude of Louth County Council. Will the Minister inform the House of the role and attitude of the Irish Government and the National Roads Authority and their level of commitment to the proposed scheme? Given the current economic climate, particularly in the Irish Republic, is the proposed scheme viable? Will the Minister also clarify his Department's involvement, if any, in the Narrow Water bridge project?

I welcome the study that is being undertaken into the more sensible proposal of providing a relief road linking the A2 Warrenpoint Road and the A1 at Newry. Does the Minister agree that that is more likely to make a substantial contribution to easing the problems of Newry, particularly the freight problems that drivers experience leaving Warrenpoint harbour and also by Warrenpoint Harbour Authority?

**The Minister for Regional Development:** For someone who considers the Narrow Water bridge project to be pie in the sky and not viable, the Member spends an awful lot of time talking about it. The position on both schemes remains the same. The Irish Government funded Louth County Council to appoint consultants to carry out a study on the bridge project, and that study is ongoing. Some public presentations have been made, and further work is under way. I am not aware of what the Irish Government will do beyond that point. They will take a decision when the work that Louth County Council has been tasked to carry out is completed, and I will await that decision.

The Narrow Water bridge project is not designed to address the issue of freight, transport or connectivity between Warrenpoint port and the Belfast to Dublin road. The southern relief road scheme, however, is designed to address those issues and will have a greater impact on improving traffic congestion and freight transport from the port. Therefore, it is unfair to compare the two schemes in that respect. Nonetheless, I have received a preliminary report on the southern relief road scheme. More work on it is being considered, and I hope to be able to launch that work at some stage in the future.

**Mr O’Loan:** The Minister gave a positive report on the various schemes under his control. What are the budgetary pressures for this financial year and the next? What impact are those pressures having on those schemes, and are they leading to delay in the published timetable for the schemes?

Following Lord Morrow’s line of questioning, can the Minister comment on the implications of the Chancellor’s UK Budget statement, which makes clear that significant budgetary cuts will take place from 2011 onwards? Can he confirm that those cuts will inevitably lead to those schemes being significantly delayed?

**The Minister for Regional Development:** The Member tends to favour the school of thought that the glass is half empty rather than half full. The Budget that has been agreed for the three-year period is the Budget under which we must operate — we have not been told any different. If financial pressures are being experienced, the Executive will do what they continually do: reassess constantly the Budget and try to prioritise the schemes as best as we can. To hear the Member’s party, one would think that that was not the case.

In the investment strategy, we set out the schemes that we would like to take forward and the time frame for them. As far as design and the statutory process are concerned, we have started to make significant progress on practically all the schemes, and many schemes are ahead of schedule. Therefore, a significant investment has already been made in all those schemes — perhaps not on the ground but in undertaking preparatory work

— and we intend to press ahead with them. If the Budget scenario in 2011 is different, we will do what any good Executive would do and reassess our position at that stage.

**Mr Ford:** I also welcome the Minister’s statement, although I must make a procedural point. Some of us understand that Ministers come to the House to make statements on behalf of the Executive, and it is less than satisfactory when matters discussed at an NSMC meeting are not subject to proper discussion.

However, on matters for which Mr Murphy does accept responsibility, I note that he talked about a sustainable transport strategy. Given the Minister’s recent success in announcing investment in new rolling stock for local services for Northern Ireland Railways, does he not accept that if we are to maintain the gains made over the past decade through the increased usage of the Belfast to Dublin Enterprise rail service, there is now a significant need for further investment in track and rolling stock as an urgent priority?

**The Minister for Regional Development:** There is an acceptance that there is a significant need for investment in the Enterprise service, but that comes up against the hard reality of the resources available to us. Therefore, the intention is to improve the service, and the objective remains the same. We asked the two companies, Iarnród Éireann and NIR, to carry out a piece of work to show how they would improve the service, including its frequency, comfort, reliability and speed. That involved not just work on the stock but on the track. It is intended to press ahead with that when the resources become available. In the interim, we will have to try to do what work we can to improve the reliability of the train sets.

It is still the intention, the desire and the objective to improve the service, as it is the key service on the island for connectivity between the two cities, and we want to ensure that it stays that way. The Member is right: the growth in the number of rail passengers is probably due to improvements in the comfort and reliability of the service, and investing in the service is the way in which we will continue to grow passenger numbers. There has been significant investment in new trains, and we would like to make the same investment in the Enterprise service. However, we may have to wait a little longer to get the resources for that. It is not simply a matter of capital investment; revenue investment is also required if the frequency of the service is to be increased.

**Mr D Bradley:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Fáiltím roimh an ráiteas seo ón Aire. Ba mhaith liom tagairt a dhéanamh do a dó nó a trí de na tionscnaimh a luaitear i gcomhthéacs an droichid ag an Chaoluisce agus an droichid ag Baile na Caradh agus an bóthar faoisimh taobh ó dheas de Iúr Cinn Trá. I



welcome the Minister's statement. I will refer to some of the projects mentioned by the Minister, particularly the Narrow Water bridge and the Ballynacarry bridge. A further appraisal is to be undertaken of the Narrow Water bridge, and there is still an ongoing appraisal of the Ballynacarry bridge. Does the Minister agree that, at the end of the appraisals, we would like to see some action taking place and some work beginning on the ground on both those schemes? What is the Minister's initial assessment of the findings of the feasibility study for a Newry southern relief road? Go raibh maith agat.

**The Minister for Regional Development:** The responsibility for assessing, designing and taking forward the Ballynacarry scheme lies with Monaghan County Council, and the responsibility for the Narrow Water scheme lies with Louth County Council. I omitted that fact in my reply to Danny Kennedy. The lead agency is on the southern side of the border and, if Members are asking for updates on those works, they should be referred to the people who are dealing with them. That was misinterpreted for genuine or mischievous reasons — I am not quite sure which. However, it was misinterpreted anyway. The two county councils are the lead agencies for both projects, and they are carrying out those assessments.

Monaghan County Council, in conjunction with the National Roads Authority, will decide what priority the Ballynacarry bridge project will have. We have been very supportive of that project. The Member will know from his constituency interests that the people in that part of south Armagh and Monaghan would like to see that project addressed quickly. The east border region has supported the project, and we have ensured that the authorities in the South are aware of that and that they support the INTERREG money available for that area being spent on that project. We are giving it every encouragement.

The position on the Narrow Water bridge is as it was. Roads Service and Louth County Council have been conducting their studies and sharing information. When Roads Service has been asked for any information or support, it has provided it and will continue to do so gladly. I am encouraged by my preliminary assessment of the southern relief road study.

**Mr Gallagher:** Just over a year ago, the North/South group Co-operation and Working Together (CAWT) produced a detailed report on road safety that involved a wide range of interests. When the report was published, it was expected that it would be taken up at North/South level. As my colleagues said, it is a matter of regret that, although road safety was discussed at the meeting, we do not have a report about it.

I expressed my disappointment at the omission of a discussion on the Belfast to Sligo road at earlier meetings, and I welcome the Minister's commitment

that the matter will be raised. I welcome the Minister's detailing of what is happening on the northern side. Did he gain any information from authorities on the southern side of the border about steps that they have taken or are soon to take to take the joint venture forward?

12.45 pm

**The Minister for Regional Development:** The Member will know that work is ongoing in the Manorhamilton area on the southern side of the border; that was discussed at the time that the report was launched by both councils. The Southern Government did not give me any more update on or commitment to further roadworks to be undertaken between the border and Sligo. However, I assume that both councils and those who support the Sligo to Belfast project will continue to press the case for that work.

In the early stages, we outlined some of the work that we have planned, such as the Dungannon to Ballygawley project and the bypasses of Fivemiletown and Enniskillen. I know that roadworks are planned for the Manorhamilton area on the Southern side, but I was not given further information on any other planned works.



## MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

### Planning

**Mr Speaker:** I have received notice from the Minister of the Environment that he wishes to make a statement regarding the weight to be given to the economic benefits of development proposals.

**The Minister of the Environment (Mr S Wilson):** With your permission, Mr Speaker, I wish to make a statement to underline the importance that I attach to ensuring that the planning system contributes to the growth of our economy, especially at this difficult time.

The Executive's Programme for Government makes economic growth and wealth creation our top priority, to be taken forward in a fair and sustainable manner. That strategic priority is echoed as a key theme that underlies our planning system, which seeks to deliver economic development while protecting and enhancing the environment. As Members will know, over the last few years there has been widespread pressure for the planning system to be reformed. We all recognise that the system needs to adapt more flexibly and more quickly to the many challenges that we face, particularly in the current economic climate.

My Department has already achieved a range of process improvements. We have created two strategic project teams at planning headquarters who will handle all large-scale investment proposals. To enhance their effectiveness, those teams include specialists from Roads Service and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), two of our key consultees. That is contributing to faster and better decisions. Many economically significant planning applications will be dealt with by the strategic project teams; it is high-profile and important work.

It is vital that proposals that may bring investment be processed as quickly as possible. The achievement of that will require the commitment of everyone who is involved in the planning process. We need better planning applications that contain all the necessary information to allow a decision to be made. The strategic project teams also work alongside the Strategic Investment Board to ensure that capital-spend projects flow smoothly through the planning process. That partnership has been particularly effective in delivering new schools in the Belfast area, for example.

Furthermore, I am pleased to say that the strategic project teams processed 25 article 31 applications in 2008-09. Those included a number of high-priority cases such as the £29 million investment in the Public Record Office; the new acute hospital at Enniskillen, which will cost £250 million; and signature tourism projects at the Giant's Causeway and the Titanic Quarter, which have a value of £110 million. Those

projects were all processed in line with the six-month target that is set in the Programme for Government, and they will give a boost to our economy's construction sector over the next few years.

More locally, my officials give priority to applications on which grant aid may depend and to those with an employment, community or public-interest dimension.

Furthermore, working with the city council in Londonderry, we piloted a streamlined consultation scheme for non-contentious planning applications. I am pleased to say that we had rolled out this scheme to all councils before the end of March, and approval decisions now take, on average, 24 days to issue. That means that extensions and alterations are approved more quickly, as well as other planning issues such as agricultural buildings, advertisements and shop fronts. That will make life much easier for those who wish to get on with development and grow their businesses, particularly in small and medium-sized enterprises. That more proportionate approach benefits councils and the Planning Service. Decisions are made faster, the economic and social benefits are realised more quickly, and council and departmental officials are able to focus on more important applications, particularly those with significant economic and social implications.

I also want to encourage developers to engage with local communities before an application is submitted. That applies to people who should discuss proposed house extensions with neighbours and to developers who should engage with the local community and interest groups. Too often, it is only after an application has been submitted that people hear what is being proposed, and they often object to issues that could have been resolved, had the proposal been discussed beforehand. As with the other process improvements that I have highlighted, I expect that such front-loading will ensure that applications have a smooth passage.

In addition to the process improvements, there are some planning policy statements in the pipeline that will facilitate economic development both in settlements and in the open countryside. I look forward to publishing the revised and updated PPS 4, which concerns economic development and has been awaiting Executive clearance since January 2009. PPS 21, which I published in November 2008, also contains policies for economic development in the open countryside, including farm diversification. The Executive are committed to the development of our tourist industry, and it is vital that we have the right planning policies in place to underpin appropriate tourism-related development projects. That is why I will soon bring forward draft PPS 16, which will set out the policy for tourist facilities and accommodation. Subject to Executive clearance, PPS 18, on renewable energy, will be published before the recess.

The planning system cannot be expected to satisfy all interests all the time. Economic growth, including major infrastructure provision, requires development. However, that development must be sustainable and take into account all the relevant material considerations in the wider public interest. My Department's guiding principle to development management is set out in paragraph 59 of Planning Policy Statement 1: General Principles:

"in determining planning applications ... development should be permitted, having regard to the development plan and all other material considerations, unless the proposed development will cause demonstrable harm to interests of acknowledged importance."

Competing interests often emerge in the assessment of development proposals. That requires the planning system to balance important social, economic and environmental considerations. The weight given to those is a judgement that lies with the decision-maker and will vary with each planning application.

That brings me to the main point of the statement. I want to give decision-makers the confidence and support to make judgements that will give greater weight to economic considerations where it is appropriate to do so. I want to give clarity and to leave no one in any doubt about how to deal with economic considerations. That is not a change of policy. The purpose of this statement is to provide certainty and to give guidance so that the planning system can play a positive role in encouraging investment and kick-starting regeneration. To that end, the following paragraph clarifies the weight that should be accorded to economic aspects in the making of planning decisions.

Full account shall be taken of economic aspects of a planning proposal, including the wider benefits to the regional or local economy, alongside social and environmental aspects, in so far as they are material considerations in the determination of the planning application to which they relate. In cases where the economic benefits of a proposal are significant, substantial weight shall be afforded to them in the determination of that planning application. However, in order that my officials can do that and determine planning applications without delay, it is essential that they have all the relevant information about development proposals at their disposal. It is, therefore, up to everyone involved in the planning process, including developers, agents and public representatives, to ensure that all information about economic benefits is provided at the outset.

In these difficult economic times, I want to ensure that our planning system plays a full and positive role in assisting economic recovery so that we can benefit from better times when they come.

**The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment (Mr McGlone):** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his

statement. He said that the proposals were not a change of policy. I understand the general thrust of what the Minister appears to be saying. However, for those Members who sit through Committee meetings on the interpretation of policy — many of whom are present today — will the Minister provide a bit of clarity on his statement's anticipated impact on the interpretation of policy if, in fact, it is not a change of that policy?

Will the Minister comment on the concerns that members expressed at a Committee meeting on 30 April 2009 about the 20% increase in planning fees that he proposed and that his permanent secretary relayed to us? Go raibh maith agat.

**The Minister of the Environment:** First, the current planning policies are peppered with references to the importance of economic considerations. All Members will know that, because they have probably been in planning offices with developers or objectors when dealing with planning applications and making arguments.

From day to day, planners find themselves torn between the various strands of policy, some of which are complementary and some of which are, by their very nature, in competition with one another. Given the passion that many planning applications can generate among objectors, developers and, indeed, public representatives, every planning officer has to weigh up the importance of different parts of policy.

This is not a change of policy. If it was a change of policy, it would have required widespread consultation etc. This is simply an attempt by me, as Minister of the Environment, to translate a priority of the Executive that I want to see in the planning system down to those officers who have to take difficult decisions on the ground.

It means that, if planning officers, in weighing up all of those considerations in the circumstances that I outlined, have to give greater weight to an economic consideration, they can be confident that they are reflecting the wishes of the democratically elected Assembly, the Executive and the Minister. That will be important for planning officers from day to day. However, it does not mean that they can ignore certain policies. As no planning decision is based on one particular policy, where that balance is to be made, I hope that this clarification will give greater confidence and information to those people who are making the decisions at the coalface.

Secondly, I note that the Environment Committee made some comments on planning fees. The decision to increase planning fees was not taken lightly. However, it is the first increase for four years, and most of it is based on the level of inflation that applied over that period. I took the decision only after considering all the efficiencies that I could make in the planning

system and in the Department to make up the impending shortfall in available staff and resources. I put a bar on recruitment, cut overtime in the Department, stopped the upgrading of posts, and so forth. I have taken action to save money in all those areas. I took money from other parts of the Department's budget and transferred it into the Planning Service. My colleague the Minister of Finance and Personnel also provided some money. However, given the economic downturn, a shortfall remained. To keep the planning system running effectively and to avoid losing expertise, an increase in planning fees was considered as a last resort.

1.00 pm

I remind the Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment that most planning fees in Northern Ireland remain substantially lower than those in the rest of the UK. In Northern Ireland, a cap of £12,500 on planning fees applies to large developments of more than 50 houses whereas the cap in England is £125,000, which is a huge difference. The increase in the price for an application to build an individual house will be approximately £110, which is also lower than in other parts of the United Kingdom and represents a small proportion of the total cost of building a house. The increase in planning fees does not, therefore, disadvantage applicants. The planning system would have been considerably more damaged by the loss of expertise through sufficient planning officers not being available to deal with applications. Developers tell me constantly that speed is the single most important element of a planning application, and speed can be achieved only by having enough resources available to process applications.

**Mr Weir:** I thank the Minister for his statement. He touched on the answer to my question in his response to the Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment. Will he outline the practical economic benefits of the direction that his Department has taken? Will he also update the House on the position of PPS 4, to which he referred in his statement?

**The Minister of the Environment:** As I said in my earlier answer, the practical benefits are that the planners will have greater clarity and will, therefore, be able to make decisions with greater assurance. That will be particularly true of cases that are finely balanced. In future, when planning officers are wondering how to balance the environmental, social and economic considerations, they will have the full weight of the Executive and ministerial priority behind them, which will be helpful.

PPS 4 is another issue that is being held up at the Executive as it awaits the approval of the parties. In the past, I have made no bones about the fact that the process of receiving Executive clearance can be extremely difficult, even for some hugely important

issues. Whether the issue is planning reform or PPS 14, those who delay the process must consider whether they are serving the economy of Northern Ireland.

**Mr Boylan:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a ráiteas.

I am grateful to the Minister for making his statement. However, Assembly policies must be based on equality, and opportunities must be provided for people in rural and urban areas.

I welcome the new policies that the Minister mentioned. However, will he assure the Assembly that those who implement the policies will be properly trained? Different divisions, for example, clearly interpret draft PPS 21 in different ways.

No matter what policy is devised and implemented, those people should be properly trained in the interim period. There should be one interpretation across the board, because confusion is being caused in the public domain. That must be looked at. I reiterate that any policy should be based on equality, and people should be given the opportunity to apply and develop. Go raibh maith agat.

**The Minister of the Environment:** I do not wish to get into a debate on the differences that I have with Sinn Féin on the planning reform proposals, which are as important as today's statement in making the planning system effective for delivering for the economy. All the assessment that has been done on the equality implications of the planning reform proposals is exactly in line with the requirements of the equality legislation. It mirrors exactly what has been done by Sinn Féin Ministers on the proposals that they have brought forward to the Assembly. The equality screening has been done to the same standard as that which has been carried out by Sinn Féin Ministers. The conclusions were based on the same information as was used by Sinn Féin Ministers when they looked at equality.

The commitment that I have given to ensure that no equality issues are involved once the proposals go into the public domain is far greater than what some other Ministers have done. The planning reform proposals, which are important in this context, have been equality screened to the same degree as would have been done by any other Minister. This is not an excuse for not progressing with the planning reform proposals.

I take the Member's point about consistency of application, and I will be surprised if that point is not raised by a number of other Members. With any new policy, there will be an issue of ensuring that the people who have to apply it are fully aware of all the details of how it should be applied. The good thing is that, even where there have been some differences, no decision notices have been issued, because the final version of PPS 21 will not be available until the autumn. Any refusals are still being held until that final



version is available. Once it becomes available, the applications can be looked at again.

It is important to ensure that the same kinds of standards and interpretations are applied across offices. A large number of Members have written to me to point out where they believe that there have been differences of interpretation. I have asked officials to look at that, because I take the matter seriously and there is no point in having a policy that is more draconian in one part of the country than in another. The Planning Service must address that issue. We have to accept that it takes a bit of time for a new policy to bed in and that it takes time for people to ensure that they are applying the policy equally.

**Mr Beggs:** The Minister wants planners to give greater weight to economic considerations when it is appropriate to do so. He says that developers, agents and representatives need to lobby to make their case. The Minister remains active on Belfast City Council's planning committee, and he lobbies on individual cases. Does the Minister recognise that he is putting planners in an impossible situation in that they may not be giving what he considers to be appropriate weight to the views of their Minister?

**The Minister of the Environment:** I have been the Environment Minister for a year, and the one thing that I would have expected of the Member is that, by now, he would have found a different question to ask me.

I understand that the Assembly is interested in environmentally friendly policies, and so on. However, to recycle the same question practically biweekly is going a bit far. The Member has heard my answer to that question already, and he knows my attitude to that issue already. Rather than my simply recycling my answer, I implore the Member to try to get a different script. If he does not have a researcher who can provide him with a more incisive question, he ought to employ someone else.

**Mr Ford:** As Mr Beggs just pointed out, the Minister highlighted some of the ongoing difficulties in the current process. Specifically, given the fact that the Minister says that he looks forward to publishing PPS 4, which is being held up in the Executive, can he inform the Assembly whether the economy is still the Executive's number one priority? Is draft PPS 16 held up in his Department or in the Executive? Can he tell the House what has happened to PPS 18, which is also being held up somewhere between his Department and the Executive?

The Minister stated that he proposes to give greater weight to economic considerations. What does that mean? Does it mean that greater weight than previously will be given to economic considerations? Does it mean that greater weight will be given to economic considerations than to the social and

environmental considerations that planners are also obliged to take into account?

**The Minister of the Environment:** Subject to the Executive's approval, I hope that PPS 18 will be published before the summer recess. We are working to publish draft PPS 16 as quickly as possible.

I am reluctant to suggest a timetable because those issues are not always in my hands. As the Member well knows, under the checks and balances of our system of Government — which, incidentally, the Alliance Party was partly instrumental in setting up — those policies are subject to, and must have, the approval of a number of parties. I cannot comment on how quickly or slowly other parties will operate on the matter. All that I can say is that my desire is to put in place a suite of appropriate policies that offer guidance and certainty to planning applicants and to those who must make decisions on those applications.

I said that greater weight will be attached to economic considerations. I believe that, in the past, I have made my view clear that when it comes to material considerations, sometimes economic considerations have not been given as much weight as I would have liked. I must say that when I look at the correspondence and the number of meetings about planning applications that other Members seek with me, I get the impression that a large number of them, through the course of their work, believe that much greater weight should be given to either the preservation or creation of jobs in their constituencies.

Therefore, it is partly in response to my gut feeling, partly in response to representations that other Members have made on the issue, and partly in response to people in the development industry that I want to clarify the weight that I believe must be given to economic considerations. Greater weight means simply that: in circumstances where there is a balance of arguments and where it is appropriate, greater weight must be given to economic considerations.

I must make it clear to the Member that that does not mean that a bad planning application will be accepted simply because someone attaches a paragraph to it that states that it is of economic significance. Moreover, it does not mean that we can override policies to which we are already committed.

*1.15 pm*

**Mr T Clarke:** I welcome the Minister's statement. In response to an earlier question, the Minister said that he did not want to debate the reasons why Sinn Féin is delaying planning reform. He seemed to avoid that issue. How will further delays affect planning reform?

**The Minister of the Environment:** The irony is that most of those planning reform proposals have been well circulated in the public domain. They first



came to the Assembly and to the Committee for the Environment in the form of emerging proposals. Thereafter, given the lack of opposition to those proposals, I increased their status to planning reform proposals and circulated them among Ministers. At that stage, Ministers made no adverse comments. I had hoped to publish the proposals in January and that the consultation would have been completed by now.

Good sound proposals will be attractive to those who wish to develop and to those who are affected by development. A range of people, from environmental groups to developers, welcomed the emerging proposals. One implication of delay is that people will be disappointed that the Assembly is not doing the work that it should be doing. However, more importantly, the reform proposals refer to the devolution of the planning function to councils. Given that we will establish the new councils in 2011, we are working to a strict timetable. As I said in the Assembly a couple of weeks ago, I question whether we will be able to devolve planning powers to those councils within the agreed timetable. Those councils might begin their work without significant devolved functions.

**Mr McKay:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement.

Sinn Féin believes that the special guidance notes that are attached to PPS 18 are contrary to the spirit of the policy. Indeed, the industry estimates that the special guidance notes will result in at least a 75% reduction in investment in onshore and offshore wind farms. How will the limitations cited in the special guidance impact on investment in the renewables sector? Has an economic impact assessment been carried out on that guidance? Furthermore, the Minister should rest assured that Sinn Féin will ensure that any planning policies that come to the Executive will be effectively equality-proofed.

**The Minister of the Environment:** I sometimes feel like a broken record when I discuss that matter. As it stands, the policy is generous to the wind-farm industry. Under the current policy, we have issued enough approvals to meet the Executive's target for generating electricity from wind by 2012. There are 50 applications in the system, which, if approved, will enable us to meet the targets that have been set for 2025.

There has been considerable debate about the guidance notes that are attached to PPS 18. The industry, the Planning Service and I are battling on that issue at the moment. I want to put my views on the guidance notes on record.

The wind-farm industry has circulated the story that the guidance notes will restrict the height of wind turbines and reduce their effectiveness and efficiency. They want no restriction on those wind turbines. The guidance notes indicate a height limit. If developers

then propose to build a turbine higher than that limit, they will have to make a case for that.

We are speaking about turbines that, very often, will be in sensitive areas of Northern Ireland. A balance must be struck when approving a planning application. There are beautiful tourist areas, and people go to those areas because they enjoy the landscape and the natural heritage, but someone may want to build a wind turbine of a size equivalent to the BT Riverside Tower beside the Waterfront Hall in the middle of that area. All that the guidelines say is that — and we are speaking mostly about land-based turbines — if an applicant wishes to make a case for a wind turbine that is higher than 80 m, they must be able to justify it. That will then become a material consideration, and what I am announcing today will be part of that.

When judging the acceptable height of a wind turbine for which someone is seeking planning permission, the environmental considerations should be taken into account, as should the social considerations because they will, of course, generate more noise, flicker etc for people who live nearby. The economic considerations should also be taken into account. Someone may well argue that a bigger turbine is needed to make the proposal economically effective. That will be a consideration of which the planners will have to take account.

Rather than opposing the point of view that Mr McKay expressed, my announcement should actually be helpful. I do not think that people would be happy if I were to introduce a policy stating that developers could build turbines of whatever height they wanted, regardless of the context in which they were to be placed. If developers want to build bigger turbines, they should make the cases for them. Those cases will be examined by the planning officers, and decisions will be made.

**Mr Hamilton:** I welcome the Minister's statement. There are quite a few planning applications in my area, and greater consideration of the economic aspects of those would be very welcome.

The planning system that the Minister and his predecessor inherited was criticised from all quarters, but he has set out a programme of many wide-ranging reforms, some of which he has mentioned, including the streamlined consultation process and the creation of the strategic projects unit. Another piece of work that has been carried out is the review by the performance and efficiency delivery unit (PEDU). Will the Minister provide the House with an update on the outworkings of that review, and how it is impacting on reforming the planning system even further?

**The Minister of the Environment:** My Department instigated some work on the planning system by PEDU, which considered a number of issues, including the internal processing of planning applications, case

management, etc. It also considered how we could be more proactive in managing cases in the planning system. Nigel Dodds, the Minister of Finance and Personnel, and I have held joint meetings with the Planning Service and PEDU. We are happy that many of the suggestions have been taken on board.

A number of issues arose, including internal case management and how we could be more proactive about that. There was also the issue of the service-level agreements with consultees, which, I must say, were sometimes service-level agreements in name only, because although they included timescales, those timescales were missed time and time again. We have looked at how those could be tightened up.

The planning reform proposals now include more definite proposals, such as statutory limits on the length of time that consultees have, and ways to ensure that developers make better planning applications.

PEDU has made a range of recommendations, and we have taken those on board. Those recommendations are already improving the way in which planning decisions are made.

**Mr Kennedy:** I thank the Minister for his statement. How will he ensure consistency of approach to the new policy on the part of planning officials? He will be aware of Planning Service's significant staffing problems in recent years because of retirements of senior staff and headhunting by the private sector. It is important that any new policy, or suggested policy, should be applied consistently throughout Northern Ireland.

I am concerned about the application of the new policy. How does the Minister intend to curtail the rather aggressive approach of Planning Service's enforcement section, which seems to be intent on making it almost impossible for owners of small businesses to operate, particularly in rural areas? The Minister will be aware of a couple of cases that I have raised with him directly. The enforcement section has a potential key role to play in making it possible for owners of small businesses to operate by not being overly restrictive or insistent on some regulations, which, quite frankly, are extreme.

**The Minister of the Environment:** I will correct the Member, as I do not want it put on the record that this is a new policy. It is not a new policy; it is guidance on, and clarification of, existing policy. We must ensure that there is consistency of application of policies such as PPS 21. Otherwise, people will ask questions about the way in which the planning system is working. Training of staff within the system by way of exchange and movement is important in achieving consistency, because it will allow staff to see what happens in different areas and offices.

There is a degree of subjectivity and discretion to the matter in hand; none of us, when asked to weigh up

the same set of arguments, will come to the same decisions, because we will give weight to different aspects. Given those elements of discretion or subjectivity, it is impossible to have 100% consistency. All we can do, through building up cases and examples, is to seek to ensure that that consistency happens.

On the issue of enforcement, this guidance does not give people who have been in breach of the policy the opportunity to set aside that policy. In many enforcement situations, it will be the case that individuals, either because they could not be bothered or because they thought that they could get away with it, have not even considered the policy, or they may not even have applied for planning permission, and then they get caught. There is no point in my giving the impression that this policy will deal with such cases; it will not. I know of many examples in which more consideration could have been given to the jobs that were lost because businesses were closed down in a particular area. I hope that the guidance will help to preserve such businesses.

**Mr Spratt:** I thank the Minister for his statement, in which he made a brief mention of PPS 21. What progress is being made on draft PPS 21?

1.30 pm

**The Minister of the Environment:** The consultation has finished, and those results will go before the Environment Committee next week. I think that that will happen next Thursday. The Executive subgroup will also consider the consultation results.

On 26 June, I will receive the report from the review group that has been considering what can be done for non-farm rural dwellers. We will consider changes to draft PPS 21 over the summer, and that should be finalised in the autumn, when the policy will go to the Executive for final ratification.

We are emphasising the retention of vernacular buildings in respect of replacement dwellings or dealing with disused buildings. I hope that the design guide will be available towards the end of the year. That will offer guidance to people who must restore old buildings on the type of additional features that can be added.

I spoke at a conference in Cushendall a couple of weeks ago. We looked at some old vernacular buildings and modern additions that had been made to them. I would be quite excited if the design guide could incorporate some of those ideas so that we can make good use of some of the old buildings in the countryside. Consequently, those buildings would not have to be knocked down, but could be turned into useful, liveable properties.

**Dr Farry:** I refer the Minister to PPS 18 and the draft supplementary guidance. How does he respond to the criticisms that have been made about what some

people view as subjective criteria in that draft? How can those subjective criteria give assurance to people who are seeking to invest in renewables?

Will the Minister assure the House that PPS 18 will be pitched in such a manner that will not just meet the minimum targets that have been set, but will give Northern Ireland the opportunity to emerge as a world leader in both onshore and offshore wind-energy production?

**The Minister of the Environment:** I am not sure what subjective guidance the Member is referring to. It may have been better if his question had been a bit more specific.

The criticism that I have heard from the wind industry is not that we are being subjective, but that we are being too prescriptive on turbine heights, and so on. I hope that I have explained in my earlier answer why we have set those limits, and what developers have to do if they wish to make a case for taller turbines.

As for renewable energy and its implementation in Northern Ireland, we must be careful not to regard wind power as some type of panacea. There are downsides. We have introduced and will introduce planning policies that seek to assist those who wish to introduce renewable-energy projects to their own homes at a micro level. One of the proposals of the planning reforms is to allow some of those projects as permitted developments, so that there would be no need to apply for planning permission. That cuts down time and cost.

Permissions that have been granted for large-scale developments and onshore applications demonstrate that we have been fairly generous. Members will also have an opportunity to debate the impact of legislation on offshore wind farms when they consider the Marine and Coastal Access Bill [HL].

I wish to be very clear: even if we have a large number of renewable-energy projects across Northern Ireland, the baseload must still be provided by energy providers that can assure consistency of supply. That adds cost, because parallel systems will tend to be run.

That is why we must be very careful that we do not simply see the construction of wind farms as some kind of panacea. We should not think that if we stick up wind farms, we will get all our energy for nothing because the wind will provide it and we will not have to buy oil or coal. It does not quite work like that.

That is one of the reasons why planning policy must reflect the balance between getting renewable energy where it is feasible and protecting our natural environment. It should not be forgotten that many wind farms are built on environmentally sensitive sites, because that is where the wind blows strongest and it is where they are easiest to locate.

## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

### RUC Museum

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

One amendment has been selected and published on the Marshalled List. The proposer of the amendment will have 10 minutes in which to propose and five minutes in which to make a winding-up speech.

**Mr Shannon:** I beg to move

That this Assembly supports the suggestions for an RUC Museum at Brooklyn Headquarters near to the Garden of Remembrance; and calls on the Northern Ireland Office to allocate the necessary funding to enable building to begin during 2009.

I appreciate the opportunity to bring this matter to the Chamber and to speak to the motion.

In 2001, the then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, John Reid, announced funding of more than £1 million for the construction of a Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) garden of remembrance and museum. With the RUC now replaced by the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), Chris Patten, author of the Patten Report, recommended that a garden honouring and remembering the officers who had served in the RUC and the PSNI was a fitting and just memorial. I agree with that.

Announcing the financial package on 14 November 2001, Dr Reid said:

"I am delighted to be able to announce the creation of a Garden of Remembrance for the Royal Ulster Constabulary. Patten identified a need for continued recognition of the dedication and sacrifice of the officers of the RUC. I fully support this prestigious and permanent memorial and I look forward to being able to visit it."

Dr Reid wag awa:

"Tha gerdin o' remembrins alang wi' tha RUC muzeim wull bring taegither baith proajects intae a' kimpleet 'RUC experience' whor fowk cumin tae it caun luk bakk oan tha sacrifices o' tha RUC as they wauk throo tha memoriel gerdin as weel as takkin in tha muckle items en displays aboot tha RUC an' it's histry."

Dr Reid continued:

"The Garden of Remembrance along with the RUC Museum will draw together both projects into a complete 'RUC experience' where visitors can reflect on the sacrifices of the RUC as they walk through the Memorial Garden and visit the many exhibits and displays about the RUC and its history in the Museum."

Tha fundatshin wus drawn up tae provide pratical recognishin o' tha acheevmunts an sacrifices o' tha Royal Ulster Constabulary, whiel tha woark o' tha fun' wus tae bring aboot mare help tae luk efter tha injured an disabled polis oafichers, en oafichers that hae noo



retired, as well as their families, and their widows who have been affected by terrorism in Northern Ireland.

The Royal Ulster Constabulary George Cross Foundation was created to provide practical recognition of the Royal Ulster Constabulary's achievements and sacrifices. The work of the Northern Ireland Police Fund was to bring additional assistance to injured, disabled and retired police officers and their families, as well as police widows, who have been affected by terrorism in Northern Ireland.

It was all a beautiful plan, and we have a beautiful memorial garden, yet we are still waiting for the promised museum to be built on site, alongside the garden. That has been going on for far too long without intervention. I was contacted by a constituent who was, understandably, very anxious for the Northern Ireland Office to fulfil its promise and build the museum beside the garden, where there is ample space and where it would set off the memorial garden.

Currently, there is an RUC museum on the Knock Road in Belfast, but the best place for such a museum is beside the garden of remembrance, which I believe was always the intention. Surely it is best for the museum and the garden to go hand in hand, to allow people to see the history of the RUC and, indeed, the PSNI, as it is now, and to see the history of policing in Ireland as a whole, so that they can learn about the men and women who gave their lives to protect the people of the Province. This is an opportunity for the two to be built together.

However, as with most recommendations in the Patten Report, only those that suited were implemented straight away, with everything else left hanging in the balance, waiting for people to get around to it. It is past time that the Assembly stood up and added its voice to the voices of the thousands of widows and orphans and of those who have served with pride in the RUC and the PSNI. The Assembly should ask that the Northern Ireland Office finally fulfil its word and allow for a museum to be built beside the garden, so that both can be enhanced.

The existing RUC museum is not well known. For example, a search on the Internet revealed only the location of the museum; there were no reviews or links, apart from one on the PSNI website, which brought up only an error page. It is little wonder that there are no reviews of the museum when no one can find out anything about it. When five people, one of whom was an ex-RUC officer, were asked whether they knew of the RUC museum's existence, none of them was. The reason for that is that the museum has not been promoted as it should have been.

The museum is not well known throughout the international community. It could be used as a tourist attraction similar to the Newseum in the United States,

but it must be well publicised, and people must know about it. Situating the museum beside the memorial garden has the added attraction of ensuring that it will honour not only the sacrifice of serving members of the RUC and their families but the promise that was made in 2001.

In 2005, the then Security Minister, Shaun Woodward MP, visited the memorial garden and again stated how happy he would be to talk to the trustees about a new museum. However, the Northern Ireland Office has done nothing about releasing the funding to further the project, which is why we tabled the motion. How long must we wait for action? How many Northern Ireland Office officials will make assurances and promises and not be held accountable for their words?

We have a noble and proud history of having one of the best police forces in the world. Police experts from Northern Ireland are invited to numerous places across the globe for their advice and guidance not only because of their experience in fighting terrorism but because of forensics expertise that they have acquired over the years. It is recognised that our police force is at its peak. However, it is sad that we can barely acknowledge that, when one considers the recommendations of the Patten Report.

Although Members remember the RUC and the exemplary work and sacrifice of its members, our children and grandchildren will not. We must ensure that there is a relevant and interesting facility to which we can take our children to tell them about the history of our colourful country. In the same way as there are Jewish memorials to the Holocaust, so, too, should there be reminders for our children of the price paid by good men and good women for the peace and safety of our beautiful nation and our beautiful land.

Museums are a part of a cultural heritage that should be enhanced and encouraged. Children are taken to the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum to get a feel for the way that things used to be and to understand their traditions and heritage better. A police museum will inform future generations, allow them to understand the truth behind much propaganda and allow them to see pictures and images that are vastly different from those that have often appeared in the media. That is essential as the Province moves on; in moving forward, we cannot and will not forget our past and allow others to distort and malign real facts and real history. An RUC museum could show facts in a way that will be interesting and informative for those who hail from the Province and those who come from abroad. We have been fortunate that many people have come from abroad to join the police force in Northern Ireland. Those people have added their cultural identities to our police force, and their contribution is acknowledged.



For those who lived through the Troubles, and those who receive their information through the media — and there are people who do — the museum is necessary. It is long past time that such a museum be built in the best place and promoted in the best way. The Northern Ireland Office made a promise, and we will hold it to that promise: a garden of remembrance and a museum to honour the RUC, the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) and other policing organisations. We do not yet have that in its entirety, and we will not stop until we do so.

My party colleagues and I ask the Northern Ireland Office to stop its stalling and honour its word. By co-locating the museum and the memorial garden, let us honour and be ever conscious of the sacrifice of the men and women who gave their time and their lives in service to our Queen and country over many years.

1.45 pm

**Mr Attwood:** I beg to move the following amendment: Leave out all after “Assembly” and insert

“notes the proposal for an RUC museum; believes that methods to acknowledge the past, including the role of the RUC and the different experiences of policing over the years, should be developed; and recommends that the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, the Policing Board, the Police Service of Northern Ireland, the Commission for Victims and Survivors and the future victims and survivors forum should consider the matter.”

The SDLP is not inclined to support the motion. However, that should not in any way diminish the fact that the broad sentiments that Mr Shannon outlined are very much arguments and views from which we do not dissent. His final comment was that the contribution of RUC and police officers over recent decades and at present should be recognised. As he was saying that, I was thinking, as, I am sure, were many others, of Constable Stephen Carroll, who made his contribution to the PSNI, but also to the RUC. Whatever differences that the SDLP and the nationalist community have had with policing and the RUC, and whatever concerns we have had about what individuals and elements in the police were responsible for in the past, there is something to honour, respect and elevate in what Stephen Carroll and many other officers did over the years before and since Patten.

In that regard, the SDLP does not dissent from the spirit and substance of some of what Mr Shannon said. I want to make that very clear. However, we are still inclined not to support the motion, and we have two broad streams of thought about the matter. The first is technical and financial and the second is personal and emotional.

The motion is very specific. It calls on the NIO to release funding for an RUC and police museum in this financial year. The SDLP does not think that that is the best use of public and police funds in this financial year, because although some of this information has not yet been placed in the public domain, there are

already very substantial and unavoidable pressures on the police budgets over the next couple of years. If the devolution of policing and justice were, for example, to happen sooner rather than later, there would be further and additional pressures on the policing and justice budget over and above those already identified.

In the context of tight financial pressures and where there will be unavoidable claims due to the dissident threat, hearing loss and extra staff for the Public Prosecution Service, where there have been new and additional concerns in recent days, we do not think that an RUC and police museum is a priority that justifies money being released in this financial year. That is different from understanding the sentiment and spirit of what Mr Shannon said. However, it recognises that, in the current financial environment, there are grounds for saying that the policing budget and additional policing moneys should go in directions other than to such a museum.

Given that there are unavoidable and difficult policing and justice budgetary pressures, I ask Mr Shannon to reflect where this proposal comes in the order of things. Without diminishing what the Member said, the SDLP thinks that this is not where the priority budget line should be.

This is, of course, much more than a technical and financial issue. It is also personal and emotional, because the experience of people in the North over the past 30 or 40 years is not about money and technical matters. Rather, it is very much about personal experience and emotional impact. That is why we think that acknowledging the past and how that is expressed, including through museums, needs broader and deeper consideration.

That is why we suggested, as the Eames/Bradley group suggested, that the issue of how a museum might be framed, and there are very many different models about how a museum to acknowledge the past could be framed, should be referred to the Commission for Victims and Survivors. Hopefully, in the near future, it should also be referred to the proposed forum for victims and survivors.

**Mr Paisley Jnr:** I understand the points that the Member raises in relation to the technical objections, and I am sure that those will be fleshed out during the debate. However, I fail to understand his emotional objection. I thought that his party had overcome that objection, especially considering that its representative on the Policing Board put her name to a letter of 11 March 2008 in which board members unanimously supported the business case — not the emotional case, technical case or outline view — that allowed for the appointment of a consultant to take the matter forward with a fully fleshed-out proposal to the Northern Ireland Office. Is the Member now saying that his party's

board members did not give proper consideration to the issue and that perhaps they did not look at the broader issue? Have they made a slip-up in this case? Is he withdrawing consent for the business case during this debate? Is he aware that that letter was sent?

**Mr Attwood:** I anticipated that someone — most likely Mr Paisley — would raise this matter. As I pointed out, we are in a very different place today when it comes to financial priorities than we have been at any time in the recent past. The SDLP has been trying to convince the DUP and Sinn Féin that we need to look at budgets, because our situation is graphically different from what it was 18 months, or even six months, ago. Commitments entered into previously must be reconsidered in the context of the new budgetary position. That includes that particular commitment. I thank Mr Paisley for the intervention, but I did anticipate it, and I think that I have given a fair answer.

However, the emotional point is a broader one. In some ways, the Eames/Bradley report was appalling. In chapter five, which deals with memorials and remembering, it states:

“Through storytelling, people realise that, although they feel their cause was just, not all that they did in pursuit of it was either the right thing to do, or altogether necessary.”

In my view, that is an appalling statement for anyone to make. Things that were wrong were not, as they put it, “the right thing to do”; and they describe things that were completely unnecessary as being not “altogether necessary”. We must consider proposals about the past and the museum in the context of the Eames/Bradley report and its weaknesses.

In the same chapter, the group makes some valid points about how we should acknowledge our past. It states that we must not glamorise what was wrong, elevate terror or misrepresent the experience of the past. The report also states that there may be a need for:

“a dedicated ‘Troubles’ exhibition in an existing museum.”

That is why we included the reference to the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) in our amendment. I note that the Minister is present, and that he might reply to the matter in his personal capacity.

The report states:

“A memorial should direct people to the future and in particular a shared and reconciled future.”

It also states that we must develop shared space in order to mitigate any alienation from a shared memorial.

Those are some principles that need to be acknowledged when taking forward the matter of whether there should be a museum to take into account the particular experience of the RUC, or one that will take into account the vastly shared experiences, not just of policing, but of society over the past 30 or 40 years. That debate needs to happen.

One thing that we can learn from the Patten experience, regardless of whatever misgivings there might be about some of its details, is that, at a point in time in our history, a number of people outlined not just a reflection on the policing of the past but a vision and values for policing in the future. We are in a far better place today than we would have been had that not happened. We think that the same thing should happen in respect of our experience of the past. We need to look at a model that outlines the shared experience of the past in order to move forward on an ethical basis.

**Mr McCartney:** Go raibh maith agat. There can be no doubt that many issues remain to be resolved by our society as it moves out of and away from conflict and towards stability. The resolution of those issues will present many challenges for us all to deal with. We must face them in an open, transparent and equitable way. There should be no tolerance of playing politics with people's genuine feelings and grievances.

One of those challenges will be how we deal with the legacy of history and how we preserve history, particularly the history of participants in the conflict. I am a trustee of the Museum of Free Derry. A main principle of that museum — its narrative — is that people who lived through and witnessed a particular period in our history are entitled to tell their story. The museum promotes the principle that people have the right to describe their story and experience in their own words. However, it is accepted that that cannot be done in isolation from others who do likewise.

The issue of an RUC museum poses many challenges to us. However, the Assembly recently dealt with the victims' issue, which was not without difficulties and differing views and perspectives. The Executive found a way forward: a platform in which all those perspectives could be addressed and resolutions sought. That is not to ignore concerns that were raised in the establishment of the Victims' Commissioners, but people must accept that, no matter what is proposed, there will always be concerns and issues. That is the reality of our situation.

Sinn Féin supports and is committed to the concept of the need to preserve the history of the conflict in an appropriate and necessary way. The party has a view on how that can best be achieved, and it is mindful of the need for sensitivity about what is a very complex, and, for many, a very emotional issue. We attempted to introduce an amendment to deal with that, and we called for time and space to allow all ideas and views to be heard and addressed.

In our view, the legacy of preserving history, an issue similar to that of victims, should be delegated to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM). I have no desire to question the timing of the motion, but I believe that this is not the

time for the Assembly to take a position as fixed and determinate as that outlined in the motion. Similarly, the amendment is overly prescriptive. We believe that the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister is best placed to take forward the task. We have seen how it dealt with the issue of the Victims' Commissioners.

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Let the debate begin the discussion on how we best preserve the history of the conflict in an open, transparent and equitable manner. Go raibh maith agat.

**Mr McFarland:** I support the motion. The issue of an RUC museum has festered for more than seven years; a time that is littered with broken promises and delays. It goes back to November 2001, when John Reid, the then Secretary of State, promised the RUC George Cross Foundation a garden and a museum. Since then, the NIO has prevaricated and nothing has happened.

Members should pay tribute to Jim McDonald and the foundation for being tenacious in keeping at this issue. Alex Attwood talked earlier in the debate about money. Jim McDonald said on the radio this morning that the foundation was more than happy to raise a substantial part of the funds for the museum, but not until the Government fulfil their commitment to produce some of the money. The foundation's supporters are happy enough to do their fair share, but progress must start now.

What is the importance of such a museum? It is worth reminding ourselves that it would not be just an RUC museum; it would be about policing on the island of Ireland. The museum would reflect the Royal Irish Constabulary and policing in the 100 years from 1822 to 1922; the Dublin Metropolitan Police from 1836 to 1925; the RUC from 1922 to 2001; the Garda from 1922 to the present; and the PSNI. Therefore, the museum covers a fairly substantial area of policing on the island of Ireland.

2.00 pm

The museum would be a good vehicle for cross-community and cross-border relations. I have the privilege of being a trustee of the Somme Heritage Centre, which looks at Ireland's contribution to the First World War, when the island was one and both sides of the community were involved. Looking at policing since 1822 is another opportunity — right across our community and in relation to North/South matters — to consider the whole issue of policing and to provide some degree of common cause.

I am concerned about the SDLP amendment. It would bog the issue down in faction fighting that would involve DCAL, the Policing Board, which, although initially happy, may now be unhappy, and victims' groups. It is probably a recipe for disaster.

The issue should be dealt with by the Northern Ireland Office before the devolution of policing and justice takes place, as was promised. Otherwise, it will get mixed up with ongoing political conflict. Surely the men and women who gallantly served the community on the island of Ireland for over 200 years deserve better. I call on the NIO to fund the museum, and I urge colleagues to support the motion.

**Dr Farry:** I too support the motion. I recognise that it is far from perfect, but it gives a strong signal of the way forward for this Assembly. I encourage the Northern Ireland Office to move ahead with the proposal. I am sympathetic to much of the thrust of the amendment, but I have two difficulties with it. First, there is a lack of a specific commitment to an RUC museum. Secondly, it does not place any pressure upon the Northern Ireland Office to address this issue ahead of the devolution of policing and justice. Alan McFarland made that important point, and I will perhaps elaborate on that in a moment.

My party certainly wants to see a much more collective approach to commemoration, remembrance and reflection across our society. Although the Eames/Bradley group's report is far from perfect, it should certainly inform discussion in that regard. Whether it is under the Eames/Bradley group, the Commission for Victims and Survivors for Northern Ireland or a forum, a move should be made towards addressing those important points. That does not need to exclude studying discrete aspects of the history of Northern Ireland in relation to the Troubles and beyond. I see scope for things to move ahead on an individual basis, even though we have an overall framework. We are currently dealing with a number of inquiries into things that happened in the past. That is notwithstanding efforts to move to a much more collective way of examining the past in Northern Ireland on a more cost-effective basis. There does not have to be a one-size-fits-all approach to all of those matters.

The point has been made that any museum is not simply based around what happened in relation to the RUC and the Troubles and it reflects a much wider history of policing, not just in Northern Ireland but on the island as a whole, before the Troubles broke out. It is also worth recognising that a particularly important contribution was made by the RUC. I appreciate that what I am going to say is not a view held by everyone in this House, but it is important to recognise that the RUC was the final line against anarchy breaking out in Northern Ireland during the years of the Troubles. The semblance of the rule of law and democracy that we had during that time would not have been possible without the contribution of the RUC.

Of course, policing in this part of the world is an extremely contentious and difficult issue. In many respects, policing and the matter of who controls the police has been at the heart of the Troubles and the conflict that has occurred here over the past number of



years. I am certainly not saying that the history of the RUC is unblemished. There were acts, both institutional and individual, that were wrong. When a more detailed scrutiny is carried out into the past, regardless of whether that happens under a legacy commission, Eames/Bradley or some other body, no doubt the state will have to face up to some difficult truths. Equally, other organisations and individuals will have to face up to difficult truths, and it is important that they are prepared to co-operate by coming forward in the same way as the state will be under pressure to do. However, such considerations need not detract from the contributions that were made by many individual officers, who did nothing but serve on behalf of their community and who provided that service honourably. Indeed, during the Troubles, a category of people in our society were targets for no other reason than the nature of their job. Indeed, the men and women of the RUC were very much in that category.

In order that we can have a clean start after the devolution of policing and justice, it is important that we address legacy matters now. I add this subject to that list. The Northern Ireland Office should follow through on its commitments. It is unreasonable to burden the incoming devolution settlement with them. I am enough of a neo-Keynesian to say that spending the money in the forthcoming financial year makes economic sense. We are talking about getting people to work and bringing forward capital spend, which implementing this proposal would achieve.

**Mr Paisley Jnr:** If stones could speak, they would tell thousands of stories as we walk around the memorial garden that honours the standing of, as Alan McFarland said, policing on this island and, particularly, the Royal Ulster Constabulary. That memorial garden is at Knock, in Belfast, and it contains tablets of stone on which is carved a roll of honour that speaks of Northern Ireland's incredible history. Indeed, that history is echoed around this Chamber. Looking around, I am reminded of a Constable Morrow and two constables named Donaldson, as well as the incredible memory of a District Inspector Durkan.

The fact should not be lost on the House that the memorial garden is not for one side or the other. It is not a memorial to or a history of one side or the other; it is about recounting facts about and the history of Northern Ireland. To turn our minds from that fact or to take our hands away from delivering on that history by not putting a memorial in place tells, in itself, a story about our society's ineptitude and failure to come to terms with its past.

The technical arguments that have been advanced in order to dilly and delay are unacceptable. Those arguments are about spending £5 million. However, if we delay implementing the proposal and the matter comes before the Assembly after policing and justice has been devolved, believe you me, the financial

resources will not be available. Now is the time to extract from the Northern Ireland Office a portion of the £5 million that is required to complete the project, so that it might deliver what it was supposed to deliver almost 10 years ago.

One Member argued that time and space must be created, but that would defeat us. By delaying we falter, and, if we falter in delivering this project, we would fail not just ourselves and the House but the people who are entitled to have an important, proper and telling history of the events that, for such a long time, affected every man, woman and child in this Province.

The SDLP has been attempting to spook nationalist horses. Every aspect of this matter has been settled. Sinn Féin, the SDLP, the Ulster Unionist Party and the DUP — all the political parties that are represented on the Policing Board — endorsed a properly fleshed-out business case. It was wrong for Alex Attwood to attempt to pull the rug from under the feet of his colleague Dolores Kelly, for that is what happened in the Chamber today. It is wrong, because, as I said in an intervention, the Policing Board gave its consent on 11 March last year to the building of an RUC museum. Its support was not partial or given after some consideration but was unanimous. As a consequence, the Policing Board commissioned work to be carried out. That resulted in the Chief Constable backing that work and in the ball being put firmly in the court of the Northern Ireland Office to deliver on it.

What happened earlier was completely objectionable and indicates that the SDLP is trying to spook nationalist horses. Today, they are indulging in a huge amount of theatre, and they are doing so for one reason: the European election that will be held in a few weeks' time. That is incredibly sad, and it reflects the minds of pygmies rather than the minds of people who are prepared to be political giants on an issue on which strident and positive steps forward should be made.

The RUC museum project should go ahead. We are entitled to it, and by "we" I mean all the people of Northern Ireland. They are entitled to see their history recorded appropriately and in a way that honours some of Ulster's most gallant and fallen people.

**Mr A Maskey:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Dúirt mo chara Raymond McCartney go bhfuil Sinn Féin ag iarraidh ár stair a choinneáil, ach ní bheimid ag tabhairt tacaíochta don rún seo ná don leasú. My colleague Raymond McCartney has set out Sinn Féin's position on the RUC museum. We believe that it is important that our history be preserved and told in its entirety. We know that there are many aspects of our history on which many of us disagree. As my colleague Jim Shannon said, there are facts and there is history. However, there are some disputed versions of our history and of what we have been told are historical and, I might add, contemporary facts.



Sinn Féin is conscious that the proposed RUC museum presents its own challenges; every Member will acknowledge and accept that. There is a challenge as to how we define our society's history of policing going back many decades. We are in a much better place now, and that must be acknowledged. Political giants in our society and community have enabled all of us to be in the better place in which we are today.

Sinn Féin believes that the matter would be better placed within the remit of OFMDFM, because the appointment of the Victims' Commission is an example of how OFMDFM can rise to the challenge if the will exists and political accommodation is sought among the various parties and other participants. The matter should be in the hands of OFMDFM. It delivered in the case of the Victims' Commission, where, at least, it laid the groundwork for its establishment. In the time ahead, we want to see a similar approach taken to ensure that the matter is dealt with maturely and professionally. The approach must be sensitive to all the views that are held, not least those of the police family. I wish to acknowledge that. However, wider views must be taken on board. Policing here has been a long-standing issue of some import, and, as I said, we have moved to a better place in that regard. We still have some distance to travel, but we have laid important and positive foundations, and we are making substantial progress.

My party and I look forward to a time when we can properly reflect the history of policing in a way that allows everyone to identify with and recognise the history as it is spelt out according to their views and their version of history. Let me be frank: many of the views across our community are deeply held, and justifiably held.

2.15 pm

It may be a bit premature to suggest locating the museum at Brooklyn headquarters because, as some Members will know — Policing Board members will certainly know — a very important discussion on the police estate has yet to take place, and the headquarters site may not be left unscathed. We do not know how much of the current estate will remain in the hands of the PSNI. Policing Board members have acknowledged that that matter must be dealt with to ensure that the PSNI can more inclusively take forward full service delivery in a professional and financially efficient manner. In delivering that service, we must not only focus on today but look ahead to tomorrow.

Sinn Féin is not arguing that this matter should not be progressed for financial reasons; we are simply saying that the issue is far too important to be dealt with in the manner outlined in the motion and the amendment. As my colleague Raymond McCartney said, we will support neither the motion nor the amendment, because we believe that it would be much better to place the matter within the remit of

OFMDFM so that it can be dealt with in a more inclusive way. Go raibh maith agat.

**Mr G Robinson:** I am firmly of the opinion that the motion seeks to ensure that due respect is paid to the Royal Ulster Constabulary George Cross and the role that its members played in the darkest days of the Troubles. None of us should underestimate that role, and we should all be grateful to the men and women of the RUC for the job that they did in the most difficult of circumstances. Few other police forces in Europe and, perhaps, worldwide did — or do — a comparable job. Moreover, few other forces lost so many of their officers — from both sides of the community, men and women, full-time and part-time — as they carried out their duties or when off duty. The fact that those officers continued to patrol every community, despite the difficulties, is the reason why there should be a permanent museum to the RUC and its valiant officers.

From the 1960s to the needless name change of Northern Ireland's police force, the police's job changed beyond all recognition. The history of how policing in Northern Ireland adapted, developed and responded to changing circumstances must be given a proper place in Northern Ireland's history. The best way to do that is to ensure that a museum is established that charts the course of the RUC and the changes that were forced upon it by events.

The ideal location for such a museum is near the garden of remembrance because the officers who are commemorated there paid the ultimate price for performing their duty in extreme circumstances. The memory of those officers and the history of the RUC are so deeply entwined as to be virtually inseparable. The Northern Ireland Office must ensure that funding for the project is made available as a matter of urgency so that the museum can be opened at the earliest possible opportunity.

The amendment seeks to muddy the waters of the debate and to complicate and extend the process of establishing a museum. It is a great pity that the Members who tabled the amendment cannot give the motion their full and wholehearted support. I urge them and every Member to support the motion as proposed by my colleagues.

**Mr Kennedy:** I support the motion, but our party will not support the SDLP amendment. The creation of a policing or RUC museum would be an important manifestation of the cultural identity of the majority of people in Northern Ireland, quite apart from its historical significance. The RUC was important not only to the majority community but to all law-abiding citizens in all communities, and it is well worth reminding people of that. It is also, therefore, an important part of our history.

On a wall in my office in this Building is a copy of a memorial picture entitled 'Our Murdered Colleagues', which honours all the RUC officers who lost their lives

during the recent conflict. In my work in the Assembly, it serves as a daily reminder of the huge sacrifices made by the men and women of the RUC. It is unfortunate that the PSNI has made a huge sacrifice recently. We must never return to the days of widespread and wholesale loss for those who work to create better conditions for all of us in Northern Ireland.

Academic researchers could use the existing museum's archive of police records from the 1840s onwards. The reference library and archive allows visitors to find information on ancestors who served in the RIC and the early RUC. The existing museum also provides a base for the RUC George Cross Historical Society, which promotes and encourages research into police history in general.

There is a broader significance to the museum, as there is also a cross-community context and a North/South context, which all sides in the Assembly would do well to remember. RUC veterans have asked the Irish Government to help establish a museum to promote and celebrate the history of policing on the island of Ireland. The memorabilia collection to be housed in Belfast will display uniforms, helmets and weapons that date back to the Royal Irish Constabulary, the all-Ireland force that kept order between 1822 and 1922. Exhibitions will also feature the Dublin Metropolitan Police of 1836 to 1925; the Irish Republican Police of 1920 to 1922, which sounds ironic; the RUC of 1922 to 2001; the Garda Síochána of 1922 to the present time; and the present PSNI. The whole project was the brainchild of the RUC George Cross Foundation, which was established in 2001 to commemorate the force that was replaced by the PSNI. The foundation has gone out of its way and met President Mary McAleese at Áras an Uachtaráin, along with members of the Garda Síochána Historical Society and the Garda Síochána Retired Members' Association. In any of those contexts, it would be reasonable to expect that, eight years after the PSNI replaced the RUC, a museum to commemorate the RUC should be properly funded and that building on the project should begin.

The Government should honour the commitments given previously. It would be a bad signal for the whole community if we were to engage in penny-pinching on the matter. The absolute sums involved are not so large, and the cross-community context is widely acceptable. I endorse the motion.

**Mr Hamilton:** At this stage of the debate and after having followed so many Members who support the motion, I do not need to continue with too much detail to make a case for a museum, as the strong case for it has been related by colleagues. Not least is the service and sacrifice of the members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary throughout the Troubles. I consider myself fortunate not to have a family member on the list that the Member who spoke previously referred to, but I know many families who have and who still

grieve the loss of a loved one. A permanent exhibitions and fitting tribute to them in the form of a museum would be only right and proper.

As has been said, the memorial garden is already on site at Brooklyn. I hesitate to use the word "success", but the attraction of international visitors of some renown to that site shows how well loved that force was, and its sacrifice has been honoured by many from far and wide.

The previous Member who spoke made an important point that should not be missed. He said that the museum would be one of policing in Ireland in its widest context, from the Royal Irish Constabulary to the Royal Ulster Constabulary through to the modern day. I have learned that some exhibits of policing in Ireland date right back to 1814, but that they cannot get a proper display in the current —

**Mr Paisley Jnr:** The Member made a very positive point about visitor numbers. More than 4,000 people visit the current garden of remembrance each year. That means that, since the garden opened, more than 20,000 people could have visited an accompanying museum. Washington has the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, and other places have memorials. As the Member rightly said, we are missing a huge opportunity that has significant tourism potential.

**Mr Hamilton:** I thank the Member for his intervention, and he is correct. There is a wonderful memorial garden at Brooklyn, but there is nothing to tell the stories behind the names of the people that are inscribed on the tablets that he spoke about earlier.

The case is so strong that it convinced the former Secretary of State John Reid to commit not only to a memorial garden but to a complementary museum. In 2001 he said:

"The garden of remembrance, along with the RUC Museum will draw together both projects into a complete RUC experience where visitors can reflect on the sacrifices of the RUC".

Therefore, he saw the matter in the same way that I, the Member and others in the Chamber see it. A holistic approach needs to be taken to the story of the RUC and policing in Ireland. There cannot be a memorial without a museum or an interpretative centre that tells the story of the people who are being remembered and of the history of policing in Ireland.

Anyone who has seen the existing police museum at Brooklyn would agree that it is insufficient to exhibit properly artefacts that date back to the early 1800s and that it is not an appropriate way of telling the story of the RUC and policing in Ireland.

**Mr Shannon:** I understand that 8,000 artefacts could be made available to such a museum; I am sure that the Member is aware of those. I am also sure that he would agree that that fact complements Ian Paisley Jnr's point that a museum would attract more tourists.

There would be more than an hour's or even two hours' viewing in a museum of that stature.

**Mr Hamilton:** The Member is right to say that there is great potential for those artefacts to be exhibited properly. In the past, my colleague the Member for North Down and his council tried to have some of the artefacts moved out and displayed in the North Down Borough Council area. However, they were told that that could not happen because of the sensitivity of the items. It would be entirely appropriate for those artefacts to be displayed permanently in an RUC museum.

The other great case for building an RUC museum is that it would contribute to greater understanding. I know that there are some Members in the Chamber who would not visit a museum of that kind regularly. However, deep down, I think that even they would appreciate the point of having an RUC museum and would know that it would contribute to an understanding of policing in Ireland and, indeed, our recent history.

In the early part of the decade, the former Secretary of State promised monetary assistance for the project. A lot of time has elapsed without any product having come out of that promise. Words come cheap, and it is high time that that promise was met. Through our work on the Assembly and Executive Review Committee, other Members and I are aware that the RUC George Cross Foundation continues to make the case for the project to be granted capital funding. It has clearly drawn an expectation from the promise that the former Secretary of State made.

An RUC museum would exhibit policing in a positive way, contribute greatly to an understanding of policing and bring obvious tourism benefits for the people of Northern Ireland. Everything that can be done, including feasibility studies and business cases, has been done. The case is compelling, and, therefore, I support the motion. I call on the Secretary of State, the NIO, and the Government to fulfil the promise that was made and to meet the expectation for an RUC museum to be built at the Brooklyn site.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The debate will continue after Question Time, when we will hear from the Minister, Mr Gregory Campbell.

*The debate stood suspended.*

2.30 pm

## Oral Answers to Questions

### HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

#### North/South Ministerial Council: Efficiency Savings

1. **Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what efficiency savings his Department is making on health issues through the North/South Ministerial Council. (AQO 2651/09)

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr McGimpsey):** The North/South Ministerial Council is part of the Belfast Agreement and the St Andrews Agreement. It was created to take forward work that would be of mutual benefit to Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic. My Department and the health and social care bodies have undertaken a range of initiatives with our counterparts in the Republic. The primary aim of that work is to promote health gain and social well-being for people living in both countries, and across that work the overriding principle has been to secure value for money.

**Mr Easton:** Does the Minister agree that the North/South implementation body should make efficiency savings, just as his Department must?

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** I agree. We operate on the principle of value for money. Mr Easton is probably aware that the Department of Finance in the Irish Republic and the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) in Belfast are discussing that. I am required to act according to the guidance that is issued to me. I am not in control of these bodies; they are jointly controlled under the North/South Ministerial Council.

Guidance from the Dublin Government is available; we still await that from DFP. Once that comes, I will be permitted to proceed. It would be helpful if I were to receive that. I imagine that the Member knows as much about it as I do.

**Mr Gallagher:** I speak as a representative of a rural border area. Healthcare is badly stretched on both sides of the border. People want to see an increase, rather than a decrease, in North/South activity.

In relation to efficiency savings, I want to ask the Minister about the loss of over 700 nursing jobs. Will



he tell the House whether he has taken that matter to the Finance Minister and asked him whether he will look at some measures to offset that?

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** It is not 700 nursing jobs that are under discussion; it is 700 nursing posts. There is a distinction. The proposal is that, over the next three years, recruitment for nursing will be reduced from 2,250 nurses to 1,400. That is the proposal, and it is only a proposal. It is not hard and fast yet: I am considering it. I stress the vital importance of nurses, but one cannot run a hospital without a whole range of other people: porters and cleaners, doctors and consultants, occupational therapists, speech therapists, administrators, secretaries and so on. They are all needed in a hospital.

I listened carefully to the debate on 20 April, and an amendment was made to excuse the Department of Health from having to make efficiency cuts. That would have saved nursing posts and others. However, the Member's party and others were keen to vote it down. Despite assurances and promises given to trade unions that they would support the amendment, they did not support it. I am where I am. I have this task that I have to complete. I assure Members that I will consider those proposals most carefully before reaching a conclusion.

**Mr McCartney:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas don Aire as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for his answer.

With respect to all-Ireland co-operation and efficiency savings, will the Minister comment on whether the pilot scheme on GP out-of-hours services has saved money, and whether he and his Southern counterpart have plans for further developments or pilot projects?

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** As far as cross-border co-operation is concerned, the overriding principle is mutual benefit. If I can see benefit to the people of Northern Ireland, I am prepared to proceed with practical proposals.

The Minister for Health and Children in the Irish Republic also takes that view. That is how we assess such matters.

As regards the efficacy of the cross-border GP out-of-hours pilot service, there have been mixed results. As anticipated, some parts of the pilot scheme have proven more beneficial than others. However, any decision on whether we proceed with it will be determined by our experience.

The Health Service must make efficiency savings of 3%, which we find absolutely horrendous. The Health Service should not be asked to do that; however, it is being asked to do so here. In the Irish Republic, there has been a straight reduction of 10% in the Budget. A

different approach has been taken in the Irish Republic, but I am not quite clear whether the Irish Government will take 10% off the Department of Health and Children's budget. The total budget for Safefood, the trading name of the Food Safety Promotion Board, is £6.3 million. I am not entirely clear as to how much of that will be affected by Irish budget cuts as a result of the credit crunch and the international economic crisis.

## Caesarean Sections

2. **Mrs McGill** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many Caesarean sections have been performed in the past five years. (AQO 2652/09)

**Mrs McGill:** Ceist uimhir a dó, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** I take it that that means "Question 2". I need Jim Shannon here to translate.

The number of Caesarean sections performed in Northern Ireland hospitals in each of the past five years is as follows: in 2003-04, 5,487; in 2004-05, 5,564; in 2005-06, 6,412; in 2006-07, 7,196; and in 2007-08, 7,149.

The decision to deliver a baby by Caesarean section, either electively or as an emergency, is based on the clinical judgement of an obstetrician, who takes account of the medical condition and circumstances of both mother and infant.

**Mrs McGill:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his response. Given the concerns about the increasing number of Caesarean sections, particularly in the North of Ireland, does the Minister agree that the new Public Health Agency should inform people, particularly young mothers, about the implications of having a Caesarean?

Should the Public Health Agency, for example, inform young mothers that there is an 80% likelihood that their babies could develop childhood asthma as a result of their having a Caesarean section? Go raibh maith agat.

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** There is a concern that the rate of Caesarean sections in Northern Ireland is on the high side. Having said that, the number of Caesareans performed in Northern Ireland is approximately the same as the UK average, and is less than, for example, that in the Irish Republic and other countries. There is a huge range in the number of incidences across Europe, from around 15% in eastern Europe to 33% in Portugal and 38% in Italy. Our section rate is sitting at 28%, and, certainly, I want to get that number down. However, the decision to carry out a Caesarean section



is based on a clinical judgement made in discussion with the prospective mother.

We have established a patient safety forum, which will promote a safety culture, share best practice, support organisations in implementing evidence-based interventions and measure patients' safety. We are also considering other ways in which to get out messages about Caesarean sections, some of which the Member mentioned.

I do not envisage the Public Health Agency playing a key part in that, as it has an altogether different role in health promotion. However, there is a strong push across the Health Service to provide the type of information that allows clinicians and mothers to make informed value judgements.

**Mr Gardiner:** The Minister will be aware that, in recent months, some people have criticised Craigavon Hospital, particularly its maternity unit. I hope that the Minister will join me in taking the opportunity to express my gratitude for the professionalism of the hard-working, dedicated staff of Craigavon Area Hospital, particularly given the growing pressures in that area.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Please ask your question.

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** I readily agree with Mr Gardiner about the maternity unit at Craigavon Area Hospital. It has faced rising pressures due to the increase in the number of births from just under 3,000 in 2004 to a provisional figure of 3,800 in 2008. Those figures illustrate the steep rise in the number of deliveries at the hospital. Much of that rise is due to the mothers' preference for Craigavon Area Hospital because of its excellent reputation. It has highly professional staff, and its obstetricians and midwifery unit work together.

I visited the hospital on several occasions, and I have announced substantial investment in the hospital to ensure that it has the facilities that it requires and that demand never outstrips capacity. The hospital continues to operate within its capacity.

**Mr Attwood:** The proposal to establish a midwifery-led unit at Lagan Valley Hospital means that less-routine cases, including Caesarean sections, will, in all likelihood, be transferred to the Royal Victoria Hospital. What negotiations are ongoing to enhance the budget and resources of the maternity unit there to enable it to deal with women who have to undergo surgery, including Caesarean sections, or other acute interventions?

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** Lagan Valley Hospital was a specific part of my Department's review of services in the Belfast area. I have asked for a business case to be provided for the establishment of a midwifery-led unit at Lagan Valley Hospital.

In Belfast, the Jubilee Maternity Hospital continues to work within its capacity, and it will receive investment to ensure that that remains the case. Investment will be made in Craigavon Area Hospital, whose maternity unit is also a unit of choice for mothers in the Lisburn area. In the south-east, the maternity unit at the Ulster Hospital is a unit of choice, and that will be the case for the new unit in Downpatrick when it comes into operation shortly.

I examined those issues to ensure that the system has sufficient capacity for dealing with the expected transfer of some births from Lagan Valley Hospital. I anticipate, although I cannot pre-empt the result, that I will receive a positive business case indicating the substantial use of a new midwife-led maternity unit at Lagan Valley Hospital.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Question 3 has been withdrawn.

## Alcohol-related Deaths

4. **Mr McCausland** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking to address the increased level of alcohol-related deaths. (AQO 2654/09)

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The increase in alcohol-related deaths greatly concerns me and my Department. Under the new strategic direction for alcohol and drugs, a high priority is being placed on measures to address alcohol misuse in Northern Ireland. Regional and local action on education, prevention, treatment and support is ongoing and includes public information campaigns, targeted education programmes, and continuing service development. Liquor licensing, alcohol pricing, advertising and accessibility are also key issues that must be addressed. As part of the young people's drinking action plan, the entire Executive must give those issues further consideration.

2.45 pm

**Mr McCausland:** I thank the Minister for his answer. The number of alcohol-related deaths in the United Kingdom has risen substantially since the early 1990s, from 6.9 per 100,000 of the population to 13.3 per 100,000 in 2007. Can the Minister give corresponding figures specific to Northern Ireland? Does he agree that the widespread dissemination of such information would help to highlight the dangers that are associated with alcohol abuse?

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** In 2008, 286 people died as a direct result of alcohol. That number is rising, and that is a matter of great concern to me. We are aware that alcohol plays a part in one third of adolescent suicide attempts. Alcohol has an important impact on health,

crime, antisocial behaviour, personal safety, risk taking, and so on. Society must take alcohol seriously. If we do not, we will pay a price.

One of my current focuses is on the impact of alcohol on young people, hence the young people's drinking action plan, which will consider minimum unit pricing, and restricting alcohol promotions and happy hours. Those measures are also being considered in England and Scotland.

All Departments have responded positively to that action plan, and some Departments have responded very positively, but the young people's drinking action plan is, sadly, currently stalled at the Executive. Mr McCausland would be of assistance to me if he could determine why that is being held up. The plan would not only have public support, but would have a very positive impact in pressing down on young people's drinking, which is increasing all the time.

Alcohol is now 62% more affordable than it was in 1980, and minimum unit pricing must be considered. Pricing is causing a problem. In England, a policy of a minimum price of 50p a unit is being considered. Under that proposal, a half pint of beer could not be sold for less than 50p. That is not unreasonable, and it is the type of direction in which I want to go.

**Ms S Ramsey:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Notwithstanding the Minister's answers, have he or his officials had any recent discussions with the Minister for Social Development on combating easy access to alcohol, considering the recent debates that have taken place in the Assembly and the proposals that the Minister for Social Development has claimed that she will bring forward?

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** One of the proposals of the young people's drinking action plan is to establish a cross-departmental subcommittee to work on that issue. Licensing is the responsibility of the Department for Social Development, which is actively considering that matter.

The figures on access to alcohol are stark: 81% of 16-year-olds have consumed alcohol, and 27% of young people have purchased it for themselves at some time. Almost one fifth of those young people buy alcohol from a pub, 14% from an off-licence and around 5% from shops and supermarkets. Despite the fact that they are underage, they are accessing licensed establishments.

In addition to discussions with the Department for Social Development, I have talked to the police about how to move forward on this issue. It is a society-wide problem, and one need only look at areas such as the Odyssey and parts of south Belfast such as the university area and the Golden Mile late at night to get an indication of how bad things can get. The events in

the Holylands area on St Patrick's day are an example of the type of behaviour that we must face up to and deal with, rather than run away from.

**Mr Kennedy:** I am grateful to the Minister for his earlier replies. Does he agree that it is a matter of concern that there appears to be opposition to his proposals at a senior level in the Executive? Will he assure the House and me that he will continue to press for that important change at Executive level, no matter who is against it?

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** I am happy to give that assurance. Indeed, I do so with confidence because virtually everyone in the House agrees with the direction in which my Department and I want to travel. It is unfortunate that I have encountered those delays.

**Mr P Ramsey:** I welcome the Minister's intentions and proposals on untimely alcohol-related deaths. My constituency is no different from others where there has been a high increase in alcohol-related deaths, particularly among young males. Is the Minister aware of a proposal that has been made to the Western Health and Social Care Trust for a detoxification unit for the Derry area, which is supported by councillors, GPs and a wide spectrum of people who are involved in alcohol-education programmes?

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** I am not aware of the specific proposal to which Mr Ramsey referred. However, I will make myself aware of it and will discuss it with him.

## Children with Speech Difficulties

5. **Mr Storey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of children who have speech difficulties. (AQO 2655/09)

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The number of children who have speech, language and communication needs varies according to the criteria that are used to assess them. However, it is reasonable to believe that approximately 3% of all children in Northern Ireland meet the criteria for specialist help. In a population the size of Northern Ireland's, that equates to fewer than 13,000 children who are aged between nought and 18 years.

During the past two years, services for those children have improved significantly. For example, my Department secured additional investment of more than £4 million for allied health professional services; an increase in the number of speech and language therapists from 228 in 2007 to 412 in 2009; and a reduction in waiting times from 26 weeks in 2008 to 13 weeks in 2009.

In addition, my Department will produce a new speech and language therapy action plan for consultation and implementation by the end of September 2009 to drive further improvements in services for those children.

**Mr Storey:** I thank the Minister for his reply and, in particular, for his and the Department's intention to launch a speech and language consultation. The sooner that helpful consultation happens, the better.

Will the Minister explain what communication there is between his Department and the Department of Education on the matter? When MLAs talk to certain parents, they find that they often have difficulty because there seems to be little co-ordination between the Department of Health and the Department of Education, not only in identifying children's needs, but in service delivery.

I appreciate that there has been a reduction in waiting times —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The Member must ask a supplementary question.

**Mr Storey:** However, those waiting times must be driven down further.

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The speech and language therapy action plan has resulted from the task force's work. Sadly, that work has been delayed because the task force's chairperson died in office. The action plan will be ready for a brief consultation period in June 2009 and ready for implementation. We are working in conjunction with the Department of Education to produce the action plan, which is due to be published in September 2009 after consultation.

A number of the actions to which I referred are already in place. Two years ago, during my response to a debate in the House, I gave assurances that I would take certain actions. For example, I have increased the number of speech and language therapists; the number of support staff to 66; and the amount of money that is allocated to those services. I have reduced targets and ensured that they are met so that no child waits longer than 13 weeks for initial treatment.

There is much to be done to the plan as it is brought forward. One of its key thrusts will be to make better use of existing speech and language therapists. It is not always a matter of simply recruiting more therapists. Instead, we must think strategically and carefully about the best way to use them.

**Mr McCarthy:** In light of what the Minister said, why do public representatives continue to receive complaints from people who are having difficulty obtaining a statement for their children during their early education periods? I ask that question in the context of his earlier comments —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The Member must ask a question.

**Mr McCarthy:** — to the effect that his Department works in conjunction with the Department of Education.

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** I suggest that Mr McCarthy makes those comments during the consultation on the action plan that will begin at the end of September. Although I have ensured improvements, I do not suggest that the position is perfect. I regret that parents must wait for long periods, because children with speech and language needs should receive support as soon as possible. I take that issue seriously. The consultation will provide an excellent opportunity for Mr McCarthy to make those points.

**Mr D Bradley:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh an méid a bhí le rá ag an Aire, agus cuirim fáilte roimh an phlean gníomhaíochta atá beartaithe aige. I welcome the Minister's intention to formulate an action plan. Advocacy groups, such as Afasic, provide valuable support programmes for young people with speech difficulties. Does his Department support such groups? Does he intend to enhance that support? Go raibh míle maith agat.

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The role of such groups will, to a large extent, be determined by the action plan. The consultation is an excellent way for the Member to make those points.

## Swine Flu

6. **Mr Cree** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what assessment he has made of the spread of swine influenza. (AQO 2656/09)

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** I have been advised by the Chief Medical Officer that on 29 April 2009, as a result of the spread of swine influenza, the World Health Organization raised its pandemic alert level to phase 5, which is characterised by human-to-human spread of the virus into at least two countries in a single World Health Organization region. Therefore, everyone must ramp up preparations because a global pandemic may be imminent.

Northern Ireland has already done so and has been planning for a similar situation for many years. GPs across the country have been notified, made aware of the symptoms and told what to do if they suspect that a patient has the virus. Hospitals are well prepared and have specific plans to deal with a pandemic. We have stocks of antivirals that can be used to treat those who become ill. Northern Ireland has robust contingency plans in place, including plans for acute hospitals, the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service and social care.



Moreover, advice has been issued to GPs and hospital clinicians.

Cases of swine flu have been confirmed in Europe, including some in the United Kingdom. The UK Health Protection Agency continues to monitor events and work closely with the UK Government to review the ongoing events and assess their threat to public health in the UK. The appearance of confirmed cases in the UK and Europe is not unexpected. Although no cases have been confirmed in Northern Ireland, there is no reason to believe that we will escape the virus.

**Mr Cree:** I commend the Minister for his proactive approach to updating everyone on the swine flu crisis. Has he had regular contact with his British counterparts? Has he briefed his ministerial colleagues? Given the cost of this unforeseen emergency, will he bid for additional funding from the Executive?

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** I confirm that I have taken all of the action to which Mr Cree refers. I am in constant contact with colleagues in the home countries through COBRA. Indeed, we had a COBRA meeting this morning from 11.00 am to 1.00 pm. I will have a further conversation with my colleagues Alan Johnson, Nicola Sturgeon and Edwina Hart tonight as a wash-up.

The alert is now at level five, and we are preparing for level six; that is ongoing. I am also having routine cross-border discussions, and hope to meet Mary Harney shortly.

3.00 pm

There will, of course, be a cost implication, which was not part of my Budget deal. However, that is a conversation that will have to take place between my Department and my finance director and the Department of Finance and Personnel.

## REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### Bilingual Road Signs

1. **Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline his plans to honour the Good Friday Agreement by ensuring that signage on motorways and major routes is in both English and Irish.

(AQO 2671/09)

**The Minister for Regional Development (Mr Murphy):** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. My Department's Roads Service has developed a draft policy for the introduction of a limited range of bilingual traffic signs, with either Irish or Ulster Scots in addition to English. However, in order to advance the overarching policy proposal, it must be referred to the

Assembly's Executive Committee, as the issue cuts across the responsibility of a number of other Departments. The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure has responsibility for the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has responsibility for tourism. Recently, I canvassed the views of ministerial colleagues about my proposals, and I am considering them before I refer the matter to the Executive Committee.

**Mr D Bradley:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra a thug sé ansin. Ba mhaith liom a fhiafraí de a n-aontaíonn sé gur chóir go mbeadh an polasaí céanna i bhfeidhm anseo agus atá, mar shampla, i bhfeidhm sa Bhreatain Bheag agus i dtíortha eile ar fud na hEorpa ina labhraítear níos mó ná teanga amháin. Agus ba mhaith liom a fhiafraí de fosta cad é an dearcadh atá aige den fheachtas atá ar bun faoi láthair ag grúpa darb ainm Na Ceithearna Coille, a ghreamaíonn greamaitheoirí Gaeilge ar chomharthaí bóthair.

I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he agree with me that the policy applied in Northern Ireland should be no different from that applied in Wales and in other European countries in which more than one language is spoken? What is his view of the campaign being mounted by a group called Na Ceithearna Coille, members of which target road signs with "Gaeilge" stickers? Go raibh míle maith agat.

**The Minister for Regional Development:** My view on what legislative protections should be in place to support the rights of minority language speakers is clear: I support the approach taken in Wales and Scotland, the legislative protections that are offered there, and the bilingual policy that is adopted in those countries. I have no issue with that.

Of course one supports bilingualism and the promotion of the Irish language, as was agreed in the section of the Good Friday Agreement on the promotion of the Irish language in public life. However, defacing signs may not be the best way in which to go about that. I would like people to express vocal support for bilingual signage, and bilingualism generally, across all Departments.

I have been consistent not only in raising the issue before I was Minister, but in following through on it now that I have taken up ministerial office, and also with regard to my responsibilities under the European charter. I have been proactive in the Department in ensuring that there is a multi lingual website, and that many of the Department's publications are available bilingually. However, there is much to be done.

Other countries, some of which have been referred to, set a good standard for us. I do not see any reason why we should not aspire to adopt those standards here, but I am not sure that stickers should be placed



over road signs, which, for road safety purposes, are generally reflective. Some of the stickers impair the night-time reflectiveness of the signs. That does not necessarily serve the purpose that those behind it intend. However, I do support campaigns for bilingualism.

**Mr Cree:** Has the Minister made himself aware of any studies into the safety implications of motorway signage? Does he agree with me that including Irish and Ulster Scots, as would be required by the Belfast Agreement, could be a safety hazard on motorways?

**The Minister for Regional Development:** Other countries have bilingual signage. Earlier this year I was in Cardiff, where all the motorway signs are in English and Welsh, and there are no road safety issues. It is obvious that substantial resources would have to be expended on motorway signage here. However, the policies adopted and the legislative protections afforded to speakers of minority languages in other countries are something that we should rightly aspire to here.

**Mr McCausland:** I thank the Minister for his answer. In considering the matter, I ask him to take account of two issues: first, that the relevant section of the Belfast Agreement has anticipated the Council of Europe's European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and has been superseded by that charter, which requires the promotion of the Irish and Ulster-Scots languages to be taken forward in a resolute manner; secondly, following up Mr Cree's supplementary question, that the Minister will take particular account of the research carried out by Oliver Clark and Simon Davies from the University of Hull, which was presented to the British Psychological Society's annual conference in Dublin last year, and which showed that —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Please ask a question, Mr McCausland.

**Mr McCausland:** — increasing road signage contributed significantly to road accidents.

**The Minister for Regional Development:** I am sure that for every study making that conclusion there will be another showing that increased road signage has no impact. I am sure that the Welsh authorities took great care to ensure that bilingual signage did not create more danger for road users. I have been doing my bit, and I have been proactive in ensuring that my Department meets its responsibilities to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. The promotion of bilingualism here has a long way to go; perhaps we should take the politics out of it. Legislative support and protection for minority languages and those who speak them should be no threat to anyone here, and we should all give it our backing.

**Mr Brolly:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Seo an cheist atá agam don Aire: an dtig leis an Aire a chinntiú go bhfuil an chumhacht ag an Roinn s'aige comharthaí dhátheangacha a chur i bhfeidhm?

I will translate that. Will the Minister assure us that his Department has the power to introduce dual signage? What representations has he had on that issue from elected Members, including, of course, Dominic Bradley?

**The Minister for Regional Development:** My Department has the power to introduce bilingual signage, but as I said in my original answer, it is a cross-cutting issue, and, as such, must be brought to the Executive. Since the Good Friday Agreement was signed, which is at the root of the original question, until March 2006, only two MLAs, Alex Maskey and I, contacted the Department about bilingual signage. Since March 2006, a number of people have contacted the Department on the matter. I support the use of bilingual signage and I want to secure the support of Executive colleagues for it. The promotion of Irish or any other minority language in public life threatens no one, and it should enhance all our lives.

### Infill Development

3. **Mrs Long** asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the cumulative impact on local infrastructure of successive infill development; how this is assessed by his Department as part of the development control process; and what agreement there has been with the Department of the Environment on this issue. (AQO 2673/09)

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I should have said that question 2 has been withdrawn.

**The Minister for Regional Development:** The divisional development control sections of the Department's Roads Service work closely with DOE Planning Service in the development of area plans. It is at that stage that the cumulative impact on traffic of infill developments is considered. In addition to that assessment, developers are required to submit a transport assessment form for a proposed development or redevelopment. Roads Service considers that form during the planning consultation process. The transport assessment form demonstrates how the development functions in transport terms and identifies any possible adverse impacts.

Roads Service may, through Planning Service, request a full, detailed transport assessment where a development is considered to be likely to have significant transport implications, irrespective of the development's size. Infill development, which by nature tends to be relatively small scale, does not normally require a detailed transport assessment. As part of the transport assessment process, the impacts of committed developments that have extant approval have to be taken into account in the analysis. Those developments that are still under consideration are not taken into

account in such an analysis. When development plans do not provide for the cumulative impact of developments in an area, Roads Service is required to consider each individual planning application on its merits.

Each application is examined against the planning policies, guidelines and site conditions that pertain at the time of the application. Members will be aware that the regional development strategy for the period to 2025 promotes development on brownfield sites. The strategy defines brownfield land as:

“that which is, or was occupied by, a permanent structure within a defined settlement limit.”

That excludes the gardens of dwellings and apartments.

Under service level agreements, Roads Service is required to advise the Planning Service on the suitability of existing roads and transportation infrastructure necessary to service a proposed development so that the Planning Service can arrive at a decision on an application. The service level agreement does not require Roads Service to provide advice on the cumulative impact of a number of infill developments.

**Mrs Long:** I thank the Minister for his answer, which was very helpful. I note his comment about the regional development strategy and area plans. Does he accept that they are out of date in respect of what is happening on the ground, and that infill development in back gardens, for example, is not covered? Although such areas may not qualify as brownfield, they are still development sites.

Does the Minister agree that there is an issue whereby if someone applies for planning permission for 40 or 50 houses, a detailed traffic-impact assessment will be carried out, but if a number of developers apply for the same number of houses, three or four at a time, a detailed assessment would not be carried out, even though the impact on infrastructure would be exactly the same?

**The Minister for Regional Development:** The interim review of the regional development strategy — and we are engaged in a much longer-term review — clearly made a point about gardens as opposed to brownfield sites. That advice was passed on to the Planning Service to use in dealing with applications. There was quite a clamour to be more definitive in citing what constitutes brownfield sites and what constitutes gardens. The interim review tightened that definition up, and passed that advice on to the planners.

I appreciate what the Member said about the cumulative effect of traffic if a single application is made, as opposed to multiple applications, but Roads Service and planners can only consider applications on their merit. They cannot anticipate what may turn out to be further planning applications. They have to consider applications that are extant when an application is received. In that respect, they can measure a cumulative

effect, but unless there is a range of applications at one time, it is impossible to do that.

One cannot measure the possible impact from applications that may be made next week or next year. That is even more difficult in the current climate, because many proposed developments have now been put on hold. It is impossible to anticipate what may be planned, but I appreciate the point that the Member made. Perhaps when there is reform of the planning process and more involvement at local government level, some of those matters can be examined.

**Mr Wells:** Does the Minister share my profound disappointment that his definition of what constitutes brownfield development, as a result of the review of the regional development strategy, has had absolutely no impact on the amount of high-density development in Northern Ireland? His Executive colleague Mr Sammy Wilson has confirmed that not a single planning application has been turned down as a result of the redefinition of brownfield development.

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

**Mr Wells:** It is absolutely useless in preventing the cramming that we are seeing in our towns. Secondly, I share the concern of Mrs Long —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I must insist that the Member come to his question.

**Mr Wells:** Does the Minister share the concern that a development can be turned down only if it adds 10% to traffic, but one can have 20 developments, each adding 8% to traffic, and one cannot turn any of them down? Surely that is absolute nonsense.

**The Minister for Regional Development:** We have made a genuine effort to respond to an issue that was raised, and to define more clearly the difference between brownfield sites and gardens. If there was an issue with that, and the planners were not happy or found that that redefinition was not appropriate or satisfactory, we should have heard from them, because planners ultimately approve or reject applications. I do not think that I have heard that from them.

As for cumulative development, I make the same point that I made to Mrs Long: we cannot make decisions based on anticipation. We can only deal with and make an assessment on applications that are in front of us. That is how Roads Service must operate.

If the Member and others perceive a clear problem, I am more than happy to work with the Minister of the Environment to see how we could try to make improvements in the context of planning reform, but it is very hard to deal with planning applications or their impact on transport on the basis of anticipation.

3.15 pm

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I ask Members to please stand clearly in their places so that I can be certain that they really want to be called. I call Mr Francie Molloy, who did stand.

**Mr Molloy:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answers so far. Will he state whether the current service level agreement can be amended to include a qualification whereby Roads Service would have to take account of the cumulative effect of infill developments?

**The Minister for Regional Development:** Roads Service and the Planning Service are reviewing the service level agreements, and my understanding is that there are no plans to make provision for assessing the cumulative impact of infill developments. However, as I said, this is the place where Members can raise issues that are important to them, and I am happy to work with the Minister of the Environment if people think that there is a pressing need that is not being met by the current planning policy.

### Ballymoney Bus Depot

4. **Mr Storey** asked the Minister for Regional Development what discussions he has had with Translink about the future of Ballymoney bus depot.

(AQO 2674/09)

**The Minister for Regional Development:** I have had no direct discussions with Translink about the future of Ballymoney bus depot. However, I understand that that depot continues to be a key operational centre in the provision of a network of bus services to the north Antrim area and, as such, Translink has no plans to discontinue its use.

**Mr Storey:** I thank the Minister for the reassurance. However, will he give an undertaking that he will look at this issue in light of the fact that Ballymoney has only a bus depot — that is, a place from which buses come and go, but at which members of the public cannot access them. The actual bus stops are in different locations in the town. Ballymoney must be one of the few provincial towns in Northern Ireland that does not have a dedicated bus station, as it had previously. Given the amount of money that we are told is going to be spent on the facilities at the railway station, it would seem natural to have a joined-up approach to public transport by locating a bus station at the railway station, as that would be to the benefit of all the travelling public.

**The Minister for Regional Development:** What the Member said makes sense; I was not aware of the exact situation in Ballymoney, and I am happy to raise the issue with Translink. The Member will understand

that the capital budget for Translink is extremely tight, as are the budgets across all Departments, but I am certainly happy to raise that issue with Translink.

Bus stations have been brought into operation in different towns, and they have made a huge improvement to the level of service and to the number of people using the bus service. Therefore, the desire, intention and objective of Translink should be to have a bus station facility in all regional towns. I am not aware of the exact plans for the service in Ballymoney, but I am happy to take up the matter with Translink.

**Mr McKay:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Minister alluded to the fact that the capital budget is very tight. Will he outline the current plans for capital expenditure in the Ballymoney area?

**The Minister for Regional Development:** The Member will know that work on the railway track is ongoing in the Ballymoney area, as that has interfered with transport there. We have given approval for Translink to purchase 20 new trains. That contract has been signed and the project is progressing, with the first new trains expected to be in service by 2011. It is planned that 13 of the new trains will replace the old fleet service, five will be used to increase the frequency and capacity of the service in the Belfast area, and two will allow additional trains to be deployed on the Derry line.

Translink also has plans to relay the track between Coleraine and Derry, and that work, plus the additional trains on that line, will facilitate the delivery of an enhanced level of service when the scheme is complete in 2013. That will mean that the journey times to Derry will reduce by 30 minutes and for the first time, commuter services into Derry could arrive before 9.00 am. In addition, as I have already mentioned, the track-life-extension work on the railway line between Ballymena and Coleraine is being undertaken, and that is expected to be completed by the end of this financial year.

We have approved a capital grant of over £400,000 to enable Translink to replace the roof of Ballymoney railway station. The Department has also made a significant investment in public transport improvements. During the last financial year, expenditure of £36 million for rail infrastructure and £9 million for bus projects was incurred. Over the next two years, capital grants of £100 million and £35 million will be invested in rail and bus services respectively to further improve those services. Given the funding restrictions that all Departments must try to live with, it is simply a case of prioritising which projects are undertaken.

**Mr O'Loan:** Will the Minister go further in his answer and agree that the accommodation for train travellers at Ballymoney station is not up to the standard that we would expect in the twenty-first century? It will not encourage people to use public transport. Does



the Minister agree that there is a need for further investment there?

**The Minister for Regional Development:** I am sure that in every sector of our railway service we could identify parts that are not up to scratch and could perhaps be more attractive to passengers. It is quite clearly the case that where investment has been made, passenger numbers have increased right across the service. Passenger numbers are up by about 11%, and that is directly due to investment in facilities and in the trains and the rolling stock. Improving the service, the comfort and the frequency certainly leads to more passengers using the service.

I am not aware of the exact detail regarding Ballymoney train station, but I do know that Translink has to try to prioritise capital works.

The railway station in my part of the world is nearing completion. However, there was not, in effect, a railway station there; it was practically a Portakabin. I presume that Translink will prioritise to try to bring what it considers to be the worst stations up to scratch, and then gradually work its way through a programme. However, as we have said, even in this morning's discussion, budgets are tight, and capital investment obviously has to be prioritised.

**Mr McClarty:** My question was on the long-term plans the Minister had for public transport in the northern region. He has answered that question fully in response to the Member for North Antrim. Thank you.

## Corporate Social Responsibility

5. **Mr McCartney** asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail his Department's policy approach to corporate social responsibility and positive community impact in the discharge of his Department's services. (AQO 2675/09)

**The Minister for Regional Development:** My Department is strongly committed to corporate social responsibility and has articulated how it aims to develop that in its corporate and business plans for 2009-2011. We are also very keen to support our staff to make a personal contribution to the community. One of the ways in which we hope to achieve that is through a partnership with Business in the Community, which would allow us to participate in schemes such as the Talent Management programme and the Time to Read initiative.

Members will also be aware of the recent Between the Bridges community-based charity event, which my Department played a role in facilitating through its corporate social responsibility agenda. We also wish to enhance areas such as research development, where we can, through internships and work placements, make

use of undergraduates and graduates to help us with work associated with promoting sustainability.

It is my intention to publicly launch my Department's corporate social responsibility policy shortly. It is being developed to take account of the wide spectrum of measures that we will take now and in the future.

**Mr McCartney:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. May I ask the Minister to outline in specific terms how the procurement procedures in his Department have an influence on social responsibility and community impact?

**The Minister for Regional Development:** In relation to procurement, my Department follows the guidance prepared by Central Procurement Directorate and the Equality Commission on sustainable development and equality of opportunity in public-sector procurement. In line with that guidance, action plans have recently been produced at my instruction by Roads Service, Northern Ireland Water and Translink. Those include proposals for implementing critical community impact and social objectives, such as increasing access to public-sector procurement opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises, encouraging the economically inactive back into the workplace, and encouraging training and skills development through, for instance, apprenticeships.

In addition, the Roads Service action plan ensures that social and environmental factors are taken into consideration alongside financial factors in making procurement decisions. The action plan has a package of measures to deliver the step change needed to ensure that Roads Service and its partners are focused on better design, low waste, higher recycled content, respect for biodiversity and delivery of its wider sustainable development goals.

**Dr McDonnell:** I thank the Minister for his answers. Does the Minister agree that his Department can contribute very positively to the whole economic and social future of an area when it invests in, for instance, transport structure? Is he engaged in dialogue at the moment with DETI or the Department for Social Development (DSD) on how regeneration can take place in a number of towns and cities across Northern Ireland?

**The Minister for Regional Development:** I agree with the Member that we can have a very positive impact. When people have argued for where the Executive's resources should be focused, we have all made arguments about building up the infrastructure; be that roads, rail, houses, hospitals or schools. Building up the infrastructure is a very useful way to stimulate economic activity, and in the longer term also provides us with a solid base of assets going into the future.

The Department for Social Development is largely responsible for regeneration matters and works closely



with Roads Service on its various town centre schemes. I have not had any discussions with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment on such matters, but I know that officials from a range of Departments work together on larger urban regeneration initiatives. For example, one will find officials from DETI, DSD, Roads Service and other bodies working together in the Ilex project in Derry and in some of the development projects in Belfast. Such co-operation is happening across the board on specific projects, which is good. Our form of Government gives Ministers the ability to interact regularly on such projects, which is helpful.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Question 6 has been withdrawn.

### Rural Transport Services

7. **Mr Burns** asked the Minister for Regional Development if he is aware of plans to cut rural transport services and for his assessment of the importance of developing an integrated public transport service, making it worthwhile for senior citizens to have free bus passes. (AQO 2677/09)

**The Minister for Regional Development:** I am aware that Translink has extremely limited plans to change rural transport services involving a reduction in frequency on three routes and the withdrawal of one very low-use sub-route in County Derry. There will be no reduction in the overall bus service coverage in the North.

I fully realise the importance of developing an integrated public transport service. The Executive's Programme for Government has set a target for improving public transport provision to deliver a modern, efficient and sustainable transportation system that facilitates economic growth and social inclusion across the region.

It continues to be worthwhile for senior citizens to have a SmartPass. Since the introduction of free travel for people aged 60 and over in October 2008, more than six million trips have been made, which clearly demonstrates the benefit of that important scheme.

**Mr Burns:** Does the Minister agree that although rural bus services are never likely to make money, Translink has a responsibility to subsidise public transport in rural communities?

**The Minister for Regional Development:** Yes. Translink takes that responsibility seriously and acts on it. It continuously prunes routes in its public transport provision. That happens on an ongoing basis because, for instance, only one or two people per week might use some of the routes to which I referred.

As the Member knows, due to the pace of development over the past number of years, areas not served by public transport may suddenly gain a couple of hundred houses. Consequently, Translink continuously reassesses and alters routes. However, it also has a responsibility to provide rural transport. Such transport is often subsidised and is non-profit-making. It is part of Translink's public service agreement that it will continue to provide rural transport.

**Mr G Robinson:** Does the Minister agree that a fully integrated public transport system is an essential lifeline for rural communities?

**The Minister for Regional Development:** Yes. The Member may take issue with the reduction of some services in the area that he represents. However, Translink has, so to speak, to wash its face, and if routes are not being used, it does not make economic or environmental sense to continue them and not provide a service in other areas that may attract more people on to public transport. The process is changing constantly, and we look to Translink to continue to provide its service across the rural routes in the North.

**Mr Elliott:** Free bus passes are only useful where there are available services. Does the Minister have any advice for senior citizens who have SmartPasses but cannot use them because there is no bus service nearby?

**The Minister for Regional Development:** I am not sure what area the Member is talking about. However, since last October, six million trips have been made using free bus passes, which indicates that it is a beneficial scheme. As a representative of some rural areas where the public transport is not as good as it is in urban areas, I know that it is more difficult for people to access public transport. There are other rural community transport projects in a lot of those areas to try to fill the gaps that there might be in Translink's service. I encourage those who are eligible for the bus passes to get them and to make as good use of them as possible.

**Mr Brady:** Will the Minister outline the alternative to the current Translink proposals?

**The Minister for Regional Development:** Translink is developing corporate proposals on how it goes forward, which have been a matter of discussion with me, the Department and the Consumer Council. Translink has to sustain itself as a company, so the choice is between some bus fares increasing marginally and the loss of jobs and services. Those are always difficult decisions. This is the third time since I came into office that we have had such discussions. However, those are the sort of choices that are facing Translink, and I hope that, through consultation, we can reach an acceptable solution.

3.30 pm

## SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

### Budget 2009-2010

1. **Mr K Robinson** asked the Minister for Social Development for her assessment of the implications of the UK Government's recent Budget announcement for her Department. (AQO 2691/09)

**The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie):** The full implications of the Chancellor's statement are still being assessed. However, I welcome its proposals to give more help and support in getting people back to work. The statement will also give additional help to people who are most in need — children, older people and disabled people — in the form of extra benefits, tax credits, child trust funds and winter fuel payments. My Department will ensure that those who are entitled to extra benefits will receive them.

I am not surprised that additional investment is being proposed for house building and energy efficiency in Great Britain. Indeed, I have argued for some time that that is also the right thing to do in Northern Ireland. Although the Chancellor was subject to unprecedented financial pressures, he still managed to find an additional £1 billion for housing. I hope that, at the very least, the Barnett consequential for that will be contributed to our own housing budget, which is woefully short of funds. The Executive must clearly signal that they will reprioritise and invest more in housing to achieve the indisputable benefits, and they must put housing on a firm financial footing rather than allow construction workers and homeless people to continue to suffer. The Chancellor has accepted the important fact that investment in social housing is the best way to boost the economy, while delivering on vital economic and social policy objectives. Why have we not done likewise?

**Mr K Robinson:** I thought that it was my function to ask the questions and the Minister's to answer them. However, I take her point and her detailed and helpful response.

What steps has the Minister taken with the Department of Finance and Personnel and the Minister of Finance and Personnel to ensure that extra funding can be detailed for the areas that she mentioned? The Minister knows my concerns about housing estates such as Monkstown where, because of population movement and the changing population profile, appropriate housing is not always available to match demand.

**The Minister for Social Development:** Over recent months, I had several discussions with the Minister of Finance and Personnel about that issue. The housing budget must be reprioritised and reprofiled. We can no longer live a hand-to-mouth existence, surviving off the scraps of quarterly monitoring rounds and the legacy of the direct rule Administration, whereby the social housing development programme and associated issues were not put on a sound financial footing. I delivered that message to the Minister of Finance and Personnel. In January 2009, I received a helpful response from him, in which he acknowledged the need to invest in housing. I now want him and my Executive colleagues to reprioritise and to put housing, once and for all, on a sound financial footing.

**Mr T Clarke:** What is the Minister's assessment for the UK taxpayer after her Department lost a £300,000 legal case?

**The Minister for Social Development:** That is a ridiculous assertion. For the benefit of Members, let me put the record straight on that matter. First, I did not pursue any legal action. Secondly, we did not receive any bills or pay any costs. It is worth recapping on the fact that the judgement supported me on three of the four counts.

Let us look at those counts. The first was that I did not consult adequately — the judge threw that out; the second was that I had already made up my mind about cutting the funding — the judge threw that out; the third was that I had no right to terminate the contract over UDA behaviour — the judge threw that out. Therefore, I make the point again that the court supported my position on all the substantial issues. The court found an error in procedure on the ministerial code point. I was aware of that potential procedural problem and sought the cure, that is, retrospective Executive approval of the decision. In fact, that is a routine procedure that has already been used by the DUP. However, when I asked for retrospective sanction, the Executive refused it.

I have heard some politicians, including ministerial colleagues, peddle the accusation that is being made here today, but such cheap shots diminish not only those who make them but the offices that they hold. The costs incurred in this case are far more a consequence of Executive decisions than of any action on my part.

I would also like to point out that the Independent Monitoring Commission published its latest report last week, and, yet again, it referred to UDA criminality and to the fact that there had been no decommissioning. Therefore, in the broadest sense, I was right all along. My decision was right then, and it is still right now.

**Dr Farry:** To return to the Budget, will the Minister confirm that it is her view that the £116 million in Barnett consequentials that the Executive will receive

over the next two years should be invested in economic recovery through social housing, energy efficiency and renewable energy, that it should not simply be offset against the £123 million in efficiency savings that have been asked for, and that those should be funded in a different way?

**The Minister for Social Development:** I thank Dr Farry for his intervention. I will come back to the initial point. There needs to be a reprioritisation of the housing budget, and emphasis needs to be placed on putting housing on a sound financial footing once and for all. We are dealing with a legacy from the direct rule Administration, which is not helpful at all. Through the operation of the Barnett formula, an additional £116 million is available for the Northern Ireland Executive this financial year and the following financial year. I will seek to ensure that my Department shares in that increase to assist with the various pressures that are being encountered in the housing programme and throughout the social security office network as a result of rising unemployment. Therefore, I cannot agree with you more.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I ask the Minister to make her remarks through the Chair.

## Welfare Reform Bill

2. **Mr McClarty** asked the Minister for Social Development when she expects to propose a legislative consent motion on the Welfare Reform Bill.

(AQO 2692/09)

**The Minister for Social Development:** A legislative consent motion is required when the Westminster Parliament intends to legislate on an area that falls within the competence of the Northern Ireland Assembly. The British Government will not include provisions in a Westminster Bill dealing with devolved matters unless the Northern Ireland Executive have agreed to it. Such provisions can be retained in the Westminster Bill only if the Northern Ireland Assembly has agreed to it by passing a legislative consent motion. There is no requirement for a legislative consent motion for the British Welfare Reform Bill, as it does not seek to legislate on matters that fall within the responsibilities of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

**Mr McClarty:** I thank the Minister for her response. Will she assure the House that her Department will prepare for Members a detailed synopsis of the Bill, with particular emphasis on the aspects that affect Northern Ireland before the legislative consent motion is introduced?

**The Minister for Social Development:** Mr McClarty raises very pertinent issues in relation to the prospective Welfare Reform Bill. We are taking on board all the issues that are being debated in Westminster, and there

are ongoing discussions with Ministers in Great Britain and with Ministers in the devolved Administrations and their officials concerning its impact. I will certainly take on board the Member's submission, and I will come back to him directly.

**Mr P Maskey:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle, agus go raibh maith agat, a Aire. How does the Minister believe the Welfare Reform Bill will affect the uptake and provision of benefits across the Six Counties?

**The Minister for Social Development:** The Bill's proposals are wide-ranging, and I understand that many of them will be piloted and evaluated before being introduced. The Member knows that, under existing parity arrangements, I must bring forward similar proposals, particularly in respect of provisions that relate to benefit conditionality. In so doing, I will ensure that the equality impact of the Bill's proposals is assessed fully and that full recognition is given to the need to protect the most vulnerable in our society. That is because I believe firmly that all of us are duty-bound to protect the most vulnerable. I will, therefore, assess the Welfare Reform Bill in that context.

**Mrs M Bradley:** Does the Minister have any concerns about proposals in the Welfare Reform Bill?

**The Minister for Social Development:** I am concerned about the fairness and practicality of some aspects of the Westminster proposals. For example, I believe that the proposition that benefit recipients with addiction problems be required to undergo treatment as a condition for benefit qualification poses all sorts of questions. I will consider all those and other matters.

## Disability Living Allowance

3. **Mr Brady** asked the Minister for Social Development, in relation to the Disability Living Allowance report brought forward by the DSD Committee, for her assessment of the recommendations leading to an improvement in administration of the allowance.

(AQO 2693/09)

**The Minister for Social Development:** Members are aware of my views on welfare entitlement. I am determined that every person who is entitled to support under the welfare system receives all that to which they are entitled, not least DLA, which involves decisions on entitlement that have an impact on vulnerable people.

Independent commentators recognise widely that disability living allowance is an especially complex benefit to administer. Nonetheless, mindful of the clients that it serves, I have set challenging public service agreement targets for DLA. Therefore, I am pleased to report that last year's indicative results represent the Social Security Agency's best DLA



performance since the benefit's inception in 1992. Subject to validation by the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the agency achieved financial accuracy of 99.7% against a target of 98%. It also achieved an average claims clearance time of 41 days against a target of 47 days. I am sure that Mr Brady agrees with me that that is a highly commendable performance that is worthy of acknowledgement.

Notwithstanding that, we are not complacent. During the debate last October in the House on the Committee for Social Development's report on the administration of disability living allowance, I welcomed and commended the Committee's work and acknowledged that the resultant recommendations were helpful as we strive to drive through even more improvements. I have since sent a memorandum of reply to the Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development containing my detailed response to each of the recommendations, the majority of which I have accepted. My officials will continue to update the Committee for Social Development on the remaining recommendations, on which work is progressing.

**Mr Brady:** I thank the Minister for her answer. Does she agree that there are still glaring inconsistencies and problems with the interpretation of medical conditions when decisions on DLA are being made?

**The Minister for Social Development:** Mr Brady raised the issue of medical conditions. I want to make the point very clearly that disability living allowance is paid as a contribution towards the extra costs that severely disabled people face as a result of having a long-term disability. Entitlement depends on the effects that the severe physical or mental disability has on the need for personal care and the ability to walk.

The reliance on effects, rather than the disability itself, ensures that all severely disabled people have equal access to the benefit, whatever the causes of their disabilities. There is no doubt that disabilities and a person's health can affect their ability to walk and to do certain things. It differs with each person; nobody is the same in that regard.

3.45 pm

**Mr Shannon:** I thank the Minister for her response. Mr Brady was right in what he said because the paperwork is off-putting. Does the Department have any intention of reviewing the paperwork and of simplifying the questions that are asked in the paperwork? That is important.

It is not sufficient for the Department to draw the conclusion that a person can walk, can self-help and can self-care if a GP states that the person's disability is not known. Will the Minister give an assurance that a review of the paperwork and the application form will be undertaken and that full information in relation to the applicant will be considered?

**The Minister for Social Development:** I think that Mr Shannon is referring to the initial application form that a person submits to ascertain whether they are entitled to disability living allowance or to ascertain the band within the various limits to which they are entitled. Notwithstanding the length of the form, I am very conscious that many claimants incur great difficulties and challenges when they are faced with such forms. I do not disagree that that is a very daunting task.

A new, shortened DLA claim form was introduced last November. Key customer representatives such as Citizens Advice, Advice Northern Ireland, the Law Centre and Disability Action were consulted on the design. They provided very positive feedback. I am sure that the Member is aware that the Social Security Agency also provides support for customers who need help with filling in DLA forms through face-to-face services or telephony.

I am still open to any other suggestions of ways to help people to complete forms and to reduce the problems or challenges that they face. In most instances, I fully take on board that people apply for DLA because they suffer from a disability. Work is also under way to examine the DLA renewal claim form that is in use with a view to reducing its length.

**Mr B McCrea:** Following on from the Minister's statement about forms and given the disproportionately large number of people in Northern Ireland who claim DLA compared to other regions of the United Kingdom, will the Minister assure us that sufficient controls are in place to ensure, even with the new shortened forms, that only people who are fully entitled to DLA are able to make claims? If all that is taken into consideration, does she expect the long-term trend of the number of DLA claimants to rise or fall?

**The Minister for Social Development:** I think that Mr Basil McCrea expects me to look into my surveyor's glass and make a prediction. The number of applicants and claims for disability living allowance in Northern Ireland is much higher than regions of Great Britain. However, we must ask ourselves what the reasons are for that. Perhaps there are greater levels of disability. We have to be sensitive to those issues. I cannot predict whether levels will increase, but I am sure that officials in the Social Security Agency will adopt a rigorous approach, along with medical practitioners and the examining medical practitioner, to assessing application forms.

Of course, if someone is unsuccessful, an application can be made to have a case reconsidered, and, if that is unsuccessful, he or she can appeal the decision, although, for many people, that can be a fairly daunting task. If a person is still unhappy as a result of an unfavourable appeal, it is possible to go, on a point of law, to the



social security commissioner. Therefore, every possible avenue is open. I am assured, however, that staff in the Social Security Agency adopt the most rigorous process. I want to be sensitive to vulnerable people who are in need, because we meet such people every day.

### **Housing Executive: Maintenance Grants**

4. **Mr Molloy** asked the Minister for Social Development for an assessment of the number of building firms and contractors that will be affected by the shortfall in the Housing Executive maintenance grants. (AQO 2694/09)

**The Minister for Social Development:** We are all aware of the £100 million shortfall in the housing budget for this year. However, broadly speaking, there has been no significant change in the allocation for the Housing Executive's revenue maintenance programmes. In fact, the Housing Executive has already advised its Egan contractors that it will be releasing programme maintenance starts worth £16 million.

In the present economic crisis, I feel strongly that we must adapt and focus our efforts on the areas that can deliver the greatest and most rapid stimulus to the economy. I have seen strong evidence from senior economists that increased investment in social housing is one of the best ways to keep businesses afloat and skilled workers in jobs.

House building offers a higher economic multiplier than larger infrastructure projects. It creates or sustains more jobs than other options, and it spreads the benefits over a wider geographical area. I am convinced of the need to increase investment in social housing to stimulate the economy, protect jobs and help those in housing stress, and I will continue to lobby my Executive colleagues for their support for my proposals. If I am successful, I will make every effort to use that investment to boost the economy.

I cannot assess how much the shortfall in the housing budget will impact on individual construction businesses, but I am doing everything in my power to maximise the work that is available to the sector. For example, I have instructed the Housing Executive to plan the newbuild programme using a much greater proportion of land and sites — commonly known as transfer sites — that it already owns, and, consequently, more of the available money will go directly into construction work and wage packets, instead of into land purchase costs.

**Mr Molloy:** Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for her answer. Does she agree that maintaining the present housing stock must remain a high priority, because any reduction in that stock would add to waiting lists?

**The Minister for Social Development:** Mr Molloy's question highlights the most fundamental requirement of the social housing development programme. Whether that involves newbuild or planned maintenance programmes, it must be placed on a sound financial footing. No more must the housing programme be subject to a hand-to-mouth existence, based on scraps from the quarterly monitoring rounds.

I will continue to try to persuade my Executive colleagues to reprioritise the housing budget. I have commissioned the University of Ulster to carry out some useful research in that respect, which I will publish shortly. There is no doubt that investment in social housing development programmes is an investment in one of the most labour-intensive industries, and it is a significant — perhaps the best — way to stimulate the local economy, create and provide a social asset and address social housing need.

**Mr Armstrong:** I agree with the Minister's analysis that the Housing Executive requires a lot of money. What encouragement has the Minister received from the Minister of Finance and Personnel that funding will be found to enable her to move forward with her plans?

**The Minister for Social Development:** Mr Armstrong has again highlighted the need for financial investment in the social housing development programme.

Perhaps, no Department has been affected by the fall in capital receipts as much as DSD, but, that said, we must make every pound go further with regard to the transfer sites. I am encouraging the Housing Executive and the housing associations to build on their own land, thus making the pound stretch further.

I have continually told the Minister of Finance and Personnel that we need to reprioritise the housing budget and that the hand-to-mouth existence to which the social housing development programme has been subjected through its receipt of scraps from quarterly monitoring rounds must be stopped. I have also presented those sentiments in documents to the Executive and to my ministerial colleagues. Housing is fundamental to the lives of everybody. We are duty-bound to address housing need throughout Northern Ireland, wherever it comes from.

I received a helpful letter from the Finance Minister back in January, and I noted that he met the Housing Council following a meeting that I had with that organisation. He published a statement and took on board and recognised the need for investment in the social housing development programme. It is to be hoped that that recognition and acknowledgement will be translated into a reprioritisation and that an investment of funds for the social development housing programme will be given number-one priority.

**Mr McGlone:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I heard what the Minister said about

investment in housing and construction being not only a significant factor in regeneration and the creation of jobs, but, primarily, in putting a roof over people's heads. There has been a significant fall in capital receipts. Will the Minister outline the consequential pressure points in respect of the housing spending programmes and their delivery?

**The Minister for Social Development:** I have prioritised the social housing development programme to ensure that we meet the target of 1,750 newbuild social homes and to protect the most vulnerable in our society through fuel poverty measures, such as the warm homes scheme. It is inevitable that the shortfall will have an impact on all the other housing capital programmes, with the main pressure points being private sector grants, Housing Executive multi-element improvement schemes and extensions for those requiring disabled adaptations.

The biggest factor is the collapse in private sector house building. However, the housing associations and DSD are increasing house building through the social housing development programme. About two years ago, we were only going to build 600 houses, but, at the end of last year, we had built 1,595, and, this year, I am determined to ensure that we build 1,750, in spite of this year's £100 million shortfall and next year's £100 million shortfall. Therefore, it is important that we place housing on a sound financial footing. That is why I commissioned research from the University of Ulster. I want to ensure that we put housing on a sound financial footing and that we secure the resources from the Executive to ensure that we address the needs of those who are most vulnerable and that we help those in the labour market and the construction industry and, above all, those in housing need.

### Village Regeneration Programme

5. **Ms Purvis** asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the regeneration programme for the Village area of South Belfast.  
(AQO 2695/09)

**The Minister for Social Development:** Last February, I announced plans for a £100 million regeneration of the Village that will transform the housing stock there through a mixture of demolition, newbuild and refurbishment. The Village was declared an urban renewal area in April 2008, and, since then, work has been ongoing to acquire those properties where advance purchase was requested. To date, 112 applications for advance purchase have been received, and agreement has been reached on 100 of those. Subsequently, the vesting application was lodged with my Department on 27 November 2008, and 116 objections to it have been received. Those are being dealt with by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

4.00 pm

The Village regeneration project is the largest single project on our books at the moment. It is a complex process, and not all the groups or individuals living in the area are in agreement about the details. I am pleased to have taken the initiative to get the redevelopment under way in an area that has some of the worst housing left in Northern Ireland, but operational matters are principally the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

**Ms Purvis:** Since the Minister is aware of the serious effects of multiple deprivation in the Village, can she give an assurance that the regeneration programme will be prioritised by her Department and rolled out in this Assembly term?

**The Minister for Social Development:** The very fact that we declared the Village an urban renewal area — and funding starts the minute an area is declared as such — and that work is ongoing shows our commitment to the project and the impetus behind it.

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

## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

### RUC Museum

*Debate resumed on amendment to motion:*

That this Assembly supports the suggestions for an RUC Museum at Brooklyn Headquarters near to the Garden of Remembrance; and calls on the Northern Ireland Office to allocate the necessary funding to enable building to begin during 2009.

— *[Mr Shannon.]*

*Which amendment was:*

*Leave out all after "Assembly" and insert:*

"notes the proposal for an RUC museum; believes that methods to acknowledge the past, including the role of the RUC and the different experiences of policing over the years, should be developed; and recommends that the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, the Policing Board, the Police Service of Northern Ireland, the Commission for Victims and Survivors and the future victims and survivors forum should consider the matter." — *[Mrs D Kelly.]*

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure has indicated that he wishes to respond on matters contained in the amendment.

**The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr Campbell):** I followed the debate, as I am sure other Members did, with great interest, given the complexity that would arise as a result of much of the discussion contained therein. I welcome the proposal to establish a policing/RUC museum. At present, policing is a reserved matter, with responsibility for it falling to the Northern Ireland Office. In whatever year the devolution of policing and justice may occur, I expect that responsibility for a proposed policing museum would transfer to the proposed new Department of justice. It would then be a matter for that Department to consider any business proposals put forward for the creation of a policing museum.

**Mrs D Kelly:** Most Members who spoke this afternoon said that they had no objection in principle to the establishment of a policing museum or to the history of policing on the island of Ireland as a whole. Indeed, some Members, particularly those from the Ulster Unionist Party, said that they believed that the proposal provided a means of creating cross-community support.

The SDLP in no way diminishes the sacrifice of many men and women over many years, and, in particular, over the past 30 to 40 years, when all too many of them paid the ultimate sacrifice. In recent months I visited the garden of remembrance, which was quite a poignant experience. I urge members of all communities to visit that garden and to note the names and stories behind the memorials. The only record that

tells the story behind some of those names is a book on the Troubles; other than that, unless one has personal experience or knowledge of the circumstances in which some officers lost their lives, there is no other means of telling their stories.

Members from Sinn Féin and other parties pointed out that there should be a way of telling our story. One of the recommendations of Bertha McDougall's report on support for victims and survivors focused on storytelling. Mr McCartney is a member of the management committee of the Museum of Free Derry, and he told us how important it was for people to be able to tell their story in their own words as they remembered it. All Members, right across the Chamber, recognised that there are differences in our experiences and in how we tell our story. There is history, story and historical facts.

No one is disputing the fact that there is general support for how we best remember the past. The SDLP amendment tried to set it in the context of the Eames/Bradley group and the wider storytelling, and the recognition of the many victims of the Troubles.

Mr Paisley Jnr, who is no longer in the Chamber, made comparisons between pygmies and giants. There can be no diminution of the SDLP's role in policing. The SDLP was the giant that led the way for the support of police reform across the nationalist community. For Mr Paisley to enter such a comparison into this afternoon's debate is an absurdity. He said that our amendment is about dillying and delay. That is not what the amendment is about. The SDLP amendment is about realities and the economic situation that Northern Ireland, and many nations across the globe, face today. Mr Paisley said that it shows that we falter and fail.

Here we are at the start of another week with no Executive business before us, there is no Executive business next week, and there was no Executive business last week. People are playing at electioneering, and Mr Paisley accused our party of doing that in moving the amendment. He should look to himself first, and if that is how he measures up dilly, delay, falter and fail, those words could, quite reasonably, apply to the Executive. In the Minister of the Environment's statement earlier today, he referred to four occasions on which, he alleges, Sinn Féin blocked progress at the Executive. The two main parties need to sort things out. I stress that it was Mr Paisley who entered such words into this afternoon's debate.

The Alliance Party spoke about the need to build a museum to recognise the worst of our past but, quite reasonably, recognised that one person's remembrance is not the same as another person's remembrance.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Will the Member please draw her remarks to a close?



**Mrs D Kelly:** We have handled this afternoon's debate maturely, and the SDLP amendment set it in the reality of today's economic climate.

**Mr Spratt:** I declare an interest as Chairperson of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee, which is considering the financial implications of the devolution of policing and justice, and the museum issue was raised in recent evidence.

I will go through some of the issues regarding a new policing museum and put them into the context of how the situation has been spun out by the Northern Ireland Office. As other Members have said, a new museum was announced in 2001 by the then Secretary of State, John Reid, in conjunction with the creation of the RUC GC Foundation. PSNI estates services initially submitted a business case to the Northern Ireland Office in November 2002, with projected costings of £9 million. That figure allowed for the completion of a memorial garden by 2004. Various sites were considered, including: Seapark; the proposed new policing college at Cookstown; Belfast city centre; the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum; and the Knock Road headquarters on the basis of a joint heritage site with the garden and with shared staffing and costs.

The RUC GC Foundation runs on a small annual budget of some £160,000, and most of the work is carried out by volunteers who work in the existing museum and who could work in a new museum. It was then agreed that PSNI estates services would withdraw from the agreement, and the RUC GC Foundation, in conjunction with the Northern Ireland Office, commissioned an independent feasibility study by a firm of museum consultants.

All stakeholders were consulted on the outline design case, and a business case was put together at a projected cost of £5 million, which represented a reduction of £4 million. The business case was submitted to the Northern Ireland Office in mid-2006. It included a further study of audience numbers and greater justification for the museum to be located on the Knock Road site, which the Northern Ireland Office said that it needed in order to put a robust case to HM Treasury in 2006.

The audience development plan was completed by another firm of consultants, and the RUC GC Foundation took the precaution of conducting a further independent site analysis. Again, that pointed firmly in favour of the Knock Road site. Critically, the audience development plan suggested that the museum should have a major educational and outreach role in relation to reconciliation and healing. It also recognised the importance of the museum being a living museum depicting the history of policing in Ireland, from the RIC to the RUC and through to the Police Service of Northern Ireland, because no other such museum or establishment exists.

As a number of Members have said, there are 8,000 exhibits being stored. Some of them are vehicles, a couple of which are on show at the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum. Other exhibits date back to the early 1800s. Some of them are very valuable and need to be on display.

The RUC memorial garden has a history trail that leads one through policing from 1814 into the garden where the names of those who died, both in the earliest troubles and in the more recent campaign, are inscribed. It is early days, but, as has been said, I hope that the name of Stephen Carroll, who tragically lost his life in the first terrorist attack since the formation of the PSNI, will be included in that garden at some point. I am sure that there will be discussions with the family in that regard, and I hope that everyone in the House will encourage that.

The business case, including the independent reports, was submitted to the Northern Ireland Office in late 2007. However, to the amazement of the RUC GC Foundation, the Northern Ireland Office stated that it required the written approval of the Policing Board and the Chief Constable in relation to the Knock Road site. As Ian Paisley Jnr indicated, the Policing Board agreed unanimously to that on 11 March 2008 and the Chief Constable gave the Police Service of Northern Ireland's approval on 30 April 2008.

After the business case had been processed further by a consultant, it was submitted to the Northern Ireland Office again in September 2008. Once again, the Northern Ireland Office has tried to stall the issue and has tried to divert the whole plan away from the Knock Road site. As my colleague Jim Shannon said, a very small museum, which was originally situated at the reception area of the old Brooklyn headquarters, has been moved to a small office close to the entry gate of PSNI headquarters. That museum is totally inadequate and, as has also been pointed out, very few people know that it is there.

*4.15 pm*

The business case was submitted for the final time on 18 November 2008, and it was believed that it would come before the Northern Ireland Office board in January 2009. Regrettably, that did not happen, and there were further meetings and administrative queries from the Department of Finance and Personnel on 23 March. So the whole scenario goes on. The final report of the Oversight Commissioner, in May 2007, also identified the construction of a museum "adjoining the garden" as a remaining issue of the Patten proposals. There have undoubtedly been a whole series of events to stymie the idea of having the museum there.

As many in the Chamber have said, this is an important part of the history of policing in Ireland. It is something that will be of immense importance,



because the plans that have been submitted provide for an amphitheatre for educational purposes within the museum. The PSNI will be able to use it; it is something that they lack in Belfast. The Assembly Education Service attracts schools on a daily basis from all sides of the community and further afield. A police museum would be a widely used facility. As has been pointed out by others, it could be used for tourism and to attract people.

I am heartened that there are no serious objections, but we oppose the SDLP amendment. It would further stymie the project. This is a legacy issue that the Northern Ireland Office should sort out.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The Member will please draw his remarks to a close.

**Mr Spratt:** It is a historic issue that needs to be settled, and I commend the motion to the House.

*Question, That the amendment be made, put and negatived.*

*Main Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

That this Assembly supports the suggestions for an RUC Museum at Brooklyn Headquarters near to the Garden of Remembrance; and calls on the Northern Ireland Office to allocate the necessary funding to enable building to begin during 2009.

## Children Missing from Care

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for this debate. The proposer 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. One amendment has been selected and published on the Marshalled List. The proposer of the amendment will have 10 minutes to propose and five minutes to make a winding-up speech.

**Miss McIlveen:** I beg to move

That this Assembly notes with concern the failure of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to monitor and maintain baseline figures relating to the number of children who go missing from care and the number of such incidents per child; demands action to address the lack of access to specialist therapeutic support services for these children across all Health and Social Care Trust areas; recognises the pressure on police resources and time in retrieving these children; calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to place greater emphasis on the needs of missing children and to ensure that his Department accurately accounts for these children in its role as corporate parent; and provides a clear strategy and resources to address the reasons for these children going missing and the risks to which they are exposed during their absence.

I am disappointed that, for the second time in two weeks, the Minister is unable to attend the Chamber for this debate. However, this matter is too important to be delayed again, and I will proceed this time in his absence.

I note that the last delay afforded the Minister's colleagues time to draft an amendment. I am content to accept that amendment. However, I cannot say that I am entirely happy. The purpose of the motion is to highlight a basic and fundamental gap in current practice in the Department. The Minister and his officials know that, hence their inability to answer the questions that have been posed. It was essentially agreed that the amendment should be the topic of an all-party motion to be tabled at a later date, following the debate on the substantive motion.

The motion was generated as a result of my concern at the experiences of some of the most vulnerable children and young people in our society. In Northern Ireland, almost 2,500 young people are in care, many of whom have stable placements and quality care. However, we all know that the overall outcomes for those children are likely to be poor.

The Department assumes the role of corporate parent of children in care, and therefore has the mantle of responsibility. According to the most recent figures, it remains a shameful fact that care-leavers are still 18 times more likely than other young people to leave school without any qualifications. In addition, more than half of all care-leavers, 53%, left school without

gaining qualifications, compared with 3% of all other school-leavers in Northern Ireland.

Only 12% of young people leaving care obtained five or more GCSEs, as opposed to 65% of pupils overall. That obviously has an additional knock-on effect, given that young care-leavers are also four times more likely to be unemployed than those of a similar age in the population.

I know that strategies and approaches are in place to address the needs of children in care and that that can happen only over the longer term. In particular, I welcome the publication of the White Paper 'Care Matters: Time for Change' and the specific educational support schemes that have recently been put in place. However, I remain particularly concerned for a much smaller number of children and young people whose vulnerability and risk are drastically increased by their experiences of running away from residential homes, and, less so, foster-care placements.

Experience here and in the rest of the United Kingdom tells us that, without doubt, children who go missing from care are subject to greater risks, including drug and alcohol misuse, sleeping rough and being sexually abused and exploited by adults who prey on their vulnerability. Reports by Extern, Barnardo's and the Children's Society all identify a young person's going missing as the most immediate indicator of sexual exploitation.

Since December, I have asked the Minister on three separate occasions and in three different ways to provide figures for the number of children in Northern Ireland who go missing. I am concerned that unless we are clear about the number of incidents of children who go missing from care and their patterns of risk, we will not be able to even begin to solve this problem. Keeping an accurate record of the number of children who go missing from care and the number of incidents per child are important indicators of children's safety and vulnerability.

I am aware that there is currently no legal requirement for those statistics to be kept or analysed, and I am genuinely concerned at that serious legislative gap. It does not seem too much to ask that vulnerable children be identified so that they can be helped. My understanding is that unless a child is missing from care for 24 hours, trusts will not have a record of them having gone missing. It does not take 24 hours for children to be at risk or come to harm.

Of the 2,500 children in care, only 13%, or 319, are in residential care. Last year, there were 325 reported notifications of children absconding from care. That is the only year for which I can find any figures. Although that clearly includes multiple incidents of individual children who go missing, I must register my concern that the figure is significantly high.

The PSNI has confirmed that, in 2007-08, there were 4,956 incident records for adults and children who went missing. A total of 616 of those had an address at a children's home. The lack of information means that it is not clear how many of those cases were repeat incidents and how many children they represent.

Retrieving children who go missing from care on a repeated basis represents a substantial investment of police time. Extern research shows that, in Northern Ireland, one in 10 children will run away from home, but it also shows that children in care are nearly five times more likely to run away overnight than those living in families.

They are also more likely to have had more than one episode of running away. Some 32% of young people who had spent time in care had run away three times, compared with only 13% of children who had never been in care. The research also indicates that running away is associated with mental-health difficulties, offending, and the use of alcohol and drugs.

Research and experience from the rest of the United Kingdom shows that children who repeatedly go missing are vulnerable and at risk. Repeatedly going missing from care is one of the most important indicators of increased vulnerability, as was recognised in the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) report 'Our Children and Young People — Our Shared Responsibility', which expressed concern about the repeated instances of children going missing, and about whether social workers and the police have sufficient resources to deal with them.

The report also identified the risk of sexual exploitation, whereby children in residential care were targeted and subjected to abuse by adults who knew that they were vulnerable. Some may accept children going missing from care as the norm, but would any of those who are parents in the Chamber accept that as the norm for their child?

A recent report by the House of Commons Committee on Children, Schools and Families argued that the state fails as a parent because it does not demand enough from services. Two essential demands must be made: to know when children are missing, how many times and why; and the recording and analysis of all that information to ensure that care becomes a better experience for children.

I know of one current example of a young girl aged 14 who regularly goes missing from care, where she has been living since the age of nine. From a young age, she witnessed significant domestic violence and alcohol abuse in her family. Over the past year, she has been going missing from the children's home and staying away for increasingly long periods, usually from 8.00 pm to between 3.00 am and 5.00 am. Each time she goes missing, the home reports the incident to

the PSNI. She often returns in a dishevelled state and is subsequently too tired to attend school. It is strongly suspected that she has been under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs. I am not implying that her story is shared by a substantial number of children in care, but it is by a few. For one child to have that experience today in Northern Ireland is one too many. Unless the experiences of such children going missing from care are rigorously recorded and analysed, it is too easy not to see the child's real story.

In response to the recommendations contained in 'Our Children and Young People — Our Shared Responsibility', the Department published guidance in April 2009 that seeks to ensure that the PSNI and staff in children's homes work together to protect children. The guidance introduces a traffic-light system that recognises the difference between children who return late and those who are missing and, therefore, at risk. I ask the Minister to confirm what, if any, multi-agency training is being put in place to ensure that the PSNI and social care staff are clear about how to implement that guidance.

To my knowledge, only one specific support service for children exists; it operates in the east of the Province and is partly funded by the Department. To date, in the first nine months of its operation, some 23 referrals have been made from that one area. Will the Minister tell the Assembly whether he plans to invest additional resources in specific services for children who go missing from care? Is he familiar with the young runaways action plan that was published in England and Wales? That plan seeks to provide support to children and prevent them from running away from home or care. Does the Minister plan to consider such a strategy for Northern Ireland?

I have seen the project to which the amendment refers in operation in Manchester. I am, therefore, aware of the need for such a project in Northern Ireland. However, for such a project to be implemented here requires the basic measures, such as accurate record keeping, to be in place. That is the primary motivation behind my motion. I am glad that the Ulster Unionist Party, by accepting the motion, albeit with an amendment, recognises the need for the Department and other agencies to do more.

I will write to the Minister to advance the issues that are raised in the debate. Given the clear legislative gap that I highlighted, I will consider the merit of introducing a Private Member's Bill. I hope that the Minister will support me in that initiative.

**Mr Beggs:** I beg to move the following amendment:  
At end insert

“; furthermore notes the danger of sexual exploitation that children missing from care can face; notes the successful approach of the Manchester Safeguarding Children Board 'Protect Team', and calls on the Northern Ireland Office to ensure that the Police

Service of Northern Ireland, in conjunction with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the relevant voluntary sector organisations, provides an enhanced Protect Team for Northern Ireland with a view to preventing the sexual exploitation of children and young people.”

I declare an interest as a member of the Carrickfergus children and young person's locality group. Barnardo's paid for my travel costs when I visited Manchester with other MLAs to observe the work of the Protect team.

I thank the Member for tabling the motion. It highlights the issue of children who go missing from care, the need for improved support, and the need to record and analyse the experience of such children.

4.30 pm

The motion calls for more resources and for the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to place greater emphasis on the needs of vulnerable young people. It calls for a clear strategy and for resources to be made available to address the reasons why those children go missing. That is all very laudable.

Let us chart where we are and where we have come from. In May 2007, the Economic Research Institute of Northern Ireland published the report 'An Analysis of Public Expenditure on Children in Northern Ireland: Part 1: Spending on Children's Services'. It revealed that, in 2004-05, less was spent on each child in Northern Ireland than in other parts of the United Kingdom. It showed that 28.6% less was spent on each child than in England and 33% less than in Wales. The proportion of Northern Ireland's personal and social services budget that was spent on children amounted to only 14.1%, compared with 24% in England and 26.1% in Wales. During direct rule, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety underinvested significantly in children's services, which received significantly less funding than similar services in the rest of the United Kingdom.

The motion fails to recognise the significant developments that have taken place in the children's sector in recent years. The 'Families Matter' strategy document, which was published in March 2009, is particularly relevant to the debate, as is the Care Matters strategy. I understand that the early draft of 'Care Matters' was delayed for several months during the Sinn Féin/DUP spat last summer. That means that progress on the matter has been delayed because of politics.

I am pleased —

**Mr Weir:** I noticed that the Member criticised the wording of the motion because it does not mention the positive progress that has been made. However, given that the amendment does not refer to that either, does that mean that the Member is critical of his own amendment?

**Mr Beggs:** I am conscious that we have all failed in the area, and I did not wish to say that no further



improvement is needed. No one can ever say that, when it comes to children going missing, they do so at a satisfactory level.

I am pleased to learn that the 'Care Matters' document has been finalised, that it has been with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, and that it has now been passed to the Executive for final approval.

What is the relevance of those documents? They are relevant because, if families who are at risk are supported, fewer children will enter care. The evidence is clear: children who are in a caring family environment have a much better chance of reaching their full potential than those who are placed in care. Children who are outside the care system are also less likely to go missing. In addition, a wide range of new investments is being made in services for children and young people who are in care.

I hope that those omissions from the motion are not a sign that children's issues are being used for party political purposes to attack the Minister. It would be helpful if the proposer of the motion would advise the House about when — or whether — she has written to the Minister or sought a meeting with him on the matter.

The all-party Assembly group on children and young people received health officials at its March meeting, and we were advised of progress on the Families Matter strategy. That strategy acknowledges that parents are best placed to support children. It advocates strengthening universal services and developing services for families that need extra help. A further £2.4 million in recurrent moneys is attached to the strategy.

Last week, Fergal Bradley from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety briefed the all-party Assembly group on children and young people on the Care Matters strategy. He and his colleagues must be complimented on the progress that has been made to date, but more must be done.

The Care Matters strategy has been developed with input from key partners, including the Department of Education, which educates the children; DEL, which helps some of them to go to further education; the Department for Social Development, which has a role in their getting housing; OFMDFM, which is responsible for children's matters; the Northern Ireland Office; the Youth Justice Agency; and the voluntary sector. Each of those bodies has a degree of responsibility for children and young people in care, and, by making changes, they can improve the lives of and outcomes for those vulnerable individuals.

Safeguarding and information sharing is a key issue that has been highlighted, and piloting arrangements for the collocation of social work staff in the PSNI public protection unit is suggested. An information-sharing protocol is being developed, and, if it is to be

meaningful, it is obvious that statistics such as those relating to children who are missing from care will be a key indicator. That should have been done in the past, and it must be ensured that it is done going forward.

Additional money is available to invest in family intervention services that are consistent with the Families Matter agenda. If we are to afford a better future for our children and young people, it is clear that a range of improvements will be required, with the co-operation of all the bodies that I mentioned.

The motion refers to the risk to which children and young people are exposed during their absence from care. It is vital that the Assembly identifies one of the main risks, which has been mentioned earlier; namely, the sexual exploitation of children and young people. It must propose measures to deal with that, which is why I tabled the amendment.

Some people might suggest that sexual exploitation of children does not happen in Northern Ireland. I will tell Members of my experience of visiting Barnardo's Beyond the Shadows project in Belfast over a year ago. The project worked with some of the most marginalised young people in Northern Ireland. During the meeting, a case worker had to leave the room to take a telephone call from a young girl who was alone in a locked room and did not know where she was. She had gone out with people whom she thought were her friends. Clearly, those people were not her friends. She was being exploited.

Vulnerable young people, particularly those who are in care, seek friendship, contact and close liaison with others. Therefore, they are particularly vulnerable to unscrupulous men. Indeed, a recent edition of the 'Sunday World' revealed that young girls in east Belfast had been given drink and drugs by older men, who then exploited them.

Before Easter 2009, Barnardo's took other MLAs and me to visit the Manchester Safeguarding Children Board's Protect team. Its model involves close partnership working between police, social services and the voluntary sector. It is recognised as being successful at proactively preventing sexual exploitation of children and is being replicated across greater Manchester and, indeed, further afield throughout the United Kingdom.

A social worker leads on case planning, undertakes direct work with young people and their families and is the key link worker with individual homes. Police gather evidence and intelligence. They also use preventative strategies, such as warnings under section 2 of the Child Abduction Act 1984 and section 49 of the Children Act 1989. I want to know more about those warnings: how often, if at all, are they used in Northern Ireland? Of course, the voluntary sector



supports young people and raises awareness of the dangers of being drawn into sexual exploitation.

The group of MLAs was told that some 54 warnings under the Child Abduction Act 1984 had been issued in the Manchester programme. Only two of them had been breached. Therefore, most people who attempted to draw vulnerable young people into a dangerous situation had heeded the warnings because of the severity of punishment. Have any such warnings been issued in Northern Ireland? If not, what changes are necessary to enable that tool to be used here? Are new protocols and regulations needed? The Assembly needs to hear from the police on the matter. I hope that all parties who have responsibility for it will get together and talk.

There is a 90% conviction rate in cases that the Protect team have taken to court. Significant statistics are available. During a six-month snapshot in 2007, 62 young people who had been referred had gone missing 769 times. Post-referral, they went missing only 276 times, which represents a 64% reduction. As regards children from care specifically, 22 looked-after children had been missing 312 times. Those are the sort of figures that one might expect to emerge in Northern Ireland. There is no reason why Northern Ireland would be significantly different from elsewhere. That figure was reduced by 21%.

Many children continue to go missing. We must recognise that young people cannot be stopped from leaving a home. They must be encouraged and supported to stay. In extreme cases, a secure detention order can be used. I understand that such an order has been used recently in Northern Ireland.

Therefore, the benefits of a multi-agency team include better access to information; better understanding of different agencies' roles; information sharing; better knowledge; and improved outcomes. How would such a team be comprised in Northern Ireland? Perhaps, it would be comprised of a dedicated PSNI sergeant and two constables; social workers from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety; and a voluntary sector practitioner.

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

**Mr Beggs:** I ask Members to support the amendment, which calls for measures that have proved successful elsewhere.

**Ms S Ramsey:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the substantive motion and commend its proposers. I also take on board the reasoning behind the amendment, because it is right that the Assembly deals with kids who go missing from care.

The amendment deals with realities, such as sexual exploitation, and highlights the need for a joined-up approach to address the matter. As the mover of the motion said, the House should not divide on this serious issue. The Assembly should send a coherent message to the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and his officials.

I had intended to commend the Minister — credit where credit is due — on the work that he and his officials have carried out to date. However, the Minister is not attending today's debate. Given that he was dealing with the swine flu crisis, I could have accepted a postponement last week. His failure to attend today sends a negative message about the importance of vulnerable children to him and his Department. I hope that the health sector does not go to the wall because of swine flu.

For the record, other Ministers have shown the capability and commitment to deal with crises in their Departments and have had the manners to participate in and listen to debates in the Chamber, most notably Michelle Gildernew during the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease and bluetongue. During Mr Beggs's contribution, it struck me that Michelle Gildernew is able to multitask because she is female. We must consider the Minister's failure to respond to a 90-minute debate on a serious issue that affects human beings.

During his speech, Mr Beggs made several excuses about Every Child Matters and the children's strategy; this month's excuse is swine flu. Last month and the previous month, the excuse was the lack of Executive meetings. I patiently await next month's excuse.

**Mr Beggs:** The document will be completed. I understand that it is now with the Executive.

**Ms S Ramsey:** Other documents from the health sector and the Department did not sit on desks because the Executive was not meeting. Mr Beggs is well aware that he is politicking on an issue that affects vulnerable people.

My minute of negativity is now over, and I commend — I have only a couple of minutes left — the mover of the motion and my colleagues who tabled the amendment, because the issue affects the most vulnerable in society. We are failing children and young people in care, some of whom are there through no fault of their own. The state is supposed to be their parent. It is important that the original motion does not simply demand that we monitor and deal with kids who go missing from care, rather than wait 24 hours before anything kicks in. I doubt that the provision that will kick in after 24 hours is what is required.

Moreover, the state has failed to address some serious issues that affect kids in care. We need to consider that matter and adopt a joined-up approach to ensure that, when young people become part of the

care setting through residential care, foster care or other types of care, society has a proactive package to deal with their emotional, physical, educational and health needs and protect them from exploitation. Mr Beggs mentioned the 'Sunday World'. Every week, that newspaper contains stories of how older people prey on our most vulnerable. We need to stop that behaviour. We should not wait 24 hours before we decide if a person is vulnerable. Children who go missing from care are in a vulnerable position.

I have no problem with the issues that are outlined in the motion and the amendment. As Mr Beggs said, the PSNI and the Department need to work closely. When children are returned to care homes, nobody asks why they absconded in the first place. We all know of cases in which children are brought back but go missing again the next day. We need to create a joined-up strategy to deal with kids who go missing and are vulnerable in the community and to ask why they decide to go AWOL.

I accept the Member's point that the Executive have been considering issues of housing and social justice. There is an onus on the ministerial subgroup that deals with children and young people not to create more work for the Executive that will provide an excuse for their lack of work on the matter. They need to focus on the issue with a collective responsibility and reach a collective outcome.

Kids are in care, some of them because they are vulnerable. We must ensure that we take away that vulnerability and stop others from exploiting them. I commend the motion and the amendment.

4.45 pm

**Mrs M Bradley:** I am sure that we can all agree in the House that the most important commodity that any country can have is its children. That is what we need to concentrate on today; that and what makes a child run away from care. If a child is not happy in care there is definitely something wrong. Our care system is supposed to protect and nurture in the absence of parental influence for whatever reason.

Looked-after children are nearly always the most vulnerable children. They have had experiences that some adults may never have in their lifetime. They will nearly always need support even when they leave care. How, then, does the child who has run away cope alone outside the care system? They are exposed to the increasingly familiar drug rings, the sex trade and the child-trafficking business. They are at most risk from themselves, and the fact that they often have had no previous sound family experiences to draw upon means that they do not instinctively sense whether an experience is good or bad. Any form of affection or consideration, misguided or not, is often a welcome caller to the looked-after child.

We were recently horrified by the brutal details that emerged from the case of Baby P in the UK and the lack of occupational investigation by those charged with protecting the vulnerable in society. However, we are here today not to dig around the whys and wherefores of such a case but to examine the preventative issues which should ensure that we never see another Baby P and that those in positions of trust are armed with the necessary manpower and can utilise a fully accessible database of information and complaints that, when consulted and acted upon, should make the experience of a looked-after child or young person a more helpful and friendly one. In turn, that should create a more stable and pleasant care environment, leading to a reduction in the number of runaway episodes, which are common at present.

The entire system must be examined. The provision of care and the recruitment and allocation of social workers to individual cases must be reassessed and, more importantly, the workload of social workers must be addressed. In the past I have had occasion to approach social services about children who are on the child protection register, only to be met with what I can best describe as a nonchalant attitude to what I considered a serious situation. The shift in attitude must begin at the heart of social services, not with the paperwork. My local social services workers, although very approachable, have an extraordinary workload. It is neither helpful nor wise to place the lives of vulnerable children and young people in the hands of overworked people with a serious morale issue.

I admit that there are obvious time and financial constraints involved in retrieving a child who runs away. However, the real change will come only when we can identify what makes children go missing in the first instance. Children need to be protected and looked after but not only in status. They need to be looked after by social services in a true parental manner, not in a pitiful manner. Children and young people are not an item that we can throw away or recycle. We get one chance at life, and it is a lottery for most of us.

Good records and good administration are essential, but true care is what is needed. The interdepartmental approach is what will guide this issue and form the best response to the problem. The solution is a matter not just for the Department of Health, but for the entire spectrum of the Executive. Children's lives are mapped right across each and every Department in the Executive. It is wrong to lay the responsibility at the door of one Minister; it is a shared problem, in what the Assembly likes to refer to as a shared society. A shared problem needs a shared solution. It also needs financial support, so that what is needed for children in care can be implemented. I support the motion and the amendment.

**Mrs Long:** I thank the Members who brought the motion to the House and those who tabled the

amendment. It has already been mentioned that the absence of the Health Minister is a major disappointment in the context of this debate. I agree with Sue Ramsey; I do not believe that his presence in the Chamber for an hour and a half as a courtesy to Members would have significantly set back his response to swine flu.

I am also disappointed that, being part of an overall Executive, no other Ministers were willing to respond to this important debate, given its cross-cutting nature.

**Mr Weir:** This matter was raised at a Business Committee meeting that I attended. The Minister could probably explain it, but my understanding is that it is up to Ministers, if they are going to be absent, to request that an individual stand in for them. Therefore, the Minister in question has a veto. Indications were made that Mr McGimpsey did not want any other Minister to stand in on his behalf. It is not a question of the unwillingness of the other Ministers; it is because Mr McGimpsey is not prepared to allow anyone else to speak on his behalf.

**Mrs Long:** The Member's point is welcome, because it highlights the issue of whether or not the Executive are functioning in a joined-up fashion. The two junior Ministers in OFMDFM are tasked with dealing with children's and young people's issues, and it is unfortunate that arrangements could not have been made in the Executive to ensure that there was some response to the debate. I will not get into a discussion about who blocked that. I am simply stating that, as a matter of record, it is disappointing. Mary Bradley is right to say that the issue of children missing from care is cross-cutting and extremely important.

Some of our most vulnerable young people are also among the most stigmatised in society. In many cases, the emphasis that is being put on the role of the police can lead to a perception in the community that young people who are living in children's homes are involved in illegal activity. I agree with the proposers of the motion that those issues must be handled with great sensitivity.

Many young people are in care homes to be protected from dangerous, abusive or destructive environments. It is crucial that the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in its role as a corporate parent, ensures that risks to young people are significantly reduced and that they are properly managed while they are in care. Young people must be safe, not only from the threat of external harm and exploitation but from their own dangerous self-harming or risk-taking behaviour, which may happen because of significant levels of distress.

The motion calls for the extent of the problem to be monitored. We need statistics if we are to determine the scope of the problem and know whether to respond and to what degree and whether that response is working. Practitioners to whom I have spoken in the

run-up to the debate have suggested that the risks to which children are exposed when they go missing vary quite dramatically, depending, partially, on how long the absence lasts and how frequently those young people are absent.

The perception that has been built up by monitoring statistics in England and Wales is that, when young people are absent for longer periods, they are at risk of much more serious harm. However, statistics on young people who are repeatedly absent are also a high indicator that those children are at risk of sexual exploitation in particular. In Northern Ireland, it is assumed that, on the basis of people's knowledge of the children with whom they work, young people are often absent from care for shorter periods. Their carers know where they have gone, because they return to family, a relative, a friend or a hang-out, and people know their whereabouts. The difficulties arise when that behaviour is addressed. A lack of proper monitoring and intervention makes it difficult to change that behaviour.

There is also a small but vulnerable group of young people comprising children in care who have been trafficked or who have sought asylum as minors without adult supervision. Those young people are more likely to disappear from the system than any other group of young people. They are hugely vulnerable, because they have no adult supervision or support networks.

No one will deny that sexual exploitation of young people is a significant issue. However, their physical safety, their vulnerability to crime and their health are also important, particularly if they are repeatedly going missing and are living rough. Interviewing returning children is, therefore, crucial, because it identifies the reasons behind the episode, helps to inform future care and gives the right level of support to those young people and the people who work with them.

The use of police resources has been raised, and we have to concede that dealing with children missing from care is a drain on those resources. From time to time, that issue has been raised in my constituency in cases involving difficult circumstances. No one will argue that anything other than non-contact methods should be used in children's homes. A young person can be reasoned with before he or she leaves if a carer knows that it is going to happen, but there is little that one can do to prevent them from leaving care. Alternative methods, such as locking the facility or introducing contact methods, have the potential to raise issues of trust with young people and the legal liabilities of staff. There are huge sensitivities around the issue. It also raises the issue of whether we want our care homes to become, more or less, secure facilities. We do not. Not all those young people need that level of protection. Once a child goes missing from care, there is very little option but to engage with the police — not to do so may result in serious



consequences. The police are the only people with the power to return those children.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Will the Member draw her remarks to a close?

**Mrs Long:** We need a more coherent strategy, and I hope that the Minister will assure us that we will get one. Unfortunately, in the absence of statistics, it is hard to see how that will be achieved. In Wales, it has been shown that people living in families are less likely to abscond and be at risk.

This is Foster Care Fortnight. If more work were done on that front, we could deal with many such issues in a more sensitive way.

**Mr Storey:** I commend my colleague for moving the motion.

The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has an unenviable and undistinguished record of maintaining proper records on vital issues of public concern, and we should not lose sight of that. There is a great deal of blame passing and saying that it is someone else's fault. I am surprised at the number of times that Ministers come before the House — when they do come before the House; on this occasion, the Minister of Health has not — to use the excuse that an issue is cross-cutting or that they are part of a four-party mandatory coalition, almost as an excuse for not doing their job.

Let us focus for a moment on the responsibilities of the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. We note particularly that the motion highlights:

“the failure of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to monitor and maintain baseline figures relating to the number of children who go missing from care”.

That is not the responsibility of any other Minister. We could probably give the Minister of Health some latitude if this were the only issue on which he does not maintain suitable records and information. I will list some of the issues that my colleagues asked the Minister about in recent months: the number of patients transferred to hospitals outside Northern Ireland due to a lack of beds or personnel; departmental records of the amount of public money spent on hospitality; the number of children with speech difficulties; the number of patients presenting at accident and emergency departments who were told to go home and come back the next day; the percentage take-up of the flu vaccine; and the incidence of hospital-acquired pneumonia.

**Mrs Long:** Will the Member add to that list that there are no records kept on staff assaults in the Health Service or of the outcome of prosecutions that are pursued or whether boards have supported the staff involved?

**Mr Storey:** I thank the Member for her intervention. I tabled a question asking what records are kept in

accident and emergency departments in relation to domestic violence.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order. The motion is on children missing from care. I ask the Member to stick to the motion and not to digress.

**Mr Storey:** Not that I would ever question the ruling of the Chair, but I have to set the debate in some context. We are talking about the Minister —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order, order. I have allowed the Member a degree of latitude to set the debate in some context. I ask him to return to the subject of the debate.

**Mr Storey:** I return to the subject of the debate. The answers were: “unavailable”, “not kept” or we were told that an answer could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The lack of proper records on children missing from care is not just a failure of good government; it is a failure of basic care. That is why the debate is timely and important. If children go missing — particularly from children's homes — that is a failure of officialdom. It is also a ministerial failure.

There is absolutely no point in blaming the system. That defence has not worked for MPs' expenses claims, and it will not work here. The system needs to be changed. It does not need to be changed to please Members; it needs to be changed to address the needs of children in the months and years ahead.

5.00 pm

Nobody would ever say that it is best for any child to grow up in care; it is absolutely far better for a child to grow up in a loving, caring family environment. We witnessed recently how the Children's Commissioner concluded that it was better to place a child in care and criminalise its parents than to have that child grow up in a home where parents use physical discipline. However, apart from that kind of ideological aberration, most people would conclude that it is far better for a child to grow up in a loving, caring environment.

Unfortunately and regrettably, that is not always possible. When that is the case, the care system should be supportive of the child, should be supportive of the establishing of good relationships and should do everything possible to make that child feel valued, loved and cared for. Often, when a child runs away from either a care home or his or her own home, it is because that has become an established practice and something that is easy for the child to do.

In many cases, tension surrounding the break-up of a family — as the result of a divorce or separation, for example — has been very high up the list of reasons that children run away. However, if the Department's set response does not involve an acknowledgement of



that fact, how does that help the child's growth and development? Clearly, it does not.

I would have made that point to the Minister today, had he been present, but, unfortunately, he is absent. We need to know whether the Minister is prepared to put in place the appropriate information to tell us exactly what the case is. It is past the time for excuses and ministerial absenteeism; it is time for action on the part of the Minister. I support the motion.

**Mrs O'Neill:** I support the motion and the amendment.

Today's debate has brought to the fore many of the worrying concerns about the safety of young people in care. The figures that have been referred to indicate that, at present, approximately 2,400 children are in care in the Six Counties, with approximately 57% of those placed with foster carers and around 13% placed in residential care. Those figures are certainly startling. We all recognise that where it has taken responsibility for vulnerable children, the state needs to do more to ensure that those children are safe and have a better life.

I take this opportunity to commend the good work that foster carers do in our communities. They provide a loving and caring environment and emotional support for the children who are placed in their care.

Members have said that no centrally held accurate statistics exist on the number of children who go missing while in care. No statistics are available that state the overall number of those children who go missing on multiple occasions. We are told that those statistics are difficult to gather, as some people may go missing for short periods. In her contribution to the debate, the proposer of the motion outlined how there is no legislative requirement to keep such statistics. If the Department is serious about keeping those children safe, we need to gather that information to ensure the best provision for those children, who are most definitely in need.

Barnardo's, jointly funded by the Department of Health, offers a limited service that is aimed specifically at children missing from care. That service, to which Members referred earlier, is located in the Eastern Health and Social Care Board area. Children who are not in that area do not have the same access to the specific therapeutic support to address the risks and difficulties associated with repeated instances of missing children.

Of the core issues that have been outlined in today's debate and in the Members' briefing from Barnardos, one is that those children who are repeatedly missing from care are some of the most vulnerable in our society. Another is that the lack of centrally held information on the issue makes it very difficult to analyse and address. Another is that there is no comprehensive monitoring system or strategy in place

to address those issues, and that has implications for effective service planning.

As Members have said also, there are clear indications that for a small but significant number of children and young people, there is a link between being missing from care repeatedly and instances of sexual exploitation. Those are serious issues of concern. Today's debate has highlighted many issues, and we need to see action.

The amendment refers to examples of good practice in Manchester; specifically, the Manchester Safeguarding Children Board's Protect team.

We must look to those examples to inform us in developing a clear strategy to prevent harm to vulnerable young people in care. As has been clear from the debate, we need a cross-cutting strategy to identify and tackle the issues, and we look forward to that being taken forward on a cross-departmental and cross-statutory basis.

I support the motion and the amendment.

**Mr Weir:** Like other Members, I commend the proposer of the motion and my colleagues who tabled it. It would be remiss of me not to express disappointment that the Minister is not in the Chamber to be with us on such an important subject. All Members appreciate the significance of the swine flu problem, but it beggars belief that he could not spare an hour and a half to be with us on such an important subject.

**Mr McCallister:** Does the Member not accept that a Minister would need a great deal more than an hour and a half to prepare for such an important debate? It is not just a question of a Minister turning up in the Chamber and taking part in a debate.

**Mr Weir:** Given that the Minister does not appear to have done a great deal on the issue and having listened to some of his replies, one wonders how long he would have prepared for it.

**Ms S Ramsey:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Weir:** I have already given way once.

**Ms S Ramsey:** I will take only 20 seconds.

**Mr Weir:** OK.

**Ms S Ramsey:** The Member may agree with me that the Minister thought that it was important to come to Question Time but not to this debate because the former was live on TV. That highlights the problem.

**Mr Weir:** In the words of a fictitious politician of a while ago:

"You may very well think that; I couldn't possibly comment."

It beggars belief that the Minister is busy 24/7 dealing with swine flu; one wonders how the country copes when he is asleep at night. How are we not overwhelmed by swine flu? I am also disappointed that there do not appear to be any departmental officials in

the Chamber, although that may be a symptom of the Minister's absence. I am also disappointed that the motion is needed. As my colleague Michelle McIlveen said, she pressed the Minister with questions on the issue on three occasions, and the information was not forthcoming.

Leaving that aside, I welcome the motion and the amendment. I agree with other Members that the amendment slightly puts the cart before the horse, and there are vital things that need to be put in place before we can move forward on it. However, the amendment offers a welcome way forward, which is something to embrace.

As Mr Beggs and Mr Storey said, we all share a belief that a family environment is best for children. Providing whatever support that we can to families is of benefit to society in human and economic terms. Mr Storey also acknowledged that that is unfortunately not always possible with every family, and that in many cases, children end up in care because their family circumstances are simply inappropriate. For example, mention was made of sexual exploitation; unfortunately, the vast majority of sexual exploitation happens in the home. Consequently, we are left with a large number of children in care.

As the proposer of the motion said, statistics on the issue are scant. However, police statistics show that a disproportionate number of missing children are in care, which is why they should be the focus of our attention. As Naomi Long said, before we can provide concrete solutions to the problem, we need to know its scope. Consequently, it is vital to have robust statistics and records to highlight patterns in the disappearance of children.

That is not simply an academic exercise: missing children are vulnerable to being led into activities that are harmful to themselves and to society. It has not been mentioned, and I do not want to dwell on it, but there are two sides to the problem; society as a whole suffers when children are led into criminal activity.

In my constituency, a care home and a juvenile justice centre are in close proximity, and for many years, residents who lived close by suffered from antisocial behaviour. Although the juvenile justice centre often got the blame for that, in practice a wide range of children was involved, and very rarely were any of them directly connected to the Rathgael site.

Society suffers as a result of such criminal activity. Perhaps more so, however, children suffer. Vulnerable children are led astray into a range of activities, be it crime, drinking, drug-taking or sexual exploitation. The protection of those vulnerable children must be foremost in our mind.

Mention was made of the fact that we have, at least as a first step, some level of model that can be rolled

out across Northern Ireland. That does not preclude further steps being taken. Again, we have the example of what operates in the former Eastern Health and Social Services Board area. However, we are witnessing one bit of good practice in one former board area that is not being repeated elsewhere. As was the case in the debate that the Assembly had some time ago on autism, in which a range of board responses to adult autism was revealed, with some boards being more proactive than others, here is an example of good practice that has effectively been ring-fenced by one health board.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I ask the Member to draw his remarks to a close.

**Mr Weir:** We need to adopt a much more joined-up approach. 'Our Children and Young People — Our Shared Responsibility' outlines a positive way forward. That needs to be implemented, and we need to have the statistics available so that the problem can be tackled for the sake of the most vulnerable children. I support the motion and the amendment.

**Mr Gardiner:** I support the motion and my colleagues' proposed amendment. I preface my remarks by making some important observations. Today's motion is the fifty-fifth private Members' motion that the DUP has tabled on health. It comes after the Minister has made 14 statements to the House, answered 3,500 health questions and steered no fewer than five Bills through the Assembly. That represents a workload four times greater than that of the closest DUP Minister. When will the DUP give the Minister time to manage his Department? The Minister of Health is in the midst of managing a swine flu crisis —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order. As I did with Mr Storey, I ask the Member to return to the motion's subject matter, which is "Children Missing from Care". Thank you, Mr Gardiner.

**Mr Gardiner:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for drawing my attention to that point, but some statements, which I feel need clarification, were made earlier in the debate about the Minister's actions. The Minister is active, and it is worth noting that among those who are criticising him for not being here today is not one single DUP member of the Health Committee. Where are they? They should be here supporting their colleagues, but none of them is here.

Why was the subject of the debate not brought before the Health Committee? Why, indeed, did the Health Committee fail to meet last week? The answer is that it could not get a quorum. I received a telephone call to say that, apart from me, only three Committee members were available to attend the meeting: my colleague Mr McCallister and a Sinn Féin Committee member. Therefore, we could not hold a Committee meeting. It would have been much more constructive

to have brought the matter of children missing from care before the Health Committee for mature discussion rather than try to grandstand with yet another health debate. The subject chosen for debate was deliberately emotive, and its timing deeply inappropriate. We are now not simply having debates on health but debates on children.

All those DUP health debates cast aspersions on the professionalism and dedication of the many excellent health professionals in the Health Service.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order, order. Mr Gardiner, it is time to return to the subject matter of the motion, please, which is "Children Missing from Care".

**Mr Gardiner:** I again thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for reminding me about that, but certain matters must be highlighted, such as the DUP's hypocrisy in its attacks on the Health Service.

Our main concern is for children who go missing from care. I support the motion and the amendment.

5.15 pm

**Mrs Hanna:** I support the motion and the amendment.

The fact that children go missing in Northern Ireland is a huge concern for everyone who is involved in the protection of children. Although it is the responsibility of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, it is a much wider societal issue, and it requires far more family support, early support and early intervention. However, the fact that the Health Department does not have adequate records for children who go missing from care is very worrying. There is no baseline data, so it is impossible to measure the extent of the problem and, consequently, to address it. Without those adequate records, we are not sure who is running away, why they are running away, or, indeed, whether a child is repeatedly running away.

There are a number of reasons why young people run away from care. It may be because of an unsuitable family placement, for example. There is also the issue of young asylum seekers, who are vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking.

Improving the lives of children is a priority for the Health Department. It states that effort needs to be focused on the most vulnerable and disadvantaged, and no group is more vulnerable or disadvantaged than children. It is essential that all partners work together: the statutory agencies, the Police Service, health and social services, and the NIO, because it still has that responsibility. Indeed, the Manchester Safeguarding Children Board emphasised that point.

Runaways are on the increase in the UK, and I am led to believe that that may also be the case in Northern Ireland. 'Care Matters in Northern Ireland' outlines the vision to improve services for children in,

or on the edge of, care and to provide support. The Care Matters strategy, which was launched in 2007, planned to improve the outcomes for children who were looked after by the state. I am pleased to hear that the strategy is with the Executive and is soon to be implemented, because charities that work with young people, such as Barnardo's and Save the Children, are advising us of what we know anyway: children who run away from care homes may turn to sleeping rough, begging, theft, drugs and alcohol, because they are living on the street and do not have a lot of choice. That puts them at considerable risk, and we are always picking up the pieces.

In Northern Ireland, there are so many children in care who do not attend school and who have mental-health problems, as well as alcohol and drug-related problems. There are also many teenage parents and young offenders. There are many reasons for the barriers to improvement, but I fear that insufficient joined-up working across all the relevant authorities is a major one. We now have an opportunity to make a fresh start to tackle the issue head-on collectively. For too long, children have suffered in a care system that has failed.

To begin with, there must be clear statistics and guidelines to deal with the protection of children. In recognising the seriousness of the issue, the Government must commit to fulfilling their international obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and to providing better protection to the most vulnerable children. Without stability and future prospects, children whom we fail to protect now may fall prey to homelessness and to a life on the street. It is a huge challenge for all of us. It is a much wider societal issue, but the Health Department has the main responsibility, not only because of the ripple effect of any negative impact on society, but because all children are our future, and we have a huge responsibility in that area.

**Mrs McGill:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion and the amendment. I thank the proposer and her colleagues for tabling the motion and I commend the proposer and Members who brought the amendment to the House.

The motion is comprehensive. It mentions the monitoring of figures: quite a bit has been said about the difficulty in obtaining those figures, what figures are obtainable, and how are they used. The motion then mentions lack of access to therapeutic support for young people who have gone missing, perhaps repeatedly. It acknowledges the pressure that is on the PSNI, asks the Department to behave as a corporate parent and calls for a strategy to be drawn up to address the reasons why children abscond. The amendment refers to the sexual exploitation of young people who go missing.



The absence of the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for the debate, which was raised by my colleague Sue Ramsey right away, is an issue. However, Mr Gardiner made the point that the matter could be dealt with by the Health Committee. The way to address the important issue of vulnerable children may be found somewhere between those options. However, this must not be turned into a conflict between Members and parties. Ultimately, I do not believe that that will happen.

The PSNI's reply to a freedom of information inquiry states that in January 2009, 16 young people were missing from homes here. That response gave me a sense of the difficulties involved, a feeling that I also got from somebody in the Western Health and Social Care Trust. The situation can be fluid. As my colleague Michelle O'Neill said, somebody who is 15 minutes late in returning to a children's home can be reported as missing because they did not return on time. The person from the Western Trust told me that a judgement call is involved in such cases.

Individual absences differ. Someone may present a very serious problem by being absent from the place in which they should be for two or three minutes. As a Member said earlier in the debate, anything can happen in a very short time. However, a young person who goes to school every day and who is due back at 9.00 pm may have arranged to do something else that leads to them being 10 or 15 minutes late. The person from the Western Trust said that it can be difficult to record all those details.

I accept that point, and I note that the proposer of the motion asked for figures to be recorded and kept centrally. Responses to the Member for Strangford Miss McIlveen suggest that trusts should have those figures and that, perhaps, given time, they will be able to produce them.

I share Mrs Hanna's delight that the Care Matters strategy will be considered by the Executive fairly soon. I hope that that strategy addresses a number of the issues that have been raised in the debate. Go raibh maith agat.

**Ms Purvis:** I am glad that the Assembly is taking the time to examine the situation of vulnerable children and young people in our community. I thank the authors of the motion and the amendment.

I have been working quite a bit on this issue in my constituency of East Belfast. I have very serious concerns about what is happening to those children. What we know of them and the risks to which they are exposed are extremely worrying. However, what is even more troubling is what we do not know.

In response to a freedom of information request in January 2009, which has already been mentioned, the PSNI stated that 38 children were classified as missing

in Northern Ireland, 16 of whom were missing from care. Clearly, the numbers fluctuate regularly. However, if those figures are typical, they suggest real cause for concern but probably do not herald an emergency.

When it comes to trying to understand the situation of vulnerable children, the problem is what we do not know. The number 38 tells us very little. We do not know how many children are truly missing from care or how often they go missing, because there is no regulatory requirement for that information to be maintained, tracked or reported. The 16 children missing from care are likely to be the tip of the proverbial iceberg. I welcome the fact that Barnardo's is carrying out research into that issue, and I urge the Department to fund more such research.

We know that children in care are not thriving in our society. Before they enter care, many children will have endured an abusive or violent situation at home and few will have had any form of stability or healthy, caring relationships in their young lives. As Miss McIlveen stated earlier, a mere one in 10 care leavers achieves five or more GCSEs. The statistics of young people in care are very similar to those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Those circumstances leave children and young people in a very vulnerable position. Many of them carry a host of unmet economic, social and physical needs that can leave them open to manipulation. We know that care homes are targeted by criminals who seek to take advantage of children who are at risk of being coerced into some form of physical, emotional or even sexual exploitation.

The motion rightly calls for specialist support services and a strategy to address and remove the risks to which those children are exposed. However, it does not address a lingering and important question about the other children who are missing. If we return to the PSNI's figure of 38 missing children, half of whom are in care, where is the other half? Who are they?

Children who go missing from residential and foster care are one element in a broader concern of missing and vulnerable children. The issue is very serious and scary and it is happening in our own communities. Children and young people are being coerced and manipulated into various forms of exploitation. What do we think of a 13-year-old girl who has a 28-year-old boyfriend? Is that acceptable or is it child sexual abuse? That is what is going on currently.

Not all those children are missing. Some of them go home to a parent who is aware of, and is quite possibly involved in, the exploitation of their own children. I know of a case of a mother who allowed and encouraged a relationship between her 14-year-old daughter and a 40-year-old man. Is that acceptable in our community? I know of examples in which pub and



club owners have prevented community workers from entering their premises to try to identify vulnerable young women for fear of losing business. That happens on a weekly basis.

We turn a blind eye to those situations that are clearly there for us to see almost any weekend in a pub: a 12-, 13- or 14-year-old girl, dolled up to the nines, goes to the pub, drinks alcopops and gets a boyfriend of 27 or 28 years of age. He goes with her that weekend, falls out with her the next weekend and passes her on to one of his friends. That is what is meant by being passed around the pub. Is that acceptable? Of course not: it is paedophilia.

**Mr Beggs:** Does the Member accept that one of the beneficial outcomes of the Protect Team model used in Manchester is that it investigates children who are missing from care and addresses other vulnerable children in the community? Its scope is much wider than children in care, so it may help to address the issue that the Member has mentioned.

**Ms Purvis:** I thank the Member for his intervention, and I accept that the model's scope is much wider than children in care. That is what we need to see.

The alternative is the continual sexual abuse of children. Those children and young people rarely make an informed choice to be involved in such activities; they are groomed, manipulated or forced into them.

5.30 pm

The answer is to prioritise child protection at all levels. That means changing our perspective and approach to the issue to reflect the understanding that the children are victims who have been coerced, or worse, into those activities and that they are not willing participants. That will require a joined-up proactive response from all the agencies and organisations that come into contact with those children. As well as the Departments, the police, the judiciary, our local councils, and even the licensing authorities, have an important role to play.

I support the motion and the amendment.

**Mr McCallister:** Some Members remarked on the Health Minister's absence from the debate. As my colleague Sam Gardiner said, the Minister's record on answering questions and on participating in debates ranks well above any other Minister, as does his record in introducing legislation. Furthermore, he is more active in running his Department than the majority of DUP Ministers. Mr Weir was so exercised about the debate, yet he has not managed to remain in the Chamber for its entirety.

Miss McIlveen opened the debate by laying out some worrying statistics and trends, and other Members backed her in those arguments. A common theme running through Members' contributions was the

dangers faced by children and the need for the Department to be the corporate parent and to work with other Departments and Government agencies to address the issues of drugs, alcohol and sexual abuse.

Another common theme was the need for improved record keeping. However Mrs McGill said that representatives from the Western Trust had told her of some of the difficulties faced when trying to keep records.

In moving the amendment, my colleague Mr Beggs provided frightening statistics on children's services and spoke of the worries in that regard. I attended a useful briefing from the Department on the Care Matters strategy at the all-party group on children and young people. Such strategies are a welcome development, and it is hoped that the Care Matters strategy will have Executive approval soon.

Mr Beggs and Mrs Hanna mentioned the need for a cross-governmental approach to children missing from care. It is not the responsibility only of the Department of Health, but of the NIO, the Youth Justice Agency, the Department for Employment and Learning and the Department of Education. A great deal of work needs to be done in addressing the serious issues that we face.

Ms Ramsey accepted the Ulster Unionist Party's amendment and said that we need to make serious progress on the issue. Bar some debate about the Minister's non-attendance at the debate, there was agreement that we need to do more on this issue, and that is to be welcomed. However, I remind Ms Ramsey that the difference between attending a debate and attending Question Time is that one supplies a Minister with the opportunity to provide ministerial accountability. It has nothing to do with appearing on television, as Ms Ramsey might have suggested in an intervention.

Mrs Bradley spoke about the importance of children in society, and every Member accepts that. She also spoke about the effort that we must all make in addressing how our care system looks after those children.

Mrs Hanna also mentioned early intervention and early detection, which must be made a priority in so many areas if we are to prevent families from reaching the crisis point whereby their children are put into care. Many Members pointed out that the best home for children is with their families, so it is critical that we have such support and early-intervention procedures in place.

One of the best contributions that I heard today was from Ms Purvis, who talked about the broader issues and told some horror stories about the exploitation of young people in our society. It was certainly shocking to hear them, but it is right that we do, so that we can start to address the issues. It is just horrendous that that is going on so very close to this Building.

I thank Members for their support for our amendment.

**Mr Poots:** The debate is timely, and I thank my colleague Miss McIlveen for bringing it to the House. I regret that some Members have criticised her motives for doing so, but I can assure them that her only motive was to raise in the House concerns that people had brought to her. It is right that the matter should come before this House, because it is important.

A number of weeks ago, we debated a motion that had been tabled by Sinn Féin Members, and at the time, I pointed out that although the issue was important, it was unlikely to make many headlines. I dare say that when we pick up tomorrow's newspapers, the headlines will once again be about MPs' expenses. That is fair enough, but, unfortunately, this debate will not get much mention in any newspaper because newspapers do not tend to be interested in these stories. However, they should be, because we are talking about vulnerable children.

If one asked those vulnerable children whether they wish to be in care or in family homes, their overwhelming response would be that they wish to be in caring, loving homes with their own parents. Unfortunately, for many young children across Northern Ireland, that is not the case. Unfortunately, intervention is often required. Many children end up either in foster care or in care homes not because of any wrongdoing on their part, but because they have never had an opportunity in life and because their parents have not provided for them. In some cases, their parents might not have had opportunities in life either, and the problems affecting those children could have been passed down through a number of generations.

**Mr McCarthy:** The Member mentioned foster care, and this is foster care fortnight. Does he agree that tremendous work has been, and continues to be, carried out by people who take it upon themselves to bring those vulnerable children into their own homes? Indeed, I heard a report this morning about a man and a woman who had reared their own family and had taken foster children into their home. We should acknowledge that tremendous work.

**Mr Poots:** I thank Mr McCarthy for that intervention. Mrs O'Neill also commended foster carers on their work, and I can endorse both Members' comments. Many foster carers are the salt of the earth; they are people who want to give some love and care to children who have had none.

It is good to see Mr Weir with us in the Chamber. Indeed, he has been present for most of the debate, and I welcome the fact that he continues to be with us — in spite of Mr McCallister's previous remark about his absence.

It amazes me that the issues raised today do not appear to be being taken up by our Children's Commissioner. In the previous Assembly, I was Chairperson of the

Committee of the Centre, on which Mr Beggs and other Members also sat. Some of the stories that we heard would have raised the hairs on the back of one's head. We heard about how children were being treated and how young children were getting caught up in cycles whereby they repeatedly ended up in juvenile justice centres and care facilities. Those cycles need to be broken.

I want to see people in the office of the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People getting their teeth into those issues. However, I am afraid to say that I have yet to see any evidence of that. I challenge the Children's Commissioner to support those vulnerable young people; her office has not inconsiderable resources with which to carry out those duties.

Miss McIlveen pointed out some important statistics, including the fact that 53% of young people leave school without any qualifications and only 12% leave with five GCSEs or more.

Glenmore Children's Home, which does excellent work, reopened in January 2004. It is a small four-bedded unit with a large enclosed garden and a ground floor that is suitable for disabled young people and disabled visitors. Two young people left that home recently. One is 19 years old and is studying at Queen's University, and the other is her sister, who is studying at the Lisburn Institute of Further and Higher Education and lives with her grandparents. Three other young people in that home are studying for qualifications and are doing very well at school. A 15-year-old came to live in the home recently and is settling in there very well. Unfortunately, a decision has been made to close that home. One must ask why it is closing. I suspect that the decision has more to do with cuts than with anything else. That home is an example of one that is performing; however, it will not be allowed to do so because it is to be closed.

Neither Roy Beggs nor any Member who supported the amendment made a case for it. Fortunately, it made its own case, as none of the Members who spoke in support of it was able to do so. Mr Beggs's attitude was that the Minister should not be blamed. However, the motion is not about blaming anybody; it is about highlighting an issue, and I think that Mr Beggs got off on the wrong foot.

Sue Ramsey criticised the Minister for his inability to multitask and for letting men down. She said that women could multitask and that they could handle a crisis and respond to debates. In this instance, I must say that men have been let down. However, I suspect that other males could do the Minister's job and multitask a bit better than Mr McGimpsey has done in this case. Ms Ramsey also said that young people missing from care equated to their being vulnerable.

Naomi Long talked about self-harm, mental distress, and the use of police resources in a non-contact environment. She said that a more coherent strategy should exist.

Mervyn Storey tackled the issue of poor record keeping and said that he believed that there has been a ministerial failure on the issue in a number of areas in the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and that it was time for action.

Michelle O'Neill commended foster carers, and she called for a more cross-departmental, cross-statutory strategy to tackle the issue.

Peter Weir said that we needed robust statistics and record keeping, which are vital in dealing with the matter. He wanted to prevent children suffering, because when children become involved in these issues they suffer, and, as a consequence, society suffers with them.

Samuel Gardiner spoke for three minutes and 27 seconds and addressed neither the motion nor the amendment; he simply had a little rant about the Minister and the DUP and indicated that one should not ask any questions of the Minister and that he should be allowed to get on with his job without having to deal with anything. I assure Mr Gardiner that there will be more motions on this issue; this is a matter that concerns the people of Northern Ireland. The DUP will not ignore health issues just because it does not hold the portfolio of the Department of Health.

Carmel Hanna talked about family support and early intervention and about establishing the reasons why young people run away. She said that there were wider societal issues for that, and I tend to agree with that point.

Dawn Purvis said that 38 children are missing, and of those, 16 are in care. She said that there is little stability in many young people's lives. She also provided some startling examples, including that of a 13-year-old girl who has a 28-year-old boyfriend, and a 14-year-old girl who is with a 40-year-old man. Wider society can only regard that as purely exploitative and wholly unacceptable, but it is taking place. The challenge to wider society is the question of what it is going to do stop it. A number of people must take up that challenge.

5.45 pm

John McCallister once again defended the Minister's record. The Minister may have responded to questions, but that is not the same as answering questions. An awful lot of questions, including those on the issue that we are discussing, are responded to with a statement that the answer is unavailable in the format requested, and other such nonsense. If we were given more answers, there would be less need for some of the debates that take place. Mr McCallister indicated that

there is broad agreement that something needs to be done, and he is absolutely right.

It is deeply disappointing that neither the Minister nor any colleagues or officials that he could have sent were present for the debate.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I ask the Member to draw his remarks to a close.

**Mr Poots:** Nevertheless, the matter has been aired, and the public is now aware of it. In future, we will be looking for more action and fewer evasive answers.

*Question, That the amendment be made, put and agreed to.*

*Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

That this Assembly notes with concern the failure of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to monitor and maintain baseline figures relating to the number of children who go missing from care and the number of such incidents per child; demands action to address the lack of access to specialist therapeutic support services for these children across all Health and Social Care Trust areas; recognises the pressure on police resources and time in retrieving these children; calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to place greater emphasis on the needs of missing children and to ensure that his Department accurately accounts for these children in its role as corporate parent; and provides a clear strategy and resources to address the reasons for these children going missing and the risks to which they are exposed during their absence; furthermore notes the danger of sexual exploitation that children missing from care can face; notes the successful approach of the Manchester Safeguarding Children Board 'Protect Team', and calls on the Northern Ireland Office to ensure that the Police Service of Northern Ireland, in conjunction with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the relevant voluntary sector organisations, provides an enhanced Protect Team for Northern Ireland with a view to preventing the sexual exploitation of children and young people.

*Adjourned at 5.46 pm.*





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# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Tuesday 12 May 2009

*The Assembly met at 10.30 am (Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr McClarty] in the Chair).*

*Members observed two minutes' silence.*

## MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

### North/South Ministerial Council: Institutional Format

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I have received notice from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister that the deputy First Minister wishes to make a statement on the North/South Ministerial Council institutional format meeting.

**The deputy First Minister (Mr McGuinness):** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. In compliance with section 52C(2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, we wish to make the following statement on the fourth meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council in institutional format, which was held in Farmleigh House, Dublin, on Tuesday 28 April 2009. All our Ministers who attended the meeting have approved the report, and we make it on their behalf. The Executive were represented by the First Minister, Peter Robinson MP MLA; Jeffrey Donaldson MP MLA; Margaret Ritchie MLA; and me. The Irish Government were represented by Micheál Martin TD, Minister for Foreign Affairs, who chaired the meeting.

During the meeting, we had a broad discussion with the Minister for Foreign Affairs about the economic downturn and the budgetary challenges that face us all.

On obstacles to cross-border mobility, the Council welcomed the progress made in the development, marketing and management of the Border People website, which provides access to high-quality public service information for people who cross the border to live, work or study. It noted that the website attracts approximately 10,000 visits a month. The Council noted that funding for further development of the website for the three years between 2009 and 2011 has been secured under INTERREG IVa. The NSMC joint secretariat will keep the website's future development under review.

The Council noted the positive outcome of discussions held with a wide range of interested groups, including business and consumer organisations and the main banking institutions, on the issue of cross-border banking charges. It noted that those discussions have resulted in the publication for the first time of a detailed comparative table of the cost of typical cross-border transaction charges in most banking institutions on the Border People website, which can be found at [www.borderpeople.info](http://www.borderpeople.info). The Council also noted the transparency that that website now provides for consumers.

The Council noted that many of the banking groups have either implemented or are in the process of implementing new IT platforms that can result in reduced cross-border transaction fees and that the implementation of the single European payments directive and the payment services directive should reduce the future cost of cross-border transactions.

On the transfer of pension rights on a cross-border basis, the Council noted that a number of possible options had been identified. Given the current cost implications and economic climate, the Council agreed that reciprocal membership arrangements of the transfer network and the transfer club pension schemes in their respective jurisdictions are not a viable option at this time.

The Council, however, noted that recent changes in pension arrangements are likely to be helpful in enabling the transfer of the value of accrued pension entitlements from one jurisdiction to the other. The Council agreed that measures should be taken to provide additional information on pension issues to teachers and others in the public sector who wish to transfer to work in the other jurisdiction. It asked the NSMC joint secretariat, in conjunction with the two Finance Departments and key stakeholders, to develop a plan to address the matter that should include information on recent changes in pension arrangements.

Ministers considered a paper on the human resources issues in the North/South implementation bodies and Tourism Ireland Ltd. They noted that the two Finance Departments have considered the issues of pay and human resources that the chief executives of the North/South bodies raised and have concluded not to change the bodies' pay structures. The Finance Departments will, however, continue to consider and address human resources issues raised by the bodies. The Council noted that the two Finance Departments are also examining other human resources issues in the bodies and that a report will be presented to the North/South Ministerial Council as soon as possible.

The Council considered a paper on NSMC joint secretariat issues and noted that construction work on the new permanent headquarters for the North/South

Ministerial Council joint secretariat will begin in Armagh in the coming weeks, with an envisaged completion date in early 2010. It also noted that the NSMC annual report for 2008 was to be published on the website —[www.northsouthministerialcouncil.org](http://www.northsouthministerialcouncil.org) — before the end of April 2009.

The Council considered a paper on EU matters that were raised in the NSMC and noted the work on EU-related matters in accordance with the work programmes in the relevant NSMC sectoral formats since May 2007. Go raibh maith agat.

**The Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy first Minister (Mr Kennedy):** I welcome the deputy First Minister's statement, on which I have a couple of questions. First, is there an update on the costings for the work to create the North/South Ministerial Council's permanent headquarters in Armagh, and is the deputy First Minister optimistic that that work will be finished by the scheduled completion date in early 2010? Secondly, given that my Committee is undertaking an inquiry into European issues, will the deputy First Minister outline any EU matters raised as a consequence of the North/South Ministerial Council meeting?

**The deputy First Minister:** At the meeting we were advised that Armagh City and District Council will provide the new accommodation for the NSMC joint secretariat in Armagh and that building work will commence in June, with an expected completion date of May 2010. The new accommodation will be on the former site of Armagh city hall. It will be a modern building that is built to a very high specification, reflecting the highest environmental and energy-saving standards and will be an important catalyst for the regeneration of a disadvantaged area of Armagh city. It will safeguard jobs and continue to bring economic benefits to the city.

The new building will provide the office accommodation and facilities required to host meetings of the North/South Ministerial Council. In the longer term, it should provide a more cost-effective means of holding NSMC meetings than the current arrangement, whereby most meetings are held outside Armagh. Everyone looks forward to the day when North/South Ministerial Council meetings will be held in the new accommodation.

The building costs fall to Armagh City and District Council, and the northern proportion of additional fit-out costs of £1.5 million, which will be split between North and South, falls to OFMDFM. We are confident that the work will begin in the coming weeks and be completed early in 2010. Everyone in the House will agree that that will be a further, much-needed indication of the importance of the institution.

**Mr I McCrea:** I thank the deputy First Minister for his statement. Will he confirm that the Irish Government, through their '2009 Revised Estimates for Public Services', have unilaterally cut funding to all the North/South bodies, save the Loughs Agency? Will he join me in calling for all Departments in Northern Ireland to follow that precedent by unilaterally imposing budget cuts on all North/South bodies?

**The deputy First Minister:** I must apologise to Danny Kennedy for not answering his question on EU matters. The meeting included an overview of North/South ministerial discussions since May 2007 on EU matters that fall within the agreed work programme. Those discussions covered a wide range of matters, such as agriculture, special EU programmes and the environment. The mutually beneficial outputs from ministerial co-operation on EU issues were recognised, and it was agreed that that should continue. We also had a broad discussion on other EU issues, including the Barroso task force. It was agreed that officials should continue to co-operate to maximise the benefits of the EU.

As far as the decision by the Irish Government is concerned, the Council discussed several issues relating to the North/South bodies. Those included non-pay conditions of service, efficiency savings and the Irish Government's moratorium on public service recruitment and promotion. We all recognised how important it is for North/South bodies and all other public bodies to deliver their objectives and programmes efficiently. That is the key point, particularly given the current downturn and economic pressures that we all face.

We also recognised that it is important to ensure that any efficiency savings that are made do not negatively impact on the bodies' operational effectiveness. Indeed, it was questioned whether recruitment and promotion should be curtailed in small organisations that need flexibility. We noted that officials from the two Finance Departments have held discussions on efficiency savings and other HR issues. We agreed that it would be useful for the joint secretariat of the North/South Ministerial Council to meet finance and other relevant officials to develop a joint approach to the consideration of sponsoring Departments and Ministers. I understand that the joint secretariat has arranged to meet officials from the two Finance Departments later this week and that meetings are also being arranged with sponsor Departments.

We all accept that greater co-operation can lead to greater savings. The review of the St Andrews Agreement will report by the end of the year on the efficiency and effectiveness of the existing bodies and on future areas for co-operation. As all Members know, in the longer term, the Assembly is to establish an

efficiency review panel to report on savings made through greater co-operation.

**Mr P Maskey:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The First Minister made a statement yesterday in which he signalled DUP proposals on institutional change, including North/South matters. Were those proposals discussed at the meeting, and were they approved as the agreed position of OFMDFM?

**The deputy First Minister:** Those matters were not raised, and the proposals do not represent the agreed position of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, which will come as no surprise to anyone on the other side of the House. The First Minister was, effectively, announcing DUP party proposals in the context of an election campaign. Some parties or individuals advocate a reduction in the human rights and equality agenda and a narrowing of the rights and safeguards built into the institutions. All of those are designed to ensure inclusivity and equality. As I said, it will not surprise Members on the other side of the House that such suggestions will not garner any support from my party or from me and will, therefore, go nowhere.

10.45 am

However, we are open to discussing how services across the island of Ireland can be made more efficient and effective, and the most obvious area to consider is duplication of services in the North and the South. We have all committed to working under the institutions that have been established, North and South, and to ensuring maximum benefits by examining how we can save money and provide better services for all our people.

Many people subscribe to the argument that, in the current economic climate, it is unsustainable and wasteful for this small island to have two health systems, two education systems, two competing economic agencies, two arts councils, two sports councils and three tourist agencies. An argument will be made around reducing the cost of duplication, because it is sensible to reduce the costs to the North and the South where it is mutually beneficial and will deliver savings to front line services. It is a matter of delivering co-ordinated and comprehensive services to communities across Ireland, and none of that threatens anyone.

**Mr Attwood:** There have been reports of inequities in payment and in the terms and conditions of employment of people who work on a North/South basis. I note from the statement that those at the NSMC meeting agreed with the decision of the Finance Departments in the North and the South not to change the pay structures of the North/South bodies. If transparent inequities exist between people in the North and people in the South who do similar work on a North/South basis, the Council should have intervened

to rectify that inequality, rather than sign off on what the Finance Departments wanted to do. That decision should have required political intervention and not have been left to the managers of the Finance Departments on the island.

The Minister stated that a decision was taken at the meeting that to carry out work on a cross-border transfer of pension rights was:

“not a viable option at this time.”

I regret that, because that is an impediment to people transferring between North and South, especially on the policing side.

If it is not a viable option at this time, will the deputy First Minister explain how, as he subsequently said in his statement, recent changes have been made to pension arrangements that make it more likely that accrued pension rights can be transferred on a North/South basis? I welcome those changes, but will the deputy First Minister explain how, on the one hand, something is not a viable option yet, on the other hand, pension changes in recent times make it a viable option?

**The deputy First Minister:** My speech to the Assembly made it clear that the two Finance Departments took the decision on pay arrangements. They considered pay and human resources issues that the chief executives of the North/South bodies raised. They concluded that, at this time, the bodies' pay structure should not be changed. I have no doubt that the situation will be kept under review, and, as I also said, the two Finance Departments will continue to consider and address specific human resource issues that the North/South bodies raise. The pay structures are linked to the Civil Service in both jurisdictions, and considerable thought is given to proposals from the bodies' CEOs.

Pension transfer is an expensive matter. At the meeting, we noted the progress that has been made on pension issues and the fact that the pensions working group has identified possible options for the cross-border transfer of pensions. We recognise that cost implications and the economic climate make it difficult at present to have reciprocal membership arrangements in the public-service transfer network and transfer club pension schemes in the respective jurisdictions. However, it is good to know that recent changes in pension arrangements are likely to help to enable the transfer of the value of accrued pension entitlements from one jurisdiction to the other.

The lack of information on pension issues available to teachers and other workers is a concern. We can and must try to address the transfer of public sector workers who wish to work in the other jurisdiction. Therefore, we have asked the NSMC's joint secretariat, as well as the respective Finance Departments and others, to prepare a plan to deal with that and to



include information on recent changes in pension arrangements.

As we go forward, we must recognise that there will be particular situations that affect groups of citizens North and South. There is a commitment to ongoing review with a view to taking action that will assist.

**Lord Morrow:** I noted that the deputy First Minister said that four Ministers from Northern Ireland and only one Minister from the Irish Republic were present at the meeting. I understand that the economic downturn has hit the Irish Republic severely; therefore, there may be reasons why that happened.

Construction of the proposed secretariat building in Armagh is to begin in coming weeks. In light of the economic downturn, would it not be better if that were cancelled? Bearing in mind the earlier part of the deputy First Minister's statement, which seemed to suggest that North/South bodies are on their way out, is there now real danger of building a white elephant that has no work to do? Does the deputy First Minister agree?

**The deputy First Minister:** That is one of the most interesting comments I have heard in the House in a long time. It was an institutional format meeting of the NSMC. Normal procedure is that, when Assembly Ministers go to Dublin, the meeting is chaired by the Minister for Foreign Affairs. It was not a full-blown meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council; those meetings have, on many occasions, been attended by many Ministers from the South and the North. Therefore, Members need not be concerned: that protocol has been in place for a considerable time.

The building at Armagh city is important and hugely symbolic. Given that we have all signed up to the power-sharing institutions and to working for the mutual benefit of people North and South, it is important to have the building, which will, effectively, be the North/South Ministerial Council's headquarters, in Armagh city. It will provide the city and its surrounding area with an important boost. It is also a symbol of the increased willingness of politicians in the North and South to work together for mutual benefit and in a way that threatens nobody.

Therefore, as we progress, we must recognise that the review of the institutions will become public by the end of 2009. People can then judge whether they believe that the North/South institutions have been beneficial. I believe that they have been beneficial. All of the empirical evidence shows clearly that, for example, InterTradeIreland has been an astounding success; so, too, has Tourism Ireland. The success of those institutions should not be cause for concern; it should be welcomed.

**Mr McElduff:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh ráiteas an Aire, agus ba mhaith liom a rá rud maith an rud é go raibh cúrsaí

eacnamaíochta ar an chlár oibre i mBaile Átha Cliath. I welcome the deputy First Minister's statement. I note that the current economic climate was discussed at the meeting. Does the Minister agree that identification of additional areas of North/South co-operation that would bring about better delivery and co-ordination of services on an all-Ireland basis could deliver major savings?

I want to hear his opinion on health matters. For example, there are pilot projects whereby people can access GPs through out-of-hours schemes on the Armagh/Louth border and on the Donegal/Derry border. Could such schemes be rolled out across the entire border area?

**The deputy First Minister:** All such matters are being considered under the review of the institutions. As we go forward, we all recognise our responsibilities to ensure greater social and political co-operation on the island. We must build better political relationships that we can use for the economic benefit of all the people who live on the island. Our policy is to ensure that we engage in mutually beneficial processes that threaten nobody.

We have progressed beyond debating the value of the power-sharing institutions in the North and the North/South institutions a long time ago. They were established under the Good Friday Agreement and were supported by the outcome of the St Andrews Agreement, which clearly suggested that those institutions will exist for the foreseeable future. If we work with a good heart and a good will, they will go from strength to strength, and the people who live on this island will be the main beneficiaries.

**Mr Elliott:** I am slightly disappointed by the deputy First Minister's response to Mr Attwood's query about pay structures for bodies North and South. Perhaps he will expand on his answer and explain why there was no agreement to change that position.

The banking crisis is a major issue. The statement contains a section on banking issues, and I wonder whether there is consensus that the Republic of Ireland authorities dealt with the banks incorrectly. That huge financial investment may not have worked out well.

**The deputy First Minister:** I am sorry that the Member is disappointed; I do not come here to disappoint people. However, we must deal with the situation that, as I have outlined, the Finance Departments North and South have made a joint decision. Moreover, I added a rider to the effect that the situation will undoubtedly be kept under review.

As regards the banking situation, we noted the positive outcome of discussions on cross-border banking charges that were held with a wide range of interested groups, including business and consumer organisations and the main banking institutions. We



noted that for the first time those discussions have resulted in the publication of a detailed comparative table of the cost of typical cross-border transaction charges on the website. That is a useful and practical step that provides transparency for consumers. The co-operation of the main banks has been helpful, and it is encouraging that banking groups are in the process of implementing new IT systems that may result in reduced cross-border banking charges.

Looking at the bigger picture, I must say that it is not the role of Ministers from the North who attend the North/South Ministerial Council meeting in institutional format to criticise the Irish Government's decisions on the banks. It is a huge issue that has been greatly debated in recent times. We must respect the integrity of the Irish Government's decisions on how they intend to pull themselves out of the economic difficulties that have arisen from the banking crisis and that have beset that part of the island. Our job is to deal with how the North/South arrangements impact on people. It is not our job to attend those meetings and challenge the Irish Government's decisions directly. Likewise, there is no protocol for them to challenge us on decisions that we take in the North. The work at hand aims to improve co-operation and be mutually beneficial.

11.00 am

**Mrs D Kelly:** I welcome the statement and note its contents. However, I am disappointed that the opportunity afforded by the meeting was not used to address the economic downturn in a much more proactive manner. Were there any discussions about the impact of the revised Budget in the Republic of Ireland on commitments given to infrastructure projects in the North? Is there an agreed action plan to bring forward any of the intensive infrastructure capital projects on a North/South basis that were referred to in the Republic of Ireland's recent Budget?

I note the comments of Members on the Benches opposite that no new measures will be added to the work programme of the North/South implementation bodies. Does the deputy First Minister agree that the narrow-mindedness and insular mindset of the DUP is detrimental to all our people North and South in an economic downturn? Does he press home to his party, one of the main parties in government, the fact that North/South bodies are here to stay, that they are part of the Good Friday Agreement, just as this Assembly is, and that they must be driven forward much more proactively? How is his party going to do that?

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order. You have asked quite a number of questions, Mrs Kelly.

**The deputy First Minister:** I think there were about six questions. That does not remove the validity of the questions; they are all valid.

At the meeting, we had a broad discussion on the economic downturn and the budgetary challenges facing the two jurisdictions. Minister Martin outlined the economic problems facing the Irish Government and the steps that have been taken in the Budget to reduce the current deficit. He referred to the common challenges facing both jurisdictions and the need to focus on efficiencies while maintaining growth in business.

We, in turn, outlined the serious challenges and decisions facing our Executive, including the efficiencies that will be required over the next two years and the additional resources that will be needed for policing and justice. It was also recognised that, in moving forward in these challenging times, it will be in all of our interests to continue to maintain close contact and co-operation. We also referred to the fact that we have established a cross-sectoral advisory forum to help us meet our economic challenges, and we explained that the overall aim of the forum was to mitigate the worst effects of the economic downturn.

In recent times many people have been concerned about the roads projects, the A5 and A8, given the establishment of what is known as "An Bord Snip" in the South and the prospect that it could impact on two vital projects: the road from Monaghan to the north-west, Donegal and Derry, and the road from Larne to Belfast. At the meeting, Minister Martin confirmed that the Irish Government remain firmly committed to funding the A5 and A8 projects as already agreed. We understand that the issue was discussed at the recent meeting of the NSMC in transport sectoral format and that Minister Murphy referred to it in his statement to the Assembly yesterday.

The A5 project is estimated to cost in the range of £650 million to £850 million, and the A8 is estimated to cost between £105 million and £120 million. The Irish Government's contribution is £400 million. As we speak, we appear to have cast-iron guarantees that those projects will go ahead and will be supported by the Irish Government. I also understand that the preferred route for the A5 will be announced this summer. That will be an important development. The preferred route for the road from Dungiven to Derry was announced last week.

I will resist being drawn into stating my view of the DUP's attitude to these institutions. All the parties in the Assembly, no matter what is said publicly and in newspapers, have been positive and constructive in building relationships in the North and between North and South. There are some exceptions.

**Mrs D Kelly:** Name them.

**The deputy First Minister:** I will not name them.

On the whole, phenomenal progress has been made in the past two years. The fact that we are now

working positively in the institutions is something that we should all be pleased about.

**Mrs McGill:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. My question on the A5 and the A8 has just been answered. I commend the deputy First Minister; I am not disappointed by his response.

**Mr Boylan:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh ráiteas an Aire. I welcome the deputy First Minister's statement. Like my colleague, I am not disappointed by his response. I welcome his announcement of the new purpose-built NSMC building in Armagh city, and I will take Mr Morrow's comments about it as positive. Does the deputy First Minister agree that this good news story could be a spur for the future regeneration of Armagh city and the surrounding district?

**The deputy First Minister:** I believe that the new development will be recognised as an iconic site in Armagh city. In a practical way, it will represent the political progress that has been made in the North, and between North and South, in recent times. The construction of the building will be a huge boost for Armagh city, and it will help regenerate a part of the city that is badly in need of support. It is also a tremendous boost for improved relations between North and South.

**Mr Gallagher:** I thank the deputy First Minister for his statement. I note his comments about cross-border workers. That is a big issue in the border constituencies, not least Fermanagh and South Tyrone, despite Lord Morrow's observations. There is a great desire to have those issues brought to the fore, and some of the people who raise them are perhaps more likely to be Lord Morrow's voters than mine.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Please ask a question, Mr Gallagher.

**Mr Gallagher:** Is OFMDFM aware that, if the taxation of cross-border workers were to be turned the other way and the rate were higher in the Republic of Ireland, workers from there who come here would be exempt under an agreement that was negotiated 30 years ago by the Irish Government when there was no Parliament here? We all know who is responsible for taxation, but this is a cross-border issue. Will the deputy First Minister raise the matter with the Irish Government so that a case can be made to the British Treasury to get rid of the double taxation that is hurting the cross-border workers who reside on this side of the border?

**The deputy First Minister:** I have tremendous sympathy for the Member's point of view. He made it clear that we have little or no control over taxation, given that it is determined in London. As we move forward, it is my party's hope that more can be done on the issue. However, that would have to be by agreement

between my party and our colleagues in government, and it would have to have Executive support.

We had an opportunity at the meeting to review the progress of the Border People website, which has been a huge success and which attracts in the region of 10,000 visits a month. We can see that there is a demand for that service North and South. We also heard how the website provides information based on real case studies and how it is an accurate reference source for the public and for information advisory services.

There is clear evidence of the need for a point of access to high-quality public service information that helps people to find answers to difficult questions on cross-border mobility. I accept that it might not be possible to find answers on the website to particular questions on the subject of taxation, but that is perhaps something for another day. I am pleased that the website is proving to be meaningful and responsive and is acting as an accurate source of reference for people.

We noted that funding for the further development and marketing of the website up to 2011 has been secured under INTERREG. The North/South Ministerial Council joint secretariat has been involved in the website's development and will continue to be involved in its future development and management. As we all know, taxation is a very complex matter, especially in relation to cross-border issues. However, we will ask officials to explore the question asked by the Member.

**Mr Durkan:** I thank the deputy First Minister for the statement and thank him and his ministerial colleagues for the work of the meeting. Does the Minister have any concern that the Finance Departments appear to be working on efficiency matters in relation to the implementation bodies ahead of the outcome of the efficiency review? Can he give us anything to look forward to by way of the outcome of that wider review as regards the other side of efficiency, which is about the possibility of enhancing the areas of co-operation and expanding the role of the implementation bodies so that they can be more productive and more relevant, and, therefore, more cost-effective for everyone?

Can the deputy First Minister tell us whether there was any discussion at the institutional format meeting about using the cross-sectoral format, which has not really been used in the North/South Ministerial Council and which would be relevant and would lend itself well to issues relating to the downturn and recovery in particular? More co-ordination at that level would also help with some of the current challenges in relation to strategic capital investment, which will also face the pressures that there will be on our Budget and on the Southern Budget for many years to come.

Was there any discussion about bringing significant cross-border collaboration, such as the north-west

gateway initiative, under the oversight of the North/South Ministerial Council? We witnessed that structural defect during the controversy surrounding Project Kelvin.

**The deputy First Minister:** Since the institutional meeting, we have become aware that, in their Budget of 7 April 2009, as reflected in the revised estimates published on 23 April 2009, the Irish Government have made cuts to all but one of the North/South implementation bodies and Tourism Ireland Limited. The revised estimates also include details of the reduced proportionate shares for the Executive's sponsor Departments. Any proposed changes to the bodies' budgets will need to be discussed and agreed by sponsor Ministers and Finance Ministers and business plans approved by the NSMC.

There has to be recognition that we are faced with a world economic recession; there is a huge economic crisis out there. However, the main point is that we have to go forward on the basis of ensuring that we do not in any circumstances drop our performance in delivering what it was intended that those bodies would deliver when they were established. There is a real commitment from the Government in Dublin and us to weather the storm and face up to the difficult economic decisions that have to be taken but to attempt to do it in a way that ensures that we continue to perform and deliver what we expected moving forward.

The Member mentioned the implications of the review. The St Andrews Agreement provides for a review group to report with recommendations to the NSMC, its remit being to examine objectively:

"the efficiency and value for money of existing implementation bodies and ... the case for additional bodies and areas of co-operation within the NSMC where mutual benefit would be derived. The Group would also input into the work ... on the identification of a suitable substitute for the proposed Lights Agency of the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission."

The review group consists of senior officials and an advisory panel of four experts; two appointed by us and two by the Irish Government. In connection with the examination of the efficiency and value for money of the existing North/South implementation bodies, the expert advisers conducted consultation meetings with each of the bodies and with Tourism Ireland Ltd, their stakeholders and sponsor departments and the social partners on behalf of the review group.

11.15 am

At the NSMC plenary meeting on 26 January 2009, Ministers noted that the experts had completed their report on the efficiency and value for money of the existing implementation bodies and Tourism Ireland Ltd. The review group, in consultation with the relevant sponsor departments and Ministers, will consider the recommendations made and submit a report to the next plenary meeting.

Although an attempt has been made to draw me on the initial findings, I think that it would be better to wait until the relevant bodies have completed their work and see what is reported at the next meeting.

**Mr O'Loan:** Will the deputy First Minister make it clear that he rejects the assault on the North/South bodies that has been made by the Democratic Unionist Party this morning? Will he agree that the long-term economic future of this island can only be secured through greater co-operation and the extension and enhancement of the work of the North/South bodies? Will he confirm that he clearly received that message from the Irish Government?

**The deputy First Minister:** In spite of all that is said outside — sometimes inside — the House, tremendous political progress has been made over the past two years. We now have an inclusive, power-sharing Executive in the North. Ministers on all sides of the House work positively and constructively with the North/South institutions. That is something to be pleased about.

I will not engage in a point-scoring exercise with anyone. I passionately want to see that progress continue. We recognise that we come at this from different political perspectives. The DUP has its allegiances, and I respect that. I have my allegiances, and I expect others to respect that.

The establishment of the North/South Ministerial Council was a very clear recognition of the outcome of the Good Friday Agreement and the St Andrews Agreement. We have to work together in a spirit of co-operation, where there is mutual benefit, to bring about a situation where we can use the institutions for the benefit of all the people who live on this island.

I am an Irish republican, and I want to see a united Ireland. I would love to have that tomorrow morning. We all know that that is not going to happen. Our friends on the other side of the House tell us that they are British unionists, and I have never been confused about that. We have to keep the positive mood going. We have working institutions that hugely benefit citizens North and South. Whatever may be said outside in the context of an election taking place or, on occasions, inside the House we know in our hearts and souls that these institutions will be here for quite some time.



## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

### Dairy Farming

**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 are called to speak will have five minutes.

**Dr W McCrea:** I beg to move

That this Assembly recognises the difficulties facing the dairy sector and calls on the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to set up a task force to consider the way forward for the sector and how it can be assisted in advance of the abolition of milk quotas.

Unfortunately, it is not with great pleasure that I propose this motion. No one can be in any doubt about the pressures that the Northern Ireland dairy sector faces. That includes not only the primary producers but the processors. The dairy sector in Northern Ireland is the largest agricultural sector, and it contributed £444 million to the total gross output in 2008. Not only are hundreds of people employed directly on farms as primary producers, hundreds are employed in the milk processing sector in Northern Ireland.

I will first pay tribute to the stamina, determination and excellence of farmers in Northern Ireland, who have faced great challenges throughout their industry over the past years. They have faced those challenges with great fortitude and have sought to do everything that they can to make Northern Ireland a better and more prosperous place. However, to make that a reality, they need the help and assistance of the Assembly.

Over recent months, the entire dairy sector has been plunged into crisis. In March, the price paid for milk by United Dairy Farmers was only 17p a litre. That was 6p down on the April 2008 price and nearly half the price paid to farmers just 18 months ago. Not only has the price paid to farmers collapsed over the last number of months but input costs have escalated considerably. The costs of fertiliser, feed and energy are all considerably higher than they were this time last year, resulting in the returns to farmers being further cut.

Farmers have also borrowed considerable sums to construct slurry storage facilities and thus adhere to environmental legislation that emanated from Europe. That situation has been compounded by wet weather over the past month, which has delayed the turn-out of livestock on most farms in Northern Ireland. In fact, that process has turned the other way, because many farmers have had to bring their animals back in and have had to pay for the silage that is necessary to feed them, and that has resulted in additional costs. It is

vital that we all examine what can be done to assist the sector, in both the short and longer term.

Over recent months, following concerted effort by many across Northern Ireland — certainly by my DUP colleagues in Westminster and Brussels — the EU Commission reintroduced export refunds and intervention storage of dairy products. Although I would like to have seen export refunds set at a higher level, that move helped to stabilise the world market and prevented further falls in the commodity markets. When I meet Commissioner Boel later this week, I hope to thank her and to encourage her to increase the level of EU support to help the market to return to profitable levels.

With the fall in world commodity prices for oil and grain, there have been some signs over recent weeks that farmers will see the prices of feed and fertiliser fall. That is to be welcomed, but prices need to fall further to help struggling farmers.

In the current markets, it is vital that the local banks work with the local industry and do not cause further problems for our farmers. Banks can do more to help our dairy farmers in the current climate. Unlike the property market, the price of farm land has not collapsed in value, and the majority of farmers are still asset-rich but, unfortunately, cash-poor. At this time, it is vital that the banks pass back the interest rate cuts to farmers. I am very critical of the banks that seem to be taking every opportunity to hike up the cost of borrowing money and cut the overdraft facility that farmers had agreed. Farmers and many others in this community desired more assistance and encouragement from banks, bank managers and the banking establishment, bearing in mind that the Treasury assisted many of the banks with their difficulties, which were often self-inflicted.

It is vital that we do not simply look at what can be done to help the dairy sector in the short term; we must look at where the sector is heading in the longer term. I welcome the recent Dairy UK study into the milk processing sector, which was part-funded by Invest Northern Ireland and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. We need to rationalise the number of milk processors in Northern Ireland, look at new markets and reduce the overheads in the milk processing sector.

The study does not relieve DARD of its responsibility to have a strategy and direction for dairy farmers in Northern Ireland. DARD has strategies and policies that look at everything from rural proofing to childcare, renewable energy, tackling poverty and disability action plans. Although DARD's reports on each of those issues are important, they will do little to help the largest sector in our agriculture industry.



I am glad that the Minister is in the Chamber to take note of the debate. Will she outline her Department's strategy for the Northern Ireland dairy sector? I also ask her to detail how many officials in her Department are working on dairy policy. Due to the importance of the sector, I suspect that more people in Dundonald House are working on dairy policy than on policies on rural development or forestry. Will the Minister outline her Department's position on the processing and marketing grant for the dairy sector? Is that scheme open? Are there many applications in the system? If so, when can those applicants expect to receive funding?

We already know that many of the support mechanisms will be either dismantled or removed over the coming years. For example, by 2015 not only will milk quotas be a thing of the past but intervention support and export refunds will have been done away with. Therefore, it is vital that we plan for our future, and our motion proposes a way to do that.

My party colleagues and I propose that DARD set up a task force for the Northern Ireland dairy sector to look at the future for dairy farming in Northern Ireland and pull together farmers' representatives, processors, retailers, Departments, research organisations and Invest Northern Ireland. It should also set out a clear strategy for the development of our dairy sector. That is not a novel concept, and it is not something that we have dreamed up or sought to manufacture for today's debate; it has already been carried out for the red meat sector in Northern Ireland. In the past two weeks, it was announced that there will be a dairy summit in Scotland to look at the dairy sector there.

There is a long-term future for the dairy sector in Northern Ireland. Milk production in the United Kingdom is at its lowest level since milk quotas were introduced in 1984. Milk production is falling in America and New Zealand, and the world population is rising.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

**Dr W McCrea:** With its family-run, grass-based farm system, Northern Ireland is the best location in the world for milk production. Therefore, it is vital that DARD provide leadership and that together we chart a way over the next five years to secure the future for Northern Ireland dairy farmers.

11.30 am

**Mr Doherty:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion. The dairy sector is facing many difficulties. Some arise from the massive fluctuations in milk auction prices, which, in many ways, depend on world prices. In November 1995, farmers were getting 30.48p a litre for milk, but by May 2002 that had fallen to 13.53p a litre. That is a massive drop. Many of the reasons for price fluctuations

are outside our control, depending on auction and world prices.

However, the dairy sector itself must take some issues on board. It is my judgement and observation as a result of discussions with dairy farmers that they are a bit too dependent on powdered milk. More emphasis needs to be placed on diversification into products such as cheese.

I am sure that the Members who tabled the motion are aware that two major initiatives were launched recently. First, an Executive delegation, led by Michelle Gildernew, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, and ably supported by Arlene Foster, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, the First Minister and the deputy First Minister, went to Europe and met Commissioner Fischer Boel. As a result of their discussions, the export refund was agreed. That was a very useful and timely intervention.

Secondly, and more recently, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development set up a study group. That, too, indicates that they are entirely aware of the pressures on the dairy sector.

As I said, I totally support the motion. However, I sound one small word of caution, which concerns the timing of the establishment of a task force. It should come into play immediately after the study group that the two Ministers commissioned has completed its work. There would be a logic to carrying out the study and analysis first, after which the task force could implement the findings, but that should occur immediately after the analysis has been completed.

**Mr Savage:** First, I declare an interest as a farmer. Secondly, I congratulate my colleagues on the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development for securing the debate.

I agree with the rationale behind tabling the motion today, because the milk industry, not to mention the milk cheques for farmers across Northern Ireland, is at a particularly low ebb, especially when compared with our friends on the UK mainland, who receive significantly more per litre than Northern Ireland farmers. Indeed, with the Chancellor's announcement in last month's Budget of a 2p a litre increase in fuel duty from September, the Labour Government seem intent on making life more difficult for the sector. That will significantly increase the cost of milk production, which stands at 28p a litre. For their efforts, meanwhile, the farmers, as Dr McCrea, the Chairperson of the Agriculture Committee, said, receive a mere 17p a litre, although I say it is 19p, if they are lucky.

A farmer can go on for only so long. Farmers in Northern Ireland cannot continue to produce milk at a loss. Simple economics tells us that the reason for the low price is supply and demand. The current low price

is caused by there being too much milk in the marketplace. The question is then how to access that surplus. A possible Northern Ireland-wide solution exists. One in every six children in Northern Ireland receives school milk.

There is a potential market for providing milk to 329,000 children in nursery, primary, secondary and special needs schools. Only 55,000 children get access to daily school milk, in spite of the fact that an EU subsidy is available courtesy of the Commission Regulation (EC) No 657/2008 of 10 July 2008.

If we were to take the excess milk out of the market, put it into schools and encourage children to drink it, they would benefit from a healthier lifestyle, the farmer would receive a better price for his product, and DARD would receive an EU subsidy. It is a win-win situation for everyone. I hope to meet with the Minister and other key stakeholders soon to discuss those plans in more detail.

Returning to the motion, I agree with the proposal to set up a task force, but I urge caution. It must not become a talking shop, but rather a vehicle that can explore and implement new and innovative ideas for the betterment of the dairy sector in Northern Ireland. Furthermore, we need to promote milk better and we need to promote the benefits of our local, fresh, quality milk product. I am sure that the Minister will be happy to outline in detail what has been done, and what can be done, to better promote Northern Ireland's local, fresh, quality milk. We must work together to solve the problem in the interests of dairy farms across Northern Ireland.

In conclusion, I commend the motion to the House, and I call on the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to do all in her power to help to sustain the dairy industry in Northern Ireland. The dairy industry, along with all the other industries associated with agriculture, is the backbone of Northern Ireland. Everyone in the House must play their part in ensuring that the agriculture sector is not forgotten. We must also try to seek better and more open markets for our products.

**Mr P J Bradley:** I support the motion and ask that my comments are taken as being supportive of the dairy industry, irrespective of the size of the herd or holding.

The 'Statistical Review of Northern Ireland Agriculture 2008', which was issued by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, is an excellent reference book. The section relating to dairy production shows that 53% of the total number of Northern Ireland's dairy cows is owned by 24% of our milk producers. The figures show that milk production has not really dropped even though the number of producers has dropped significantly. Almost 2,000 million litres of milk are produced but on less farms than in previous years.

Our large dairy farms are getting even larger while the smaller farms are gradually fading out, and the hybrid Holstein is now the prime producer of milk. I

wish to slot in a question that is perhaps for another debate on another day: is there a possible link between the ever-increasing high-yielding cows and their vulnerability to disease?

Our large farms are becoming larger at the expense of historical levels of farming. Not everyone in the Chamber might agree with me, but I believe that large and small farms should be afforded equal attention and support.

The Government, and DARD in particular, cannot talk about creating rural sustainability if they are not prepared to look at how this once productive sector can be reinstated. When it comes to milk production, big is not necessarily beautiful, and the small farmer should not be allowed to fade away courtesy of the Government's lack of real interest or support. I welcome the Minister's views on that line of thinking.

Milk production, like farming in general, must not and cannot be allowed to fade into oblivion. If we were to let the industry die in Ireland and leave future generations to depend on an unreliable supply of imported milk and dairy produce, it would mark us out in the future as an irresponsible generation.

No one knows what the future holds for any industry. However, from the era of Frederick Joseph Flintstone through the Copper Age, the Bronze Age, the industrial revolution, the electronic world, and the IT world that we live in today, people have had to eat and drink to survive. We should never overlook the fact that farming is the only industry that has survived since then. I join the call to set up a task force.

In keeping with my earlier comments, I ask the Minister to assure that at least the top seven categories of dairy production, which are listed at table 4.16 of the 'Statistical Review of Northern Ireland Agriculture 2008', are represented on the task force, even if only on a pro rata production-level basis. By allowing such representation, the Minister, the Department and those of us who support milk producers will never be accused of backing only the large farming concerns.

If and when such a task force is set up, one of its considerations will be to undertake marketing milk as an all-Ireland product. With all-Ireland marketing as a possible long-term solution, the task force should seek regular updates on the benchmarking system that is soon due to get under way at the Moorepark dairy production research centre. Teagasc, in conjunction with the Irish Cattle Breeding Federation (ICBF) and the Dairygold Co-Operative Society is developing a pilot benchmarking scheme to benefit the dairy sector.

It is recognised that milk price volatility, particularly downward price movement, will force milk producers into lower-cost production. The benchmarking system at Moorepark will collect, validate, centrally store and draw up reports that dairy farmers can use prior to

making key business decisions. My information is that the scheme captures various performance indicators electronically by a number of stakeholders, including milk processors, ICBF, marts, meat factories, banks and accountants. That data may then be used in the decision-making process.

The information gathered at Moorepark will assist producers across the island of Ireland and should help in providing what the motion calls for when it asks that consideration be given to:

“the way forward for the sector and how it can be assisted in advance of the abolition of milk quotas.”

I support the motion.

**Mr Irwin:** As a dairy farmer, I declare an interest at the outset. Perhaps I can share some of my experiences of that sector and highlight the present difficulties faced by producers.

The agricultural industry is a large and important part of Northern Ireland's economy and the dairy sector is a significant player in that industry. It employs approximately 10,000 people, has an annual turnover of more than £500 million and worldwide annual product exports worth more than £300 million. In 2007-08, we enjoyed a period of increased prices. However, that was relatively short-lived.

Since October 2008, the price of milk per litre has been in a downward spiral. Surveying the present market shows the dairy industry in Northern Ireland to be in real difficulty. Producers are largely operating at a loss, receiving less than it costs to produce each litre of milk. Prices for Northern Ireland milk have been the lowest in Europe. With the added stresses and strains on farm budgets caused by meeting the ever-lengthening list of EU directives, and taking into account rises in input costs, it is no surprise to predict that the situation cannot continue.

Dairy farmers are under increasing pressure. When it is considered that many have borrowed significant sums of money to make their operations more efficient and to meet stringent EU demands, it is no wonder that many dairy farmers are considering an exit from the industry. That is the unfortunate reality. The figures show that, since 2003, the number employed in agriculture has fallen steadily.

Dairy farmers are trying to exist in a climate in which the drain on resources is becoming more unsustainable. Feed prices have rocketed. Fuel prices settled earlier this year, but have again started to rise. There has been a hike in electricity prices. Added into that mix is the very wet weather that we experienced in late spring, which led some farmers to put their cattle back indoors at more expense in feed bills and running costs at a time when the animals would normally be out at grass.

For the dairy industry in Northern Ireland to begin to compete, there must be predictability in the marketplace and in prices. In turn, that would allow producers to plan ahead in the knowledge that there was some degree of market stability. Stability is not a luxury at present enjoyed by the Northern Ireland dairy farmer. Recently, we have highlighted more than ever the need for a greater market for our produce. Export refunds can be fought for and may give some respite, but they cannot be a long-term answer to the industry's problems.

We have to up our game and move to a situation in which we rely less on commodity-based products and more on value-added products. In response to a question that I put to the Minister in November 2008, she admitted that the change from commodity-based to added-value products must continue, but at a greater pace. I want the Minister to update the House on the progress of her Department's efforts to quicken the pace in that regard.

*11.45 am*

The standard and quality of Northern Ireland dairy products is second to none. Without doubt, there is a bigger market for our produce, and we must work harder to develop our range of products in order to fully avail ourselves of the marketplace. On the UK mainland, milk production has fallen to 1971-72 levels. It is almost 40 years since milk production was so low in the UK, which proves that the exodus from the industry is staggering. However, one small positive fact is that there has not been the same exodus from the industry in Northern Ireland, because we have committed and resilient producers. Many families rise at 5.30 am and put in long, hard hours. In recent times, those families have, sadly, been working at a loss. No matter how resilient those farmers are, they cannot continue to do that indefinitely.

As I said earlier, the industry faces a daunting future if the current price trends continue, and the Northern Ireland economy will feel the strain along with the dairy farmer. Quotas will not be here forever, and we have a limited window of opportunity to address the problems that exist and prepare the industry for the stern competition that will inevitably follow the withdrawal of quotas.

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

**Mr Irwin:** The industry deserves a redoubling of our efforts to meet those challenges. I very much support the creation of a task force to prepare a strategy for improving the Northern Ireland dairy industry. I support the motion.

**Mr Molloy:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the proposer of the motion for bringing it to the Assembly. It is a timely motion to



raise awareness of the dairy industry and to explain the support and the work that is currently ongoing.

Other Members have raised the issue of the future of the dairy industry. To some extent, it has to change if it is to survive. Cross-departmental support is needed from the various Departments that are involved in agriculture. Promotion is also needed, and support to diversify the industry and to create the added value to milk products that everyone is talking about. That will require the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) and others to come on board to support the industry and its diversification.

The new European rural programme contains projects and funding opportunities for farmers to come together to co-operate and develop in the future. I know that farmers have operated very independently in the past, but it is very important that they come together as a group of farmers to benefit and to build the industry. We know that, throughout Ireland, the co-operative business model has been very successful in the past. Unfortunately, that has been taken over and bought out by big business. Why is that? It has been to the detriment of the farming industry, because the support base that had been brought together to build the industry in support of each other has been lost right across the island. The idea of bringing farmers together in co-operative businesses is important.

George Savage made a point about the issue of school milk. I think that we all remember that quarter-pints or third-pints kept us going when we were at school. It is an important aspect, because people are supported through the supply of milk to schools and because it encourages people to drink milk at a very young age. I welcome the cross-departmental support for the provision of school milk and the support to the dairy industry to enable it to deal with that.

It is also important that farmers come together to challenge the big supermarkets on price. They should buy local and should pay a realistic price for the work that goes into producing milk. The role of the supermarkets is very important, because they came together as a big industry to reduce prices in one sense, but also to create the facilities for themselves.

It is important that farmers also come together to challenge the prices that they are being offered, which, in the light of how much it costs to produce milk, are unrealistic.

For many years, the milk cheque has been the main source of income for dairy farmers, and it has been important in keeping the industry going for as long as it has been. It is important that we do not lose any elements of that industry, because it is one way that the stability of the rural economy in the future will be sustained. Therefore, it is important that we maintain and support that industry in whatever way possible.

Sinn Féin supports the spirit of the motion and commends it to the House. The first job of any task force should be to work cross-departmentally and in Europe, using the various existing strategies, to get as much support for farmers as possible. In addition, the Department must maximise on the work that has been done to date in order to work out exactly what the task force will do when it comes into operation. I support the motion. Go raibh maith agat.

**Mr Elliott:** I thank those Members who tabled the motion, and I apologise for not being in the Chamber for the start of the debate. I declare an interest as a milk quota holder.

Anyone who has been listening to the debate will realise how depressing the situation is for milk producers. When the milk quota system was established in the early 1980s, many people in this part of the world thought that it would be hugely detrimental to Northern Ireland milk producers. In fact, because that system enabled milk production to be controlled throughout the European Union, it helped sustain prices for small and medium-sized dairy producers here, allowing them to continue producing milk.

The milk quota system is one area for which being part of the United Kingdom was hugely beneficial. That is because quotas were able to be bought and sold between the UK regions. Moreover, the system allowed Northern Ireland dairy producers to increase the overall amount of quota in this area. In fact, Northern Ireland farmers are now producing far more milk than they were when quotas were introduced, or even 10 or 15 years ago. That means that Northern Ireland is probably the only region in Europe that has increased its volume of milk production.

Although that increase in production has benefited farmers here, it has also been to their detriment. That is because they are so reliant on the export market. Compared with dairy farmers who are situated closer to larger cities and populations in mainland Britain, Northern Ireland farmers do not have the same market for high-value — mainly liquid — products. Farmers here rely very much on exports. In fact, 80% of our higher-value products are exported, which means that we have to manufacture more of our milk into such products and that we are very reliant on milk powders.

Another difficulty is that in order to compete with dairy farmers in the southern hemisphere, farmers here must try to produce milk at lower prices. Southern hemisphere dairy farmers can produce milk cheaper, given that the climate in places such as Australia and New Zealand means that grass can be grown there much easier and that the cattle there are more accustomed to being outside, whereas cattle here must be kept in for at least six months of the year. Nevertheless, we



must compete with those types of producers in the world market, and that makes things more difficult.

As other Members suggested, we must concentrate more on manufacturing value-added milk products. I must commend those in the manufacturing industry who have done a good job of sourcing good sales destinations for our products. It has not been easy for them to compete in the world market.

The proposal to end the milk quota system will have a significant effect on the industry in Northern Ireland. I appreciate what Mr Molloy said about co-operating with the Republic of Ireland, but the difficulty is that we are competing with it, too. Some milk product manufacturers in the Republic of Ireland have been buying a great deal of milk from Northern Ireland. If the quota system is abolished, those manufacturers will be able to expand their production significantly. They will become more self-sufficient and will not need as much Northern Ireland produce, which, in turn, means that we in Northern Ireland may face an even greater reduction in milk prices.

I agree with those who tabled the motion that a task force should be established.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I ask the Member to draw his remarks to a close.

**Mr Elliott:** The key is to concentrate on value-added products to get more money for our producers.

**Mr Burns:** I support the motion. I am not a farmer and have no farming interests, but I live in the countryside, so I will approach the issue from the perspective of a rural dweller. I recognise the importance of the dairy industry to the countryside. Many people are employed in the production of the fresh milk that we drink every day and the cheese and ice-cream that we regularly enjoy, making the industry one of our most important.

I recall that, as a young boy, all our neighbours were dairy farmers who worked seven days a week, regardless of whether it was Christmas Day, Boxing Day or New Year's Day; they had, perhaps, 10 days off a year. We thought that we were at the top of the market at that time. One of our neighbours set up his own milk-processing business, and we had our first experience of those wee cartons of milk, which was a move away from the traditional bottles of milk that the milkman left at the door. We thought that we were very progressive and moving forward in our part of the world.

However, there is none of that now at all; it is all change. The entire industry is in decline. Only two of the families who lived near us still work in the dairy industry; they have huge dairy herds and employ a couple of men. Instead of having to work night and day, 365 days a year, those farmers can now take Saturdays and Sundays off because other people are there to help out. The farmer might have to milk the

cows himself only once every three weeks. However, fewer families are involved in the dairy industry.

I support the motion and join in calling for a task force to be set up. The Assembly must realise how important the dairy industry is to Northern Ireland.

**Mr McCallister:** I declare an interest as one who owns and manages a dairy farm and who still milks a few times a week. That said, I am not sure whether the protocol really requires me to declare an interest, given the amount of money that the average dairy farmer is losing at the moment.

As colleagues said, the difficulties in the dairy sector are well documented. A huge job of work must be undertaken to rebuild confidence in the dairy sector because it has taken such a knock in recent times.

*12.00 noon*

When proposing the motion, Dr McCrea mentioned some of the difficulties that farmers face: the bad weather that we had last year and soaring costs. Although the cost of fuel has come back down, when silage was being made last year, it was particularly high, and feed and fertiliser costs have been horrendous over the past year.

**Mr Elliott:** It has been suggested to me recently that dairy farmers have been losing approximately £2 a cow a day over the six-month winter period. Will the Member confirm whether that is reasonably accurate or a close estimate?

**Mr McCallister:** I reckon that it is very close. The losses incurred over the winter have been staggering. There are also issues with credit facilities, as Dr McCrea said, and many dairy farmers spent money over the past couple of years to meet EU requirements. Although there was welcome help from DARD's farm nutrient management scheme, farmers would still have shouldered 40% of the costs of those schemes at some point. That has left a legacy of repayment, which has to be factored in. I agree strongly with my colleague's point about farmers counting that loss, and I take issue with the comments of some of the SDLP Members, because they are fixated with the size of dairy herds and the idea of large farms versus small. If a farmer is losing £2 a cow a day, having an extra 100 cows would not be a money-spinning idea.

The sector is losing money, whether it is measured in cows or litres a day. Large farms are being hit hardest, because there is nowhere to go, and paying for labour exacerbates the problem. Sometimes, smaller farmers can resort back to the very tight unit that relies solely on family labour. I caution against saying that our larger dairy farmers are the problem; there are problems right across the sector, and if a farmer is losing money, having a large farm is not advantageous at the moment.

What are the solutions? We are facing a serious problem worldwide. We are competing not only with countries in the southern hemisphere, which have the option of cheap production systems, but with the Republic of Ireland, some parts of which have cheaper production levels that we cannot match. We must remember that we are competing with the Republic of Ireland in production and for processing jobs.

I remind the House that the agrifood industry is still the largest employer outside of Government, so it is of huge importance to the Northern Ireland economy. The role that the dairy sector plays in the agrifood industry is enormously important and influential. If a meaningful task force is set up to report quickly on what can be achieved, it is absolutely vital that it examines a range of issues, such as moving to value-added products, reducing some of our reliance on commodities and getting help to stabilise the market in the short term.

I worry that if we lose too many dairy farms, they will be gone for good. As a result, we will not only lose dairy farms, we will lose processing jobs, and that will have a wider detrimental effect on our economy generally. The sector is too important not to be helped and assisted through this very difficult time.

I urge the Minister, the Committee and the Assembly to play a role in supporting the sector. We must encourage it in any way possible.

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

**Mr McCallister:** That encouragement could take the form of emergency measures such as export refunds. We must build up the industry and ensure that it is fit for the future.

**Mr W Clarke:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I declare an interest in that I drink milk, and, as you can probably see from my physique, I eat a lot of cheese.

**A Member:** You drink Guinness, too. *[Laughter.]*

**Mr W Clarke:** Although I broadly support the motion, the call to set up a task force pre-empts the dairy process and competitiveness study. I am not against a task force being set up, but as Pat Doherty mentioned, setting up a task force may be recommended by the study. We can consider that matter when the report is complete in December.

Export refunds are also important for the dairy sector. Along with her Executive colleagues, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development has worked hard to secure the reintroduction of export refunds for dairy products, which was pressed for by the industry. Great emphasis was placed on that, and a large team was sent to Brussels to fight for the cause.

My contribution to the debate will be based on the need to get involved in niche markets, the need to move the industry away from commodity milk powders, and the need to get a greater return for well-branded, high-value produce. Dairy farmers in the North of Ireland, like farmers throughout Europe, find themselves in a new period in which agriculture has been shaped by an EU policy that seeks environmental and rural sustainability.

Future farm prosperity will be dictated by the marketplace. Free market economies always seek to take full advantage of returns against the most limited resources. Therefore, milk producers must make decisions on the system and scale of enterprise that take account of the factors that limit efficiency production on their own farms.

There are two routes that farmers can take to remain economical. They can produce milk cheaper than it is produced by other farmers, or they can target quality milk at high-value markets. Given the lack of scale, the first of those routes is not an option in the North of Ireland. Therefore, quality milk must be delivered to the processor at a competitive rate.

By adhering to principled production systems, farmers allow consumers to enjoy clean milk and dairy products in the various rural areas in which they were produced. That is an important policy that can secure an improved and sustainable return in the marketplace, but there must be trust and true integration in the supply chain.

Dairy farms, like all other farms, can make more money by either —

**Mr Elliott:** I thank the Member for giving way. Does he agree that it would be extremely helpful if voluntary modulation was taken out of the system in Northern Ireland and that that would be beneficial to the incomes of dairy farmers?

**Mr W Clarke:** The Minister heard that question, and she will respond to it.

**Mr McCallister:** You are on message today. *[Laughter.]*

**Mr W Clarke:** Higher profit, rather than keeping costs low, is the goal. The farm nutrient management scheme was a big step, but there is an opportunity for a lot of farms to cut energy costs by using renewable energy and anaerobic digestion. That may be the next step that some farms can take as a co-operative under the rural development programme. Slurry is a valuable resource that can help to reduce the amount of energy that is needed on dairy farms.

It is almost always more profitable to focus on the income side rather than to try to decrease expenses. Marketing is key to that, and products that can be produced efficiently include milk, yogurts, soft and

hard cheeses, ice cream and butter. Developing a niche market is vital to the success of an on-farm processing plant. The decision of whether to pursue direct sales or to utilise established independent retail stores through a distributional channel is also important.

There are opportunities for on-farm processing under the rural development programme. It is not for everyone; do not —

**Mr McCallister:** I agree with the Member that niche markets could play a very important part. However, one of the factors that makes Northern Ireland unique is the success that it has achieved in the quota system. Buying in quotas from the rest of the country has meant that our milk production is double what it was in 1984. We produce far too great a volume of milk and we have to export it, whether to the rest of the UK, the Republic of Ireland or the rest of the world.

**Mr W Clarke:** Buying quotas from the rest of the country? I do not know where we bought them from, unless we have drifted off to an island somewhere — *[Interruption.]* I do not think we bought them from the South either.

Dairy farmers who meet organic requirements are one step further towards having available markets for their products; they have set an example. High quality in cheeses and ice creams is also important. I admit that that is not for everyone, and I say that to the Member through the Deputy Speaker. However, many supermarkets already stock organic milk, yoghurt, butter, ice cream and cheese.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Will the Member please draw his remarks to a close?

**Mr W Clarke:** There is an onus on us to develop those products. In my constituency of South Down, no one is making cheeses. There are opportunities for lots of dairy farmers.

**The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew):** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank Dr McCrea, Mr Poots, Mr Irwin and Mr T Clarke for bringing this issue forward for debate. It is a serious subject, and we must do all that we can to help the dairy sector as it faces the challenges ahead. That is why Arlene Foster, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, and I co-operate closely for the good of the dairy industry and have agreed to support a dairy sector competitiveness study. I will say more about that shortly.

Before I address the crux of the motion, I wish to stress the important contribution that the dairy sector makes to the local economy. There has been a strong consensus on this and all Members recognise the importance of the dairy sector. The total gross turnover of the milk and milk-products processing sector in 2007 was almost £700 million, which represents 25%

of the total turnover of the food and drinks processing sector. In addition, the processing sector employs about 2,400 people.

For many years, dairy farming has been recognised as the sector most able to generate a positive return on investment, but not at present. There is a spake in our country that the banks will give you an umbrella when it is dry and take it off you when it starts to rain. Farmers across all the sectors are feeling the effects of that problem that at the moment. I agree wholeheartedly with the comments made about banks and their contribution. I agree with Dr McCrea on that.

As other Members have said, the milk cheque was for many years the only stable thing in agriculture. Almost 4,000 dairy farmers in the North are affected by the downturn in fortunes. That is a big hit on our economy. Over the years, dairy farmers have been progressive and, as many Members have said, have invested for a sustainable future. Since 1995, the volume of quota held by producers has increased by more than 40% to almost 1.9 billion litres, and the average size of a herd has increased by more than 60%, from 45 cows to 73 cows. That compares with an average herd size of 45 cows in the South and 35 cows in 15 member states of the EU.

Structurally, our dairy farms look good, and that should make them more resilient to the ups and downs of modern farming. Dairy processors have also been proactive, with help from DARD and Invest NI, in improving their overall competitiveness. Nevertheless, it is widely held that the industry cannot be complacent with the pace of progress and there is no doubt that it still needs to do more. Not so long ago, the dairy industry enjoyed the fruits of buoyant world markets, but what a change there has been in over 12 months. In 2007, the milk auction broke the barrier of 30p per litre and dairy farmers were full of optimism, but it is now below 20p per litre and there is an air of despair. We must look at the reasons for that.

I acknowledge that the global economic downturn presents difficulties. We must also face the fact that we live in a world in which markets fluctuate. The industry must take the good days with the bad and not turn to Government when times are hard. It is vital that the industry is market-led and capable of operating without Government subsidies. It does not make sense to produce milk and milk products that customers are not prepared to buy or for which they will give only a poor price.

So what is the crux of the problem facing our dairy industry? First, the liquid markets here and in the South are small, utilising, respectively, only 14% and 10% of production compared to more than 50% in Britain, which is why there is such a difference in price. That is where a good return can be realised.



Our industry remains heavily reliant on the manufacture of commodity products, such as milk powders for export markets, despite 30% of milk being sold to processors in the South. That might have been fine when the EU had strong market support mechanisms in place and the South could not increase its production; however, that position has changed.

12.15 pm

As regards the liquid milk market, George Savage and Francie Molloy spoke about the EU school milk scheme. I support that fully, as demonstrated by my and the Executive's agreement to the top-up subsidy. However, even if there were a 100% uptake of the scheme in nursery and primary schools, it would utilise only another four million litres of milk out of our production of 1.9 billion litres. Therefore, clearly, it is not the answer. However, we need to find markets for such high-price products.

Since 1995, there has been free movement of quota between England, Scotland, Wales and here. As a result of that policy decision and the decrease in production in Britain — an issue about which Mr Elliott in particular spoke — our producers have been able to expand production and are now in a much stronger position than producers in the South. That is why producers in the South were keen to have an increase in quota under the CAP health check. Like us, they want a soft landing when the milk-quota system ends.

The 2003 CAP reform presented the dairy industry with a strategic challenge, because up to that point it was heavily reliant on export refunds. With the reduction in those and intervention prices, it was clear that dairy processors had to move away from basic commodity production and focus increasingly on higher-value products.

However, six years have passed, and the dairy industry is still reliant on basic products. One might ask whether Government in the North provided any help at all in that time. It did, and the industry was encouraged to avail itself of assistance from DARD and Invest NI. I am glad that some producers in the dairy sector availed themselves of that assistance, but more could have.

More recently, the CAP health check made it clear that milk quotas will end in 2015; it will be good to get rid of the red tape and bureaucracy associated with the regime. However, let me be clear: the end of milk quotas will increase the momentum towards a completely market-led agriculture industry, and the North is heavily reliant on external sales.

With changes in global markets and increased competition for commodity products, the future sustainability of the dairy industry will be determined by our ability to respond to changing times. We have done it in the past, and the current challenge is to

improve our product mix in line with consumer expectations in order to deliver higher-added-value products and to bring forward products different from those of our main competitors. Only that will shield the local industry from the volatility of global trading.

We need to export milk rather than milk powder, for which there is a poor price. Some companies have already been very successful in exporting dairy products. Fivemiletown Creamery, for example, exports its high-quality cheeses to the US, and a niche market in the US is massive compared with our market here. Therefore, it is important to look at how companies can add value to their product. To that end, technologists at CAFRE's Loughry campus support processors with technical training and product development. That work is vital, and I encourage the industry to utilise it more.

Dr McCrea made a point about the number of staff working in Dundonald House; we also have technological advisers working out of the DARD direct offices. I do not have time to go through the enormous range of measures that we have in place; however, I am happy to address the Member's comments in writing.

As I indicated in my opening remarks, Arlene Foster and I are fully apprised of the difficulties that the dairy sector faces and have agreed to support the dairy sector competitiveness study. The aim of the study is to ensure that the North has a sustainable dairy sector, with a structure to enable it to compete globally, and the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development and the Members who proposed the motion are already aware of that. In fact, I understand that they have received an industry presentation on it.

It is important that the study is evidence-based and not an exercise that looks at the desired results and works backwards. I hope that it will put dairy processors in a better position to recognise the challenges facing the industry and to make strategic decisions about the future direction of their businesses.

A vibrant dairy-processing sector is essential in helping to ensure that farmers receive a good return for all their investment and hard work. I recognise the hard work, long hours, early starts, and so forth that are involved. That sector is important to me, as Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, and to the Executive.

I am glad to report the positive response from processors to the exercise. I assure the representatives of producers of our full engagement with them throughout the process. Their involvement is important in ensuring that the conclusions reflect what is best for the industry.

Dr McCrea made a point about the Red Meat Industry Task Force. When that body was commissioned, who would have thought that the dairy sector would be in its current position?



Change will not take place overnight. In view of that, my Executive colleagues and I, together with a leading representative of the industry, met the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. We pressed hard for the EU Commission to take the necessary measures to stabilise the market. Our efforts resulted in the reintroduction of export refunds, and I am glad that there has been some improvement in recent milk auction prices. When Commissioner Fischer Boel visits the Balmoral Show later this week, I will have the opportunity to update her on the difficulties that the dairy industry here continues to face.

I agree that the motion is important. An active engagement and working relationship with all parts of the industry means that I recognise the difficulties that are faced by all those working in the dairy sector, both producers and processors. I am encouraged that everyone in the industry will contribute constructively to the current study. I am confident that that will prove to be a watershed in the well-being of the sector.

Work on the study is under way, and I expect a report towards the end of the year. Until then, it would be premature to speculate on its outcome or to consider setting up a task force. However, I do not rule out that possibility; I will wish to examine the study's recommendations. I join Members in wanting the best for the dairy industry.

I look forward to working with the members of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development. We can work collectively and, as Members have pointed out, we should chart the future together. The consensus that has been reached and the comments that have been made during the debate are helpful. We want to continue working in partnership for the betterment of the dairy industry. That can be achieved. Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

**Mr Poots:** Over the past 10 years or more, Governments in the UK and beyond have operated a low-cost food policy. That helps Governments in many respects, including keeping down inflation. Unfortunately, the primary producers, rather than the supermarkets, have had to bear the responsibility for delivering that policy. In the past few weeks, Tesco, for example, announced a £3.1 billion profit. Given Tesco's investment in the development of many new stores in the past year, that figure does not reflect its real profit.

When two litres of milk leave a farm, they cost 34p, but they are sold in Tesco stores for £1.28, which illustrates where that company makes its profit. Tesco can make 400% profit from milk that a farmer produces at a loss, and £3 billion off the backs of consumers. Therefore, current policy is not good.

The national Government are failing the people of the United Kingdom by allowing supermarkets to exercise such power. For the benefit of Willie Clarke,

by "national Government", I mean the UK Government. Mr Clarke did not understand the term when John McCallister used it in an earlier question, and I remind Mr Clarke that we are in the UK. When one company accounts for £1 in every £8 spent on the high street, the Government must sit up and accept that that company is far too powerful. The Assembly must reflect on such matters, because Tesco is turning over the farming community and not giving the consumer value for money.

**Mr I McCrea:** Yesterday, I met a farmer who suggested that a uniform price should be paid for milk in supermarkets across Northern Ireland. Does the Member consider that one way to prevent supermarkets from selling milk at increased prices and shafting consumers?

**Mr Poots:** No, because I do not believe in totalitarianism. I believe in a free economy. I encourage individuals to shop around, because my local butcher supplies milk at a considerably lower price than the supermarkets, so perhaps people are better to support their local butchers.

#### **The Minister of Agriculture and Rural**

**Development:** Yesterday, I spoke to a Minister of State from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. I raised with her the issues about loss-leaders in supermarkets, the strength of supermarkets and said that more must be done to regulate what the Member talked about. I said that we supported the introduction of a supermarkets' ombudsman. I recognise that the high profits that supermarkets make are very unfair when one looks at the challenges that dairy farmers go through.

**Mr Poots:** In the run-up to Christmas 2008, supermarkets used alcohol as a loss-leader. One company made a loss of more than £20 million on alcohol in December 2008, while it ripped off people who were buying basic food products, which are a necessity.

Aside from the supermarkets, the cheap food policy is not sustainable, and it also incompatible with food security. When I show people around this Building, I point out that the Senate Chamber was used to keep the north Atlantic shipping routes open so that Britain could have enough food to feed its people. I hope and believe that we are not entering a situation comparable to a world war, but our country should not be wholly reliant on food from South America and the southern hemisphere in general.

The same guarantee that can be given on the quality of the food on the shelves that comes from this country cannot be given on that from the southern hemisphere. It is important that consumers can be given guarantees that the food that they eat is of the best quality. That is generally the case for the food that is produced in the United Kingdom and across Europe.

I do not have to declare an interest in the debate as I am not a dairy farmer; I could declare an interest in eating ice cream and bowls of rice pudding. I can recall being told in the 1980s that export refunds and interventions were needed because there was an oversupply of milk. We heard about butter mountains and milk lakes. That was eventually done away with, which was to the good. Dairy farmers and the dairy-processing sector were then able to thrive. I am concerned that we are returning down that route, which is not the answer. It is a short-term solution, and we need to deal with the longer term.

There has been a failure in the processing sector in Northern Ireland in that it is over-reliant on milk powders as a commodity and that it has not established other markets to the extent that it should have. Various Members spoke about getting into niche markets. That is easier said than done, and that is why a task force is a necessity. The Red Meat Task Force carried out work to identify what farmers needed to get for their products. Farmers were quite alarmed when they heard some of the outcomes of the Red Meat Task Force report, but, when they read it and gave it full consideration, they realised that it was the reality. Reality is also needed in the dairy industry about the return that it needs and how those returns can be achieved. There are no easy fixes.

Willie Clarke talked about niche markets. It will take a long time to get into niche markets, and the problems of the dairy industry will not be solved in 10 years, never mind one year, by going down that route. Nonetheless, we do need to go down that route as one aspect of resolving the issue.

William McCrea set the scene for the debate with great clarity. Pat Doherty expressed concern about the timing of the establishment of a task force, but he fully supported the concept. George Savage talked about the differential with the UK milk price, and he referred to school milk, which, as the Minister pointed out, accounts for 4 million litres of the 1.9 billion litres that are produced in Northern Ireland. Therefore, although such a measure can provide modest help, it is not the answer. A cocktail of measures is needed to assist the dairy industry.

*12.30 pm*

George Savage expressed concern that the debate would be merely a talking shop and said that better promotion is needed. P J Bradley talked about large farmers becoming larger and said that there must be equality. There is equality in that the price that a farmer gets for his milk is the same whether he has 400 cows or 40 cows. Unfortunately, I do not believe that smaller herds will be sustainable in the dairy industry in the long term. That is just the nature of the industry.

William Irwin said that prices have fallen to an unsustainable level and that the number of dairy producers throughout the UK has fallen steadily since 2003. He maintains that export refunds are not the answer in the long term and that there must be a switch from commodity to value-added products.

Francie Molloy talked about the need for a cross-departmental approach and for greater co-operation among various Departments. Although I agree with that, I believe that the focus must stay with the Department of Agriculture, which is the lead Department on the matter. In the main, answers to the problem will come from that Department.

Tom Elliott talked about quota expansion and about more milk being produced in Northern Ireland. However, as considerably less milk is produced in the rest of the UK, that is not the problem, albeit Northern Ireland produces a huge amount of liquid milk that must be dealt with better.

Tommy Burns shared an interesting reminiscence with the House. John McCallister mentioned that the problem is worldwide and that Northern Ireland competes with the Republic of Ireland; he said that short-term action must be taken. I suppose that that is where export refunds and intervention come in. However, those measures can only be short-term solutions.

I have discussed Willie Clarke's comments on the niche market. I have explained to him that the quota came from that other part of our country of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, namely Great Britain.

The Minister talked about the contribution that the competitiveness study would make and said that the time might not be quite right; she also talked about the air of despair. I am concerned that she gives the impression that if there is no market for dairy products, farmers should simply stop milking their cows. Better ways to establish a market must be identified.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

That this Assembly recognises the difficulties facing the dairy sector and calls on the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to set up a task force to consider the way forward for the sector and how it can be assisted in advance of the abolition of milk quotas.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The Business Committee has agreed to meet immediately upon the lunchtime suspension. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm.

*The sitting was suspended at 12.33 pm.*

*On resuming (Mr Speaker in the Chair) —*  
2.00 pm

## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

### Economy: Ad Hoc Committee

**Mr Speaker:** In accordance with the Business Committee's agreement to allocate additional time where two or more amendments have been selected, up to one hour and 45 minutes will be allocated 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. Two amendments have been selected and published on the Marshalled List. The proposer of each amendment will have 10 minutes in which to propose and five minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

**Dr McDonnell:** I beg to move

That this Assembly reaffirms the priority given to the economy outlined in the Programme for Government; notes with concern the impact of the downturn on jobs, especially in the construction, manufacturing and service sectors; recognises the need to protect frontline services including health, education, skills and housing in the pursuit of efficiency savings; and resolves to establish an ad-hoc committee:

(i) to bring forward proposals to revise budget lines and spending profiles to ensure the best support for key economic sectors in the context of both current downturn and future recovery;

(ii) to explore innovative uses of public money to address the pressures caused by the global downturn and prospects for regional recovery; and

(iii) to consider proposals to ring-fence frontline public services and ensure more strategic targeting of efficiency savings.

We are in the grip of one of the worst economic recessions in living memory. Businesses are going belly-up, workers are being laid off, and families across Northern Ireland are struggling to make ends meet. This is a genuine motion that aims to open up an honest debate on the economy. We must find mechanisms through which we can talk to each other and share economic responsibilities. Rebuilding our economy will take a great deal of work. However, in the short term, we have just as much work to do to make best use of our existing resources.

Nobody will be surprised that I am slightly concerned about the response of the two main parties — the governing parties — to the crisis. They hold their hands up, claim powerlessness and do nothing of any substance. One should consider the relatively unhelpful amendments to today's motion as examples of how devoid those parties are of creative or productive ideas

and of how content they are to dawdle along, making no changes and no difference.

The DUP's recent proposals are nothing more than a smoke-and-mirrors exercise. A set of old ideas has been dressed up in new clothes, and a few efficiency savings have been added around the edges. There is talk about reducing the number of Departments but not the number of civil servants. There is no mention of scrapping the large bonuses that are dished out to many civil servants. The DUP is fooling no one on the matter. People want genuine proposals, not a fog that hides the existing difficulties and failures. We do not need to create a fog to hide the deepening failure.

We are fully conscious that difficulties may exist among political parties, and we are conscious that the DUP and Sinn Féin may have difficulty renegotiating changes. However, those changes must be renegotiated. The Programme for Government and the Budget, which are almost two years old now, are not sufficient to meet the fierce challenges of today. From its inception, the Budget was seriously flawed, and the SDLP voted against it. In the light of the deepening crisis and the radical changes to the economy, that Budget is obviously flawed. Economic experts, financial experts, the business sector and the community and voluntary sector all agree that we must urgently revise our priorities. The two main parties in the Chamber are the only ones who oppose that concept.

Yet, all over the world, Governments are looking again at spending priorities, while many of us in this Chamber bury our head in the sand. The response to the growing criticism from across the community and from leading economists is to avoid the issue. We cannot succeed in rebuilding our prosperity by doing that. I think that that is a terrible message to send to the thousands of people who have lost their jobs and the tens of thousands who are struggling to make ends meet in the recession. That is not responsible or acceptable government, and I do not think that it is the type of government that any of us want. That is why my party make a new, carefully costed Budget paper and why we brought forward the proposals that are in the motion.

We are disappointed with the Executive's response. We must ask what that response is, because clearly, they did not deem the economic downturn significant or important enough to respond. If they did, somebody would be here today to deal with the issue and to respond to the debate.

Any issues that I raise, I do so genuinely and honestly. I want an honest and positive solution. I have said time and again in the Chamber that the way in which we respond to the current crisis will be the greatest test of this Executive and this Assembly. The DUP and Sinn Féin are running away at a time of economic crisis.



Someone should be here in the Chamber today to say why a Budget that has a shortfall of £100 million for building social houses, for instance, should last another day. Somebody should be here to say how they intend to find the £123 million of savings that were decreed by the Chancellor. Yet the main parties refuse, against all calls from economic experts, to revise the Budget at this time of emergency.

Today, Minister Conor Murphy has agreed further Translink fare hikes of 13%. He is demanding that the public revise their budgets, but he refuses to allow the Assembly to revise its Budget. Minister Sammy Wilson has agreed rises in planning fees; he is demanding that the struggling construction industry revise its budget priorities; but he refuses to allow the Assembly to do the same. What kind of government is this? I think that those people owe more to themselves, if not to the rest of us.

Unlike any other party, the SDLP has nailed the notion that no new money could be found. We identified £400 million that could be vired to boost the local economy. As outlined in the motion, the Executive must revise their Budget lines and spending priorities to ensure the very best support for our key sectors, not just during the current downturn but when it comes to helping us prepare for a recovery.

An Ad Hoc Committee on the current economic crisis is perhaps the most effective and best value-for-money vehicle for achieving that. Such a Committee could be innovative and creative, and it could listen to and take on board any evidence that may be available, from whatever source. An Ad Hoc Committee would be the best vehicle for exploring all the options and for coming up with some original and resourceful recommendations.

Our front line services are vital in all this, and, in a time when stringent efficiency saving targets are being set, an Ad Hoc Committee is the most effective and efficient means of exploring all proposals to ring-fence front line public services and to ensure more strategic targeting of efficiency savings. However, it is crystal clear from the amendments that the DUP and its Sinn Féin puppets are not interested in making serious proposals to revise the Budget lines and review the spending profiles to ensure that the best support is delivered to our key economic sectors and drivers. At the same time, they are not interested in exploring innovative uses of public money to address and ease current pressures right across Northern Ireland. They clearly have no intention of or interest in considering proposals to protect our front line public services.

I am sure that people right across Northern Ireland are delighted to hear that message from those two parties. Rather than bring hope, that message can only induce despair in all those fathers and mothers who are

joining the ever-lengthening dole queues and enduring sleepless nights worrying about how they will make ends meet and feed their families.

I want to assure people that the SDLP is interested. We want to make changes; we want to make a difference; and we want to do what we can to make people's lives easier and better in these difficult times. MLAs are not helpless in the face of the economic downturn, despite what the two main parties want the public to believe. With leadership and imagination, we can protect existing jobs, get some more people working again, and then some more after that. It is unfortunate that such initiatives and such determination are in short supply among the parties that control the Executive. Nevertheless, I assure the public that the SDLP will continue to press the issue. We will not dodge our responsibility in the Assembly or outside it, and we will not allow other parties to dodge their responsibilities to the people.

It is my privilege to move the motion. I do so in a genuine way, and with a view to finding some answers to the various challenges that we face. Those challenges are bigger than any of us as individuals or as members of parties in the Assembly, but we owe it to the public, whatever our party allegiance, to do all that we can to alleviate the worst impact of the downturn and lay the foundations for a better future.

**Mr Weir:** I beg to move amendment No 1: Leave out all after "savings" and insert

"; notes that budget lines are altered in-year via the Monitoring Round process and that since 2007 the Executive has reallocated £1 billion in resources, including £70 million in December 2008, aimed at addressing the downturn; acknowledges the need to pursue further efficiencies targeted at reducing the size of government; welcomes the proposal for an Efficiency Review Panel; and calls for the prompt production of recommendations to reduce the number of government Departments and to deliver efficient and effective public services."

I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate. The mover of the motion told us several times of his party's genuine motivation for tabling the motion; indeed, one became a bit suspicious of that because of the number of times he mentioned it. However, I admit that it is difficult to take exception to the first few lines of the motion: all Members share the desire to reaffirm the prioritisation of the economy, and there is concern about the impact of the global economic downturn and that efficiency savings should not mean cuts in front line services. I suspect that that message has not reached every official in every Department, because there is still a culture in some Departments that regards efficiency savings as cuts. From our perspective, that is as good as the SDLP motion gets.

One of the main reasons for tabling amendment No 1 is the proposal for an Ad Hoc Committee. The proposer was a little unclear about whether that Committee would be an Ad Hoc Committee of the



Assembly or a forum involving outside economic help. We must ask whether we need an Ad Hoc Committee; and my answer is no, for two reasons. First, let us examine the potential role of such a Committee. Will it allow people from outside the Assembly to bring in their expertise? That has already been done. The Executive have set up a wide-ranging group that involves the trade unions, business and local government. Will its purpose be to assess the best way forward for the Assembly from an economic perspective? The people who should be taking those decisions and are already doing so are the Minister of Finance and Personnel and his Executive colleagues. Those decisions should not be shuffled off to a Back-Bench Committee of the Assembly.

The economy is the number one priority; it was established as such in the Budget and in the Programme for Government. Consequently, there should be no need for an Ad Hoc Committee. Will such a Committee be tasked with producing greater efficiencies? Again, that has already been tackled by the Executive, which established the efficiency review panel. It seems strange to set up another Committee to examine greater efficiencies. Is it the SDLP's solution to add more bureaucracy into the system and put one more Committee on top of the others?

2.15 pm

The other reason given for needing an Ad Hoc Committee is to reprofile Budget lines. However, that is unnecessary, because there are already processes in place to take account of changing circumstances and revise Budget lines. As is noted in our amendment, since 2007 the Finance Minister has reallocated approximately £1 billion in resources, including £70 million in December 2008 directly addressed at the downturn. That £1 billion over a two-year period is two and a half times the amount that the SDLP is suggesting. The SDLP has come up with a £400 million package, and I will come to some of the detail of that later in my speech.

The SDLP has criticised the Budget, both at the time and today. It has said that the Budget was a flawed outcome. However, given a blank page to create its own proposals, the SDLP has produced a change in revenue spend of less than 1%. If capital is included, it is in the region of a little over 2% of the overall Budget. Therefore, the SDLP agrees with 98% or 99% of the Budget, yet there has to be reallocation. Furthermore, the amount being reallocated on an annual basis by the Finance Minister is already greater than that proposed. The issue of some sort of economic rejigging seems to be somewhat flawed in that regard.

Although we want to ensure that front line services are protected, I sense within this motion a move away from the efficiency savings that need to be brought about. The purpose of having an efficiency review panel, which is welcomed in our amendment, and the

efficiency targets that are set for each of the Departments is to ensure that money is brought forward to front line services. I would be very loath to move away from anything on that line.

Let us take a look at the panacea that has been put forward to us today in the SDLP's magnificent vision of reallocation. In the United States, a politician once criticised another for talking about "voodoo economics". To describe the SDLP's proposal as voodoo economics would be an insult to the witch doctors of the island of Haiti: it is utterly incoherent. Let us take a look at some of the spending proposals, for example. I am sure that we would all welcome £20 million being allocated to the hospital for women and children at the Royal Hospital. However, £20 million is not going to wash the face of that project, which is a £300 million project.

There are other proposals. Some of the loans that are proposed are already being pursued by the Executive with the banks. They could be delivered at no expense to the public purse and would see the banks fulfilling their criteria.

The real weakness with the SDLP budget comes when we look at where the supposed £400 million over a two-year period is to be saved. First, we are told that there can be reprofiling of the Housing Executive debt. At £100 million, that is, in fact, the biggest single item proposed out of the £400 million. In fact, it is greater than that, because for some reason the savings seem to be split on a capital and revenue basis. I am unsure how that amounts to £140 million, more than one third of the proposals. However, that debt is on the basis of agreement between us and the Treasury. We are not in a position to unilaterally reprofile that debt. If we are able to release some of that money through negotiations with the Treasury, the amount that would be saved as a result would be massively less than that. However, I reiterate that that is not something that we are in a position to do unilaterally.

A sum of £50 million has been allocated for the funding of a multi-sports stadium, yet the SDLP has tabled a motion urging the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to go ahead and spend that money on a multi-sports stadium. As Members who are involved with DCAL will know, even if it is not spent on a single sports stadium, that money will be reallocated towards spending on sports stadiums in general. Therefore, that money is not available.

We see, for example, the proposed sale and leaseback of the Housing Executive headquarters at £16 million. Even the Social Development Minister did not propose that in her part of the Budget.

When the business case for that redevelopment was looked at, it did not add up. It did not represent value for money to the Northern Ireland Executive.

The SDLP proposals also reference Invest NI surplus funds and Belfast Harbour Commissioners' surplus funds. My colleague Ian Paisley Jnr brought to the Committee a letter from Belfast Harbour Commissioners stating that the cash reserves referenced in the SDLP's proposals have been allocated elsewhere. Similarly, the Invest NI money has already been allocated to be spent elsewhere.

The much-vaunted Civil Service bonuses could be looked at, but, even taken at face value, that would represent less than 1% of the overall amount that the SDLP proposes to find. A range of asset sales has been suggested, such as selling car parks. In some cases, that has already been factored in. We are not in a position to get the best value from public money by selling off capital assets when the market is at its lowest point. An unrealistic freeze of Civil Service recruitment has also been proposed.

The party that is keen to boast of its green credentials proposes to sell around one eighth of Northern Ireland's forests. We have recently had the somewhat token gesture of switching off lights for an hour, yet the SDLP proposes to reduce the carbon footprint by reducing our forests by one eighth.

Football managers were often accused of writing their team on the back of a fag packet. This is a fag-packet budget, which is utterly unrealisable. Around 80% or 90% of it does not add up. The SDLP can propose whatever it wants, but an Ad Hoc Committee will not add to the work of the Assembly.

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

**Mr Weir:** The route that we have suggested is the best way to achieve efficiency savings.

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

**Mr Weir:** It is preferable to the 'Fantasy Island' politics of the SDLP.

**Mr McLaughlin:** I beg to move amendment No 2: Leave out "resolves to establish an ad-hoc committee" and insert

"calls on the Executive to utilise fully the in-year Monitoring Round process:"

Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. With your indulgence, Mr Speaker, I would like briefly to thank you for the generous use of your discretionary powers in allowing the leaders of all parties in the Assembly to make very kind remarks in relation to the attack on my family home. I am most grateful. It was of great solace to me and my family.

I thank the SDLP for securing the debate today. I support the comments made by the First Minister and deputy First Minister in the past couple of weeks. They recognise the value of discussions with leaders of

every party to discuss the ongoing crisis in the economy. I hope that that open and inclusive approach will be applied to other emerging issues and pressures that will face the Assembly as we move forward.

I accept that the Executive ministerial team in the Assembly must be capable of demonstrating that they have responded and are responding to the changing economic conditions. However, I and my party cannot support the motion today. It is more concerned with pursuing the SDLP's obsession with reopening the Budget process than with developing effective responses to economic decline within the context of the agreed Programme for Government priorities and a careful deployment of the available financial resources.

The motion continues to reflect the mistiming of the SDLP. When it brought forward its economic proposals, the SDLP was possibly the only party on this island oblivious to the fact that the British emergency Budget was about to be announced. Its proposals were redundant almost before the ink was dry. These issues have to inform people's approach to the proposition before us today.

The SDLP has concluded that it did not contribute effectively to the original Budget consultation process. Its memorable indecision when it came to the Budget vote last spring and the clear division between the SDLP Assembly group and its Minister has characterised its feeble and, I believe, increasingly desperate attempts to renegotiate that Budget.

The recently established economic task force, the cross-sector advisory forum, will be reluctant to create even more Committees, as proposed by the SDLP. Again, this is a proposition from a party that proposed that we reduce the number of Committees and the amount of bureaucracy in this place when it launched its proposal document.

Equally, the Assembly will be very reluctant to agree to the duplication or replication of the work of its existing scrutiny Committees, which have statutory powers, can call for evidence and can meet the most senior departmental officials and Ministers, when appropriate. They can also, under the revised Standing Orders, meet in joint purpose to discuss and develop proposals.

Confused thinking is not the way to respond to the increasingly damaging and enormous economic challenges. Sinn Féin will not accept the DUP amendment, nor does it accept the DUP election manifesto wish list as an appropriate or adequate alternative option. The DUP proposals that were published yesterday and are reflected in its amendment must, as a minimum, be acceptable to my party before they can be presented to the Assembly with any possibility of endorsement. That is just a fact of the election results, and that will not change in this Assembly term.

At the end of the day, it is a matter of reflecting the electorate's judgement and wisdom in the representation that they have elected to the Assembly and have thus mandated. The Assembly and the parties in it must operate within the agreed protocols, and those protocols require us to develop proposals that reflect cross-community interest, endorsement and support.

We strongly welcome the submission of ideas from the DUP. We even welcome SDLP ideas. Such ideas will be the subject of discussion, negotiation and agreement before they can translate into the policy position of the Assembly. Those ideas — that is really the best description of them at this point — are at an embryonic stage. I welcome and look forward to the opportunity to discuss the various suggestions. We will see whether they can emerge in the form of proposals that have a realistic possibility of endorsement and acceptance by the Assembly. It is only in those circumstances that they can be enacted.

The Sinn Féin amendment has the —

**Dr McDonnell:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Speaker:** It is up to the Member whether he gives way.

**Mr McLaughlin:** To be honest, the Member had his 10 minutes. If he felt that he did not say enough in 10 minutes, I do not see any value in giving him any further time.

The Sinn Féin amendment has the strength of being an agreed way forward.

**Mr Durkan:** He is looking forward to a debate.

**Mr McLaughlin:** I am looking forward to a debate, and I listened carefully to what Dr McDonnell said.

**Dr McDonnell:** When are you going to have a debate?

**Mr McLaughlin:** I look forward to hearing what Mark Durkan will say, as well. *[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order; the Member has the Floor.

**Mr McLaughlin:** Ten minutes really is enough for anybody who has anything to say.

The Sinn Féin amendment, I repeat, has the advantage and strength of being an agreed position. Just as Sinn Féin did, the DUP identified the in-year monitoring process as one of the procedures that we have agreed. That process is effective and has identified quite significant sums of money, which have been reallocated. It has identified how efficiency savings can be redeployed on front line services. It has identified where underspend patterns were developing and how that money could be surrendered by the respective Departments and redeployed according to agreed priorities in the Programme for Government. That is a democratic position that the Assembly has agreed and endorsed.

The Assembly cannot print new money in the light of emerging pressures. It cannot set new fiscal parameters. We can, we must and we will operate according to the reality of the available finances. We will do that in the most effective way possible, and we will do it on a non-partisan basis. If we look at who won the most significant amounts of money in the in-year monitoring process, we see that it was the SDLP Minister. That is because every party has stepped up to the plate to deal with the priority issue of social housing and has allocated very significant additional sums to it. In return for that, we want to see the social housing deficit and the pressures that it creates being addressed effectively. That is what we will judge our spending on. *[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order.

2.30 pm

**Mr McLaughlin:** The money has been given to the Minister, and we expect her to deliver. Although we are prepared to be critical, we are also prepared to be very supportive of the Minister if it is necessary to examine whether additional money can be identified and applied in future monitoring rounds.

I urge everyone, particularly the party opposite, to operate on the basis of existing agreements. As the DUP highlights correctly in its amendment, we have a mechanism to free up money and to apply it to emerging pressures, and we can, therefore, hold the feet of Ministers to the fire with regard to surrendering unspent moneys and identifying efficiencies. In such circumstances, we can continue to address, protect and ring-fence those priorities that were identified in the Programme for Government, the delivery of which the Assembly is tasked with.

We do not support the SDLP motion, or the DUP amendment, which contains elements that have not been discussed or agreed with any other party, and certainly not with Sinn Féin.

**Mr McNarry:** My party is pleased to see Mr McLaughlin in his place of work, despite the despicable events at his home.

The mechanism already exists to do everything outlined in the motion; it is called the Executive. However, in practice, we know it as the cosy Sinn Féin/DUP coalition, which is part of the problem. Like others, I am frustrated at the persistent and consistent refusal of the Finance Minister and the First Ministers, in particular, to positively address the recession.

Today, the economist Richard Ramsey said that Northern Ireland's economy "needs to reinvent itself", and he is absolutely right. The four-party Executive is the place to reprioritise public-spending profiles. Therefore, any Committee that we establish will, by its nature, lack the full Executive power for action.



However, we need to do something to force the cosy coalition into doing its job and to stop cowering behind the control-freaking and complacency of Ministers who use their majority to impose their will and to whom there appears to be no economic recession. Of course the economy is the priority, but the attitude of some people needs to change as do some of the lesser priorities of which people just will not let go.

Perhaps, the double-jobbers in this place find other distractions that prevent them from concentrating on the job at hand: we all suffer from that behaviour. Let the nouveau riche political millionaires who sit on the DUP Front Bench and who are absent from the Chamber connect with the people who are struggling with unemployment or the threat thereof. Let them connect with those who are making the family budget stretch and with those who are struggling with rent or mortgage payments, even for one home. Let them tell the people what difference £1 billion in reallocated resources has meant for them; show them, pinpoint it and tell them what difference it makes to them. Let them tell us that they do not need recommendations from others; after all, the DUP is a party of action and has the majority to act alone. Tell the people now: no more big talk and no more dodging the issue. Go for it. Tell the people that you will recommend to the Assembly authorities your own number-specific Departments. Tell people the truth: that you will cut jobs in the public sector and that those cuts are your solution.

Last week, the “Artful Dodger” said that we should consider immediately cutting the number of Departments, which would release £50 million annually. He added that we should consider:

“what could be done with less bureaucracy, less government and fewer Departments”. — [*Official Report, Bound Volume 40, p227, col 2*].

Such a statement sums up the shambles that the DUP is in.

There is merit in the SDLP motion, because voting for it will be a clear signal that the Sinn Féin/DUP axis has failed and is out of touch with public opinion. Is it not surprising that the DUP/Sinn Féin co-operative is not grabbing at the idea of an Ad Hoc Committee?

I would have thought that, as the penny dropped, they would be bursting to find cover and to suck us all into a weeping confession that they have messed up. On the other hand, perhaps the control freaks want a subservient group. Perhaps they will move on the matter themselves by creating an informal group that will help them to cover up their mistakes. If that is to be the case, let us wait and see what develops. That said, we should all support the motion.

**Dr Farry:** I, too, welcome Mitchel McLaughlin back to the Chamber after the despicable attack on his house and family.

The Alliance Party supports the original motion. We see merit in the specific focus of a Committee that cuts across departmental lines. However, any Committee would be a poor substitute for firm Executive action. The Alliance Party has always recognised and welcomed the emphasis on the economy in the Programme for Government and the Budget. However, although it is fine, on the one hand, to prioritise the economy, on the other hand, one has to recognise that there are different ways to do that. Frankly, that is what a number of Members, and many economists on the outside, are talking about.

A revised Budget would be a means to two ends. The first would be protecting public services; the second would be investing in economic recovery and modernisation. The approach of using monitoring rounds, which is reflected in the DUP and Sinn Féin amendments, is, in itself, a very limited way of addressing the flaws in the Budget. The potential range of what can be done is determined by two factors: first, what, if anything, Departments are prepared to surrender, and, secondly, whatever Barnett consequential come one's way. There can be no fundamental reconsideration of underlying baselines and existing policies and priorities in reconsidering whether they are still relevant in the current economic situation. That, frankly, is what a revised Budget would achieve. Therefore, it is important that the Assembly is clear about that.

It is welcome that Members are talking about what economists on the outside are saying, and it is important that we listen to the full gamut of what they are saying. Economists do not live in ivory towers. They are saying that we need a revised Budget. They are also saying that the Assembly will have to face up to taking tough decisions about the populism that has underlined many of the Executive's decisions. The SDLP, which tabled the motion, also needs to address that issue, given that one almost senses that that party is waiting for the Executive to make their first move on water charges so that it can pounce on them. We need a bit more maturity than that.

The Alliance Party was critical of the Budget at the outset. We felt that it did not address the cost of a divided society, properly address modernising the economy, or protect public services. Since the Budget was passed, we have had the economic downturn and the situation has changed fundamentally.

Frankly, the Executive's response to the recession has been extremely muted. Around the world, national Governments, and regional Governments such as our own, have had their own fiscal stimuli to address the situation in their own jurisdictions. We have not gone down that route, and it has not been for lack of opportunities. In November 2008, the UK Government introduced their £20 billion stimulus. Quite a lot of that applied automatically to Northern Ireland. However, we had our own share of new money from Barnett conse-



quential. Did we make the best use of that money? I do not think so.

As a result of the April Budget, which was not an emergency Budget, as was said earlier, but just the regular spring Budget, we will receive another £116 million in Barnett consequentials — £50 million this year and £66 million next year. Over that period, Northern Ireland will be asked to make another £123 million in efficiency savings. It may be rather neat and convenient for the Executive to set one figure off against the other, leaving a deficit of only £7 million. However, two factors must be borne in mind. First, the phasing might not facilitate that off-setting, and, secondly, and more importantly, that increased windfall for Northern Ireland reflects increased spending elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

The UK Government might not call it a fiscal stimulus, and it is certainly not on the same scale as that announced in November. However, it is a significant countercyclical element that they are trying to address. Under devolution, of course, we can do things differently, and I defend that. However, the source of those Barnett consequentials should be a clear indication to us in Northern Ireland about what we should be doing. We should be investing in recovery in areas such as social housing, training and employment, energy efficiency, and renewable energy.

The real focus now shifts to the June monitoring round, which comes two months after the Budget. A good place to start would be to invest all the £116 million in economic recovery and to try to address the £123 million in savings elsewhere from public expenditure. That may not be a full rewrite of the Budget, but it would be a good place to start. My party believes that, in the first instance, the Executive should use that £123 million to start to address the cost of division. We will table our own paper on that shortly.

The DUP's amendment in respect of efficiencies from Government —

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

**Mr Paisley Jnr:** It is not often that one gets the opportunity to follow such absolute and total drivell from other Members. We have heard absolute drivell from the SDLP Benches, and particularly expert drivell from the Ulster Unionist Benches. This House, and, more importantly, our people, deserve better. The people of Northern Ireland are entitled to be given a little bit of hope from their political and public representatives — regardless of where they sit in the House — during this time of economic turmoil, rather than the hell that some Members wish to serve up to them.

If an Ad Hoc Committee were established, we can clearly see the sort of talk that would be served up to us on a ritualistic, daily basis. That would consist of nothing but putting people through sheer wallowing in

the mire in respect of how awful Northern Ireland is. We need to stand up to that and say that Northern Ireland has turned a corner and that it has opportunities. It is up to us, as public representatives, to point to that opportunity, to lead, and to bring our people out of the economic turmoil, which exists through no fault of our own, but is a consequence of the turmoil that the rest of the world is experiencing.

If any Member were to study the global economic climate, they would see that things are slowly changing. In today's edition of the 'Financial Times', it is clear that all the economies of the world have turned a corner, with growth up in China, France, the United Kingdom and Germany. However, some Members are talking about how awful the situation is; they are saying, "woe is me", and that the economy is at an end. Those parties have decided that they would like an Ad Hoc Committee to be established to allow them to continue to wallow in the past, but we owe our people more than that.

I looked to the SDLP's 'New Priorities in Difficult Times' document for some stimulus, but it is not about priorities in difficult times; it is about the SDLP avoiding taking tough decisions now. Instead, the party wants to set up a Committee.

The SDLP states that it has shown that plenty can be done, but during Alasdair McDonnell's 10-minute speech, he did not tell us about one thing that can be done. He also stated that we must revise the "flawed" Budget and the Programme for Government. Let me be absolutely clear: the Budget was supported by the SDLP's Executive Minister. Indeed, in her guise as the "Iron Lady", the Margaret of the SDLP said that it was a Thatcherite Budget, but then she melted and supported it, and gave it her full endorsement at the Executive. Although her party may cling to the pretence that it voted against the Budget, the truth of the matter is that it supported it where it counted — at the Executive — and it supports it every day by implementing the policies of that Executive.

**Mr Poots:** As someone who has planted quite a lot of trees over the years, I wonder whether the Member shares my concerns that the SDLP wants to institute a chainsaw massacre on one eighth of our forests across Northern Ireland.

**Mr Paisley Jnr:** The "innovative uses of public money", as the SDLP likes to call it, means that, armed with a ballot box in one hand and a chainsaw in the other, that party would cut down our forests. I do not think that that is the answer to the economic plight of our country.

My colleague Peter Weir talked about the SDLP's proposal to sell off the Housing Executive's headquarters and then lease it back. Not even Margaret Ritchie would propose that project, which demonstrably represents no value for money.

2.45 pm

Another proposal was to sell off parts of the Harbour Commission. Although that involves issues worthy of consideration, the Harbour Commission wrote to every Member saying that the SDLP policies, which the commission took time to study in detail, were completely unfeasible. In the parlance of the people, the SDLP is talking rubbish, and I think that we should accept that.

We measure the SDLP not by the words of its Members in the debate, but by its actions. Why does the SDLP not support us?

**Mr Speaker:** The Member should draw his remarks to a close.

**Mr Paisley Jnr:** Why does the SDLP not support us in reducing the number of Departments and Members, in dispensing with designations, in supporting a voluntary coalition and in improving and reforming the North/South bodies through an efficiency review panel?

**A Member:** Time.

**Mr Paisley Jnr:** No; I have an extra minute. Why does the SDLP not support us in reforming the Civic Forum and in culling quangos? Such measures would cut public expenditure where it matters and enable money to be redeployed in the Budget to the better use of the public purse.

**Mr Kennedy:** That was quality drivel.

**Mr Paisley Jnr:** Absolutely.

**Mr Newton:** I support my party's amendment and will speak largely from the perspective of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment. In doing so, I regret that Dr McDonnell is not in the House, because his opening remarks highlighted the absolute unreality of the composite SDLP motion.

Dr McDonnell said that we must find mechanisms by which to talk to one another. I do not believe that the Northern Ireland public want us to find more mechanisms for talking to one another; in fact, they are asking us to do less talking and to take more action. However, they expect us to address the economic downturn. It may be a matter of attitude, but I prefer to take a positive rather than a negative view: how can we build the economy rather than dwell on the economic slide?

We must adopt a positive approach to the economy and to economic prosperity. Rather than spend time dealing with global economic difficulties about which we can do very little, we must address areas that we can do something about in Northern Ireland. Our amendment outlines how the Executive have reallocated £1 billion in resources to tackle the downturn. The amendment also points out that there are other areas in which public expenditure could be reduced at a vast saving to the public purse.

What Peter Robinson announced yesterday was referred to by Members on the other side of the Chamber as an election manifesto, but it was driven by a DUP ethos that has underpinned everything that we have done since taking our places in the Chamber. We would like a reduction in the number of Departments and Members. I can assure Northern Ireland that, with a population of little more than 1.5 million, it does not need 11 Departments.

Nowhere else in the world would set up such a system of government, although I realise that it was created here because of our unique background and for economic reasons. Getting rid of the Parades Commission and the Civic Forum is essential and will set a benchmark against which other quangos will be measured.

**Mr Kennedy:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Newton:** I will, provided that I am allowed an extra minute.

**Mr Kennedy:** I am grateful to the Member for giving way. Will he say whether or how his party has brought those ideas and proposals forward for discussion with its partners in the Executive, particularly Sinn Féin, of which the deputy First Minister is a member?

**Mr Speaker:** The Member has an extra minute in which to speak.

**Mr Newton:** Mr Kennedy knows that there is always a need to set the pace and to be out in front so that others can follow and catch up. There is a need to act quickly and to show the public that we understand the situation that many of them face. Decisions should be made quickly and efficiently in response to evolving circumstances. Members know the old adage: when one does not want something to go forward, form a Committee to delay its progress.

I spent Monday talking to members of the business community. One of their major complaints is about red tape and bureaucracy. The business community — the people who create the wealth for this economy — will laugh with derision if the Assembly forms another layer of bureaucracy to address issues that are already the responsibilities of existing Departments. The business sector wants action and decisions. It wants to be free from red tape. It expects this Assembly and its Ministers to make decisions, rather than fobbing them off to another Ad Hoc Committee that will study arrangements.

The Assembly must address areas that will enable growth and prosperity. Those areas are quite easy to find, and they have been mentioned by various delegations to the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment. We need to facilitate the growth of the private sector and the jobs in it. We need to create

conditions that will stimulate investment. We need to give confidence to the business community and increase its innovation and enterprise. We need to reform the public sector, as Peter Weir outlined, and we need to improve infrastructure. There is no need to create another pointless Assembly subcommittee to do the work with which the Assembly has already been tasked.

**Mr O'Loan:** In the present circumstances, the SDLP motion is exactly right and the amendments are profoundly wrong. There is common ground at the outset: we all agree that the Programme for Government contains a necessary priority for the economy. We agree that there is a need to prepare for the upturn while protecting those who are affected by the downturn. However, we differ greatly about how that should be done and the degree to which it needs to be done.

The SDLP believes that this period could be an opportunity. We could do useful and necessary things that would put us in a better place for the upturn. I repeat the essence of our position: the Programme for Government and the Budget were created in a different time. We need to revise our priorities. The SDLP has proposed a mechanism to do that — an Ad Hoc Committee. That would mean that the Assembly would be taking control of the political agenda, which is the right place for it to be.

I will critique the amendments because I find them inadequate. It is remarkable that the Democratic Unionist Party removed the three objectives in our motion. It wants to use the monitoring rounds; but to do what? That is not terribly clear. Monitoring rounds are not strategic in nature. The December 2008 monitoring round to which the DUP amendment specifically refers yielded only £70 million after a considerable exercise was undertaken to find issues that would focus on the economy directly.

Once again, that party repeats the diversion of cutting Departments. That discussion has its place, but it does not start to be the answer to dealing with the economic downturn. This time, I see that the DUP does not even have the audacity to refer to cutting the number of MLAs or to the ludicrous figure of £40 million or £50 million that the Minister used in that regard previously.

Sinn Féin, not surprisingly, simply repeats that monitoring rounds should be used. However, it leaves our three key objectives in place. Having accepted the purposes of the Ad Hoc Committee, Sinn Féin has no mechanism whatsoever of achieving the objectives; they simply cannot be achieved through the monitoring rounds.

I wonder why there is such a mood of conservatism in the two large parties. In one sense, that mood is perhaps not so surprising on the part of the Democratic Unionists, who, for years, had “no” as their party’s middle name. They have resisted change and created a

siege mentality for themselves. Psychologically, it is not easy to get out of that mindset and begin to act.

Sinn Féin, of course, thinks differently. Its members come from a command-and-control military culture, so it is perhaps not surprising that they no longer appear to have the freedom to think for themselves. Now, however, we need the ability to think outside the box in order to create new approaches to resolving our particular problems.

We have some support from the DUP. The First Minister commented quite favourably on our document, ‘New Priorities in Difficult Times’. He said that the whole House needs to start examining its priorities, and he called for debate. That is the SDLP position as well. However the Finance Minister made his position abundantly clear by putting his trust in mere slippage money. Yet, a senior DFP official was able to come to the Committee for Finance and Personnel and say that there needs to be a “cessation of low-priority programmes.” How can there be cessation of low-priority programmes without a method to establish which programmes should cease and where to divert the money? The SDLP motion proposes such a mechanism, and I ask the Minister of Finance and Personnel to support his senior official.

I could quote many favourable economists. Most recently, Richard Ramsey, who was referred to earlier, said that, hopefully, the worst is over. However, he also said that unemployment will rise to 10% in 2010. In the same breath, he said that substantially more money should be put into the construction sector.

I note the proliferation of bodies that have been established to advise the leading parties on the economy. Recently, yet another one was established. On top of the Economic Development Forum, three separate in-house economic units and others, the establishment of the cross-sector advisory forum smacks of a leadership that is simply moving ideas about its desk, without translating any of them in to action.

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

**Mr McQuillan:** I support amendment No 1. It is difficult to argue against the opening position in the motion with regard to concerns about recent job losses and the need to protect public services. Indeed, my constituency of East Londonderry has been hit as hard as any, given the job losses at Seagate, Spanboard, Eakin Timber and Christies Building Supplies — to mention just a few — and the wider knock-on effect that that has had on the local economy and community.

However, it appears that the SDLP does not understand the Budget process. We already have a Committee that regularly reviews spending, so the establishment of an Ad Hoc Committee would be of no benefit and would only increase bureaucracy.



The SDLP should be aware that, since devolution, the Executive and the DUP Finance Minister have ensured that the economy is their main concern, and, via the Department of Finance and Personnel, they have reallocated moneys to address the effects of the economic downturn. That was done most successfully during the past financial year, when more than 150,000 low-income homes received a fuel-poverty payment and rates relief was given to those who had invested in energy-saving measures. Therefore, a mechanism is in place to address any existing and future pressures, without the need for an additional Committee.

The Executive face a range of budgetary pressures that have impacted on public finances, and that require careful management, using the end-year monitoring process, which provides a mechanism by which they can regularly review expenditure plans in order to assist in the present economic downturn and in any future recovery.

Northern Ireland uses a different process from those used in the rest of the UK and the Republic of Ireland, so there is no need for a formal Budget review now. The spending plans for 2008-09 have been reviewed four times in light of current circumstances, and that approach will be maintained during the next financial year. Those reviews provide the flexibility that the Executive require to make changes to allocations to Departments.

The SDLP's argument to ring-fence front line services and to ensure more strategic targeting of efficiencies would only result in moneys being moved. No real savings would be realised. However, the establishment of an efficiency review panel should result in prompt recommendations to reduce the number of Departments and the efficient delivery of effective public services. If the SDLP is serious about the Government becoming more efficient, it should drop its support for unelected quangos, such as the Civic Forum, and the other unnecessary Belfast Agreement machinery of government.

The Assembly and the Executive are bloated from having too many Members and Departments, at great cost to the public purse.

Perhaps the SDLP Members should have a word with their Executive Minister, who seemed happy to waste £300,000 of taxpayers' money on a court case that she had been told she could not win. If they were to do that, they would be in a position to talk about efficiencies.

3.00 pm

I feel that the SDLP motion is a mere distraction; it must mean that an election is coming soon. The SDLP's talk of ring-fencing money serves only to protect its own selfish interest in the Executive. I support amendment No 1.

**Mr Attwood:** I add my words of sympathy to those that have been offered already to Mr McLaughlin and his family.

Mr McLaughlin's speech was very strange indeed. The reason that I think that goes to the heart of the SDLP's proposal. In previous debates in the Chamber, the point has been well made that Sinn Féin now administers DUP rule in the North. However, what surprised me about Mitchel McLaughlin's speech was that it reminded us that not only does Sinn Féin administer DUP rule in the North, it administers the requirements of the London Exchequer in the North. That was Mitchel McLaughlin's essential point.

Mr McLaughlin said that the SDLP Budget proposals were:

"redundant almost before the ink was dry".

He said that because there was an emergency London Budget. On the one hand, Mitchel McLaughlin and Sinn Féin say that we have to stand up for ourselves and be independent from London, yet, at a critical moment in our recession, when the London Budget is rolled out —

**Mr McCartney:** You did not support it.

**Mr Attwood:** I will give way to Sinn Féin Members, if they want me to; I have no difficulty in doing so. I note their silence.

At the very moment when we have an opportunity to respond to the recession in a way that is dedicated to our needs, the Sinn Féin response is Londoncentric.

Proposals to change our Budget and to get to grips with the ravages of the recession in the North are redundant. One might ask why that is so. It is because a London Budget makes it so.

**Ms J McCann:** Will the Member inform the House as to whether the SDLP supported the Sinn Féin motion that called for greater fiscal powers for the Executive?

**Mr Speaker:** The Member has one extra minute in which to speak.

**Mr Attwood:** A number of issues arise from that question. The fundamental issue is that, for now, fiscal powers will not be granted to the Assembly, and that situation may endure for some time. In the absence of that happening, Sinn Féin's response to the community's concerns about the recession is to say that it cannot do anything. Sinn Féin says that it has to be left to London to decide our Budget lines; we have to allow other people to decide our destiny. That is the essence of what Sinn Féin Members have said. The SDLP's view is more nuanced, strategic and developed.

As my colleague Declan O'Loan said, Sinn Féin has lost the freedom to think for itself. There was no more brutal and compelling an example of that when, 20 minutes ago, Mitchel McLaughlin told the people of



Northern Ireland that the Executive could not do anything, because a London Budget had to decide our budgetary future. How casually can people give up their independence to think and act for themselves?

**Mr A Maskey:** Is it appropriate for a Member to directly mislead the House about what another Member said a few minutes ago?

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Members must be careful that they do not suggest that another Member is misleading the House. Members must not go down that route.

**Mr Attwood:** I do not want to revisit that particular debate, Mr Speaker.

Peter Weir's analysis of the SDLP's proposals was defeatist, and it demonstrated a shallow grasp of the issue. I will give two examples that prove that assertion.

First, if we were to go into Belfast city centre and tell its citizens that an elite group in the Belfast Harbour Commissioners' office has £40 million or £50 million in cash reserves and that it has decided to spend that amount, and £600 million of other moneys, on developing Belfast port over the next decade, the people in this city would ask whether that is really what we should be doing with that amount of money.

The Harbour Commissioners are now briefing everybody that they cannot spend the money on anything else, and the DUP and others are swallowing that line. We should ask the commissioners why they recently allocated between £12 million and £14 million from their cash reserves to the Titanic signature project. They voluntarily gave up some of their reserves because they felt that it was worth it to support an economic- and tourism-development project for the city of Belfast. If they can give up £12 million or £14 million, they can give up £20 million, £30 million or £40 million, and Belfast's harbour would be none the worse for it.

The second proof of the shallowness of the DUP's position can be found in its response to our proposal to spend £30 million on pump-priming the Royal Victoria Hospital site over the next two years for the development of a maternity hospital for the citizens of Belfast. Do not misrepresent that issue, because to do so is inaccurate and to play shallow politics.

**Mr O'Dowd:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom tacú le leasú Shinn Féin.

I support the Sinn Féin amendment. I will put my cards on the table — I am not an economist. Having listened to many of the contributions to the debate, it is clear that I am not the only one who is not.

In proposing the motion, Dr McDonnell said that we are facing the worst economic crisis in living memory and that we must tackle it. Setting up an Ad Hoc Committee, as proposed in the motion, will not tackle

the worst economic crisis in living memory. Governments who are masters of their own economic destiny are trying to tackle the crisis, but they do not set about it by setting up an Ad Hoc Committee. A local GAA club sets up an Ad Hoc Committee to fund-raise for a sports day, but a Parliament or an Administration certainly does not set up an Ad Hoc Committee to tackle the world's worst-ever economic crisis.

**Mr O'Loan:** Why is the Member so defeatist? Why does he say that there is nothing that we can do? Can he explain why he and his party are in that mental state?

**Mr O'Dowd:** Before I was interrupted, I was about to outline what we should do, and what can be done, to address the crisis.

Our Committees are already tasked with scrutinising the Assembly's Budgets and Programmes for Government. The task of each and every Committee is not only to scrutinise its Department but to assist in the development of its work. Surely Committees are the best forum through which to continue the work on finding a way in which to deliver ourselves from this economic crisis.

When I think of Alex Attwood's comments today, the phrase "savaged by a dead sheep" comes to mind. My republican credentials are being called into question by a party that was tugging its forelock to an English Queen last week. Those who choose to curtsy in front of the English Queen cannot lecture this party on its republican credentials.

**Mrs D Kelly:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr O'Dowd:** No, I have already given way.  
[Interruption.]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The Member has the Floor.

**Mr O'Dowd:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Until we are masters of our own economic destiny, all we can do is divvy up what is known in the Assembly as a Budget. The Budget from the British Government is insufficient, as is the block grant. No matter how we slice it up — even if the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety were to be given 75% of the Budget instead of 51% — it would still not be enough.

We will continue to have such debates until this Assembly and the people of Ireland take control of their economic destinies. One of the difficulties that we face, and which was not commented on in the introductory speech by the proposer of the motion, is that of "North/Southery". It would appear that "North/Southery" has left the vocabulary of the SDLP because it was not referred to when its members talked about tackling the economic crisis.

We are operating two economies on this island back to back, and we are operating our health services and

our education systems back to back. Every nature of life on the island is operated back to back. That, in itself, is an economic drain on the resources of this society. Sinn Féin remains firmly of the view that, as part of moving forward, the Assembly should have fiscal autonomy.

After lecturing my colleague Mitchel McLaughlin on his factual comment that we would all have to await the outcome of the British “emergency” Budget, I noted that the SDLP had the brass neck to say that the reason that it voted against bringing powers to the Assembly was because the fact is that the British control our purse strings. The SDLP criticised Mitchel McLaughlin for pointing out that fact, and it is missing from its economic equation. *[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order.

**Mr O'Dowd:** We will continue to rely on an insufficient grant from the British Exchequer until the Assembly starts to take control of its economic destiny and until it starts working in partnership with its counterparts in the Twenty-six Counties. Republicans believe that, in future, the island should have a single economic unit. When we do achieve a single economic unit, republicans are not talking about sitting in the Atlantic as isolationists; rather, we are talking about working in partnership with our neighbours in England, Scotland, Wales and the rest of Europe to build a sustainable economy, not an economy based on boom and bust.

The SDLP's document states that we will raise the finance required by selling off land and property. I opened my comments by saying that I am not an economist, but even I know that we are in this mess because the land and property market has collapsed.

**Mr Speaker:** The Member should bring his remarks to a close.

**Ms Purvis:** I pass my thoughts to Mitchel McLaughlin and his family. I am glad to see him back in the Chamber.

I appreciate what the motion has set out to achieve. It is another attempt to force action on the economy, which, without a doubt, is the key concern of every party in the Chamber. However, I believe that we are going about the situation in the wrong way. We are fiddling while Rome burns. I appreciate the intention of the motion, but we have had enough Committees.

I attended a conference last week, at which someone said that the Assembly's response to this crisis cannot be simply to vomit another panel or another Committee. That person said that there should be no more talking shops, no more reviews, no more expensive consultations and studies, and that it is time for action.

I make the distinction that that person was not referring to the Executive. The public do not make the

distinction between the Assembly and the Executive, and we need to make that distinction.

The recession has been in full swing for well over a year. There have been enough Committees and reviews announced and argued for to double the size of the already large public sector in this country. However, there has been very little action, and that is long overdue. We are well behind the curve in responding to the situation, and we should have been preparing for the recession before it hit. I am astounded each time a Minister comes into the Chamber and declares that no one could have seen the recession coming. Therefore, there is no one to blame for the fact that we have been unprepared to deal with its consequences.

Like John O'Dowd, I am not an economist or a mathematician, but I can put two and two together. When personal debt exceeds gross domestic product, and when, as an entire country, we spend more than we earn, there will be trouble. When local house prices skyrocket by 20%, 30% and 40%, and when wages creep up in small single digits, there will be trouble. When the Executive put forward a Programme for Government that calls for growth through people spending and consuming more, rather than investing in sustainable development of local communities and local industry, there will be trouble. Whenever our growth is based on borrowing and throwing households and our society further into debt, there will be trouble. Trouble has arrived — big time.

3.15 pm

The public impression is that the Executive are fiddling about while people are suffering and struggling to make ends meet. I say to the Executive that they should stop telling us that the economy is their number one priority, but they have limited means with which to deal with it. They should stop telling us that there is no reason to open up the Budget and review the Programme for Government when we are dealing with the most difficult recession in living memory. I recognise that there is a Budget process here, but elected bodies around the world are reviewing their spending priorities and mechanisms. Why can we not do the same?

The message that everything is fine and that recovery is close is not credible. We may be doing better than other regions in the UK and the Republic of Ireland, but a boat that is only half sinking is still sinking. I think that the fact that we are doing relatively better than our neighbours will be of little comfort to the workers at Bombardier Shorts, Wrightbus and Visteon who have lost their jobs recently, to the small businesses and sole traders who are closing up shop now having struggled through the Troubles, or to the people who are losing their homes and struggling to pay rising monthly bills on limited incomes.

I understand and respect the intent of the motion, but I cannot support the creation of another Committee when we should be meeting today to endorse action. The amendments, both of which were tabled by Executive parties, are a smokescreen for Executive inaction and should be rejected as a poor attempt at Government spin. I cannot support either the motion or the amendments.

**Ms J McCann:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Like my colleague Mitchel McLaughlin, I support the Sinn Féin amendment, but I do not support either the motion or the DUP amendment. I will touch on some of the many issues that were raised before giving my views.

Stephen Farry mentioned efficiency savings, and his point goes to the heart of the short-term need for the Executive to have fiscal powers and the long-term need for an all-island economy. Only a couple of weeks ago, the British Government reneged on their assurance that the Executive would be allowed to retain efficiency savings for front line services and infrastructural projects in 2010. Indeed, around £40 million, which came from the increase in fuel prices some time ago, was returned to the British Treasury, rather than going to the Executive to be redistributed to people who are in fuel poverty.

Declan O'Loan pointed out rightly that some useful and necessary things can be done. I am surprised that one of those was not touched on, except by Members of my party, in the months that we have been discussing the recession. That point is about how public procurement can be utilised. In the Programme for Government, the Executive set out their commitment to maximise social and employment opportunities for everyone through the public procurement process. The Governments in the North and the South of Ireland have a genuine chance to maximise those social and employment opportunities. That is an essential part of the investment strategy, and it is important that that opportunity is grasped now in order to retain the people who are in employment and to create new employment.

The Executive have earmarked somewhere in the region of £20 billion for the public procurement of works, services and goods over the next 10 years. Examination of the all-island context shows that €16 billion is spent on public procurement each year. Most of that goes to overseas companies, because our small and medium-sized and local businesses cannot even get a foot on the ladder. I am surprised that that real opportunity —

**Mrs D Kelly:** Given Sinn Féin's concern about the economy and the recession, does the Member share my concern that, as Minister Wilson said, Sinn Féin is continuing to block progress and that there is no

Executive business before the House at present nor will there be before the summer recess?

**Ms J McCann:** I do not accept that. Members must understand that the Assembly and Executive are power-sharing bodies. Therefore if there is no agreement — *[Interruption]*.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The Member has the Floor.

**Ms J McCann:** Thank you. Members raised several important points that I want to address.

Other useful and necessary things could be done. Dawn Purvis touched on the real problems that people face, and we heard lately that there has been a 64% increase in home repossessions in the North of Ireland over the past year; that compares with a 4% increase in England and Wales. I ask the SDLP to prevail upon their Minister to introduce a mortgage relief scheme, which has been debated and agreed in the Assembly. That is another way of helping people to offset their economic difficulties.

Alex Attwood referred to fiscal powers and tried to lecture Sinn Féin on republicanism. With respect to the arguments for an all-island economy and efficiency savings, John O'Dowd pointed out that we have two health services, two education services, and all the duplication that that involves, on this small island. Even our energy policy is not joined up. We lack the clear joined-up thinking that we need. We need to consider ways in which local and central government can be more efficient, and that suggests that an all-island economy is the solution. We must consider the economy and investment in the same way that we consider tourism, and this morning, the deputy First Minister referred to InterTradeIreland. We need to work like such organisations: together as an island and not as two separate entities. In the long term, that is the only way forward.

In the short term, we need greater fiscal powers. Everyone agrees that there are problems, but we have opportunities to offset some of the job losses through our public procurement policy. Our party is the only one to push that.

**Mr Speaker:** The Member should draw her remarks to a close.

**Ms J McCann:** It is within the gift of Ministers to put it into operation. Sinn Féin seeks short-term fiscal powers, and, in the longer term, an all-island economy.

**Mr Poots:** When I was a young lad, I used to enjoy 'The Beano' and 'The Dandy' for a bit of entertainment at the weekend; it was light relief from school. It was very enjoyable to receive the 'New Priorities in Difficult Times' document from the SDLP. On the front, we have Dennis the Menace and Gnasher, and on the back, we have the Bash Street Kids. It made for some very entertaining reading. For example, we will spend £30



million on a hospital that will cost more than £300 million. What will we do in that women and children's hospital? Dig the foundations and use them as birthing pools? Anyone who would start a project without having the capacity to finish it would make himself totally ridiculous.

Have Members ever driven past a bungalow in the countryside that has been built to the peaks? Everyone asks what eejit started something that he could not finish. Yet in a supposedly serious document, the SDLP proposes to do just that. We have had some great entertainment from that document.

The SDLP attacked the DUP and accused it of using smoke and mirrors. According to the SDLP, the world recession is to be blamed on one political party in a regional Assembly representing 1·5 million people in a world population of more than 6 billion. The DUP is not to blame for a recession that has taken place across the world; however, I allow others to give us the credit for how we respond to that recession. I allow people to admit that we treated the economy as our first priority, even before the recession kicked in.

Mr McNarry spoke about expert advice of Richard Ramsey from the Ulster Bank. I wonder whether Mr Ramsey was working for the Ulster Bank in 2007 and 2008. If he was, I would not pay too much attention to his advice, given the losses that that organisation has experienced and the fact that we, as taxpayers, have had to bail it out.

When striking the Budget, the DUP froze business rates to make life easier for the business community. We also identified additional money for the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL). I often hear the Ulster Unionists say that the Budget should be redistributed and that money should be reapportioned. Are they saying that they want the money that we gave to DEL for additional training and employment to be taken away from it?

The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has the biggest budget. Are the Ulster Unionists proposing that we take money from that budget and use it to focus on more economy-based issues? That is what the Ulster Unionists are suggesting to us today. Those are not very Conservative-type proposals; however, they are Ulster Unionist Party proposals. *[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The Member has the Floor.

**Mr Poots:** As regards how the Executive and Government do business; a 10-day turnaround policy for bills received has been introduced to help facilitate businesses. In addition, the planning system now gives greater weight to economic proposals that will benefit the economy. Furthermore, planning applications are

being dealt with more quickly than at any time in previous years.

Some Members spoke about the need for higher levels of public spending on the construction industry. That is already happening, folks. A total of £1·4 billion is being spent on public construction. However, we need to ensure that the private sector can respond. The private sector needs investment in an educated workforce and a quality infrastructure.

Therefore, the Executive, led by the DUP, are making the right investments. Better roads and good broadband facilities are the sorts of things that businesses want to see. They do not want to see the Port of Belfast being starved of funds, because were that to happen, developments in the South of Ireland would pull business there.

**Mr Weir:** As regards the Port of Belfast, one wonders whether the SDLP representative who sits on the board of Belfast Harbour Commissioners will release some sort of minority report on the reservations that the board raised, or perhaps he disagrees with his colleague Alex Attwood.

**Mr Speaker:** The Member has an extra minute to speak.

**Mr Poots:** Given that the Port of Belfast is a key part of our infrastructure, it would not be wise to prevent its progress by taking resources away from it. I support the Port of Belfast investment in the Titanic signature project. I welcome the fact that it is prepared to give money to that project, which is within the confines of the port.

**Mr Attwood:** On that point, is it not equally feasible that the Belfast Harbour Commissioners, with anticipated reserves of £600 million over the next 10 years, could find an extra £10 million to give to the signature project, thereby reducing the Executive's contribution to that project? Does that not make economic, popular and political sense in the current economic downturn?

**Mr Poots:** I am not sure where the Member got the figure of £600 million from. Perhaps someone from the Belfast Harbour Commissioners leaked that information to him. I suspect that many projects will take place in Belfast harbour and that those will improve the efficiency of that facility.

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

**Mr Poots:** I thought that I was listening to the confessions of a republican, as Mr O'Dowd explained how the British Exchequer holds the purse strings. Of course, we get a huge subvention from the British Exchequer, and I do not see any republican refusing that.



**Mr Durkan:** We have had an occasionally entertaining but not always enlightening debate. *[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order.

**Mr Durkan:** In proposing the motion, Alasdair McDonnell set out the issues of concern that the economic downturn has raised.

There seems to be clear consensus on the first four lines of the motion. In proposing amendment No 1, Peter Weir attacked the idea of an Ad Hoc Committee and criticised the SDLP's economic discussion document.

Mr Weir seemed to say that we should just rely on the banks to deal with a lot of the problems that face the economy, but those same banks got us into a lot of these problems. He said that the Assembly should not look at some of these issues as the banks would take care of them. I doubt that many people will find good sense or wise counsel in that.

3.30 pm

In proposing amendment No 2, Mitchel McLaughlin made a virtue out of the monitoring rounds, on which, as other Members said, the Sinn Féin and DUP amendments rely entirely. Mitchel McLaughlin suggested that an agreed mechanism on monitoring rounds exists. However, that is not a new concept; monitoring rounds have existed since direct rule and were in operation during the previous mandate. Monitoring rounds are not, and never were, a strategic intervention; they are slippage-led, not strategy-led.

When I was Minister of Finance and Personnel, I delivered reports in the Chamber on monitoring rounds that involved big money, but I never pretended that they were a significant strategic intervention by the Executive. Strategic interventions are made when the Budget is being prioritised. When slippage leads and determines what happens, one cannot pretend that that is a strategy.

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

**Mr Durkan:** I did not see Sinn Féin giving way to us too often, but I will give way to the Member.

**Mr A Maskey:** When Mark Durkan was the Minister of Finance and Personnel, did he not argue strongly that all the "slippage money" should be returned to the Executive so that they could reimburse it strategically, rather than allowing the money to remain with the Departments? Mr Durkan said then that he had a strategy.

**Mr Durkan:** That is because Executive programme funds were used at that time. The Executive had funds into which they could put money to be used for strategic purposes. The current Executive did away with that; when they abandoned those funds, they abandoned the concept of a devolved strategy. The

monitoring rounds do not give the Assembly the means of responding to current issues.

David McNarry emphasised the need to reappraise the Budget in light of current and future pressures.

Stephen Farry highlighted the limited nature of the monitoring rounds, as I have done. He questioned the quality of the Executive's response in support of the economy. It is one thing to have the economy as a stated priority, but the real test is what is done in response to pressures and whether investment is made in any prospects.

Ian Paisley Jnr must win the drivell-of-the-month award for his contribution. He complained that we are all being negative and should be talking things up. He, however, is not voting for an amendment that talks things up; rather, he is voting for an amendment that is full of the doom and gloom that he talked about. It shows neither imagination nor positive commitment. The SDLP motion refers to recovery and to the prospects of recovery; the amendment supported by Ian Paisley Jnr contains nothing about recovery.

Robin Newton said that £1 billion has been directed at the economic downturn; he must have misread the DUP amendment. It says that £1 billion has been reallocated in monitoring rounds, but can quote only £70 million as a response to the downturn. In fact, some of that money is not even for this year, but will come in the form of rate relief next year. The DUP amendment offers little new and little now, and is not much of a response to the economic difficulties.

Declan O'Loan highlighted the hollowness and inconsistency of the amendments.

Adrian McQuillan said that a Committee already exists to review Budget spending, but there is not. Although a Committee for Finance and Personnel exists to scrutinise the Department, the Assembly does not have a Budget Committee. The Assembly does not have the style of ways-and-means Committee that exists in other legislatures. What we are talking about is an Ad Hoc Committee on which the parties of the House could agree that issues, including the structural defects in the Budget process, must be faced in the short and long term. This Ad Hoc Committee could be one way of considering how to resolve those. I will touch on some of those ideas later.

Alex Attwood expressed his surprise that Sinn Féin is now confined in its thinking to whatever parameters are set by a UK Budget, and John O'Dowd corroborated Alex's concerns when he said that "North/South" had gone from the vocabulary of the SDLP. The questions that we asked this morning about the North/South Ministerial Council institutional format demonstrated that we are the ones who are pushing the North/South Ministerial Council to address the issues relating to the economic downturn now and in the long term. The

message that we got from the deputy First Minister was that we should not push any of those issues just now, but let the efficiency review that the DUP wanted take its course and see where we stand after that. Therefore, the SDLP, not the DUP, is the party trying to push things forward.

Dawn Purvis expressed concern at the establishment of another Committee. However, we do not propose that yet more experts be hand-picked or hired by Ministers or that more people be assembled in a forum of the great and the good. We are talking about an Ad Hoc Committee of this House. MLAs on that Committee would simply be doing the job that they were elected to do.

Dawn Purvis said that other elected Assemblies around the world are reviewing Budgets, and she asked why we are not. However, in opposing our motion, she opposes the very way in which the Assembly could review the Budget, because it is quite clear that the Executive have told us that they will not review the Budget. Unless the Assembly finds a way of reappraising budget lines and re-profiling the Budget, not only for this year and next year, but beyond that, we will have problems.

Ms Purvis said that she will vote against the motion and all of the amendments. We will have a penalty shoot-out in which no one will score. Both amendments and the motion will probably be defeated. What does that say to the people of Northern Ireland about how coherently and competently this devolved Assembly takes its responsibilities?

The SDLP has tried to avoid simply coming up with ideas and dumping them at the door of the Finance Minister or the Executive. We recognise that the Assembly has a responsibility. We agree with the First Minister's comments in the Chamber of a few weeks ago that the whole House must re-examine its priorities. How will the whole House do that if it does not agree with the motion, which would set up an Ad Hoc Committee to allow us to re-examine priorities in a number of ways?

What would the Ad Hoc Committee be asked to consider, and what is the DUP rejecting? It is rejecting proposals to revise Budget lines and spending profiles to ensure best support for key economic sectors. It is rejecting the innovative use of public money to address the pressures that have been caused by the global downturn, which, as the DUP said after a visit to Brussels, is the very measure that President Barroso asked us to take. The wording of the motion emerged from that request, yet the DUP amendment rejects it.

The Ad Hoc Committee would be asked to consider proposals to ring-fence front line services and ensure more strategic targeting of efficiency savings. In a health debate a couple of weeks ago, the DUP said that

it was in favour of such measures, so it must have been regretting the effect and impact of the Budget and the flat-rate efficiency savings of 3% that it had imposed. We propose a Committee that could come up with ways of doing that, not only in regard to the current Budget, but permanently.

Why should we not look again at the entire Budget system? One cannot tell from reading the Budget where the front-line services sit in respect of the budget lines. Let us re-profile the budget lines so that people can know which of them are wholly or mainly for front line services, which are partly for front line services and which are not at all. That means that the Committees that scrutinise Departments will know which budget lines to challenge for efficiency savings, because they will know which are administrative and which to test for performance and delivery because they relate to front line services. That would improve the intelligence of the Budget system, not only now but well into the future. That is the type of good idea that could be worked through by the proposed Ad Hoc Committee.

Jennifer McCann and other Sinn Féin Members talked about the need for fiscal powers in the short term. However, for all of Sinn Féin's talk about fiscal powers, it has never said which tax it would raise. How high does it wish to raise income tax in Northern Ireland? How high does it wish to raise corporation tax? Sinn Féin did not support the SDLP when we sought fiscal discretion when negotiating the Good Friday Agreement. The only party in the negotiations —

**Ms J McCann:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Durkan:** Sinn Féin has already had one intervention in my speech.

The only party in the negotiations that supported us on the need for some type of fiscal discretion was the Alliance Party, but its support was purely to vary income tax by three percentage points, which is the same fiscal power that is held by the Scottish Parliament — *[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The Member has the Floor.

**Mr Durkan:** We wanted a power that was wider than that.

Edwin Poots, when summing up on the DUP amendment, reinforced what we all believed as he told us how much he enjoyed 'The Beano' and 'The Dandy' and how they were so formative in the early years of life. His attempts to rubbish the SDLP document fail, because — *[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order.

**Mr Durkan:** In attempting to misrepresent our policy document, Mr Poots failed to recognise that we made an honest contribution — *[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The Member has the Floor.

**Mr Durkan:** We made an honest contribution to an honest debate —

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

**Mr Durkan:** We want to continue this debate in an Ad Hoc Committee.

**Mr Speaker:** Before I put the Question on amendment No 1, I advise Members that, if the amendment is made, amendment No 2 will not be called, and I will proceed to put the Question on the motion, as amended.

*Question put, That amendment No 1 be made.*

*The Assembly divided: Ayes 29; Noes 47.*

#### AYES

*Mr Bresland, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Dodds, Mr Donaldson, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Irwin, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Dr W McCrea, Miss McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Newton, Mr Poots, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Savage, Mr Shannon, Mr Simpson, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.*

*Tellers for the Ayes: Mr McQuillan and Mr Spratt.*

#### NOES

*Mr Attwood, Mr Beggs, Mr Boylan, Mr D Bradley, Mrs M Bradley, Mr P J Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Burns, Mr W Clarke, Mr Cobain, Mr Cree, Dr Deeny, Mr Doherty, Mr Durkan, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mr Gallagher, Mr Gardiner, Ms Gildernew, Mrs Hanna, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Ms Lo, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr McCallister, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Mr McFarland, Mrs McGill, Mr McGlone, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McNarry, Mr Molloy, Ms Ni Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mr O'Loan, Mrs O'Neill, Ms Purvis, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Mr K Robinson, Ms Ruane.*

*Tellers for the Noes: Mr Attwood and Mr O'Loan.*

*Question accordingly negatived.*

*Question put, That amendment No 2 be made.*

*The Assembly divided: Ayes 18; Noes 58.*

#### AYES

*Mr Boylan, Mr Brady, Mr W Clarke, Mr Doherty, Ms Gildernew, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Mrs McGill, Mr McLaughlin, Mr Molloy, Ms Ni Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ruane.*

*Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Boylan and Ms J McCann.*

#### NOES

*Mr Attwood, Mr Beggs, Mr D Bradley, Mrs M Bradley, Mr P J Bradley, Mr Bresland, Mr Buchanan, Mr Burns, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Cobain, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Dr Deeny, Mr Dodds, Mr Donaldson, Mr Durkan, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Gallagher, Mr Gardiner, Mr Hamilton, Mrs Hanna, Mr Hilditch, Mr Irwin, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Ms Lo, Mr McCallister, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Dr W McCrea, Dr McDonnell, Mr McFarland, Mr McGlone, Miss McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Newton, Mr O'Loan, Mr Poots, Ms Purvis, Mr P Ramsey, Mr K Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Savage, Mr Shannon, Mr Simpson, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.*

*Tellers for the Noes: Mr P J Bradley and Mr Burns.*

*Question accordingly negatived.*

*Main Question put.*

*The Assembly divided: Ayes 29; Noes 47.*

#### AYES

*Mr Attwood, Mr Beggs, Mr D Bradley, Mrs M Bradley, Mr P J Bradley, Mr Burns, Mr Cobain, Mr Cree, Dr Deeny, Mr Durkan, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mr Gallagher, Mr Gardiner, Mrs Hanna, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Ms Lo, Mr McCallister, Mr McCarthy, Dr McDonnell, Mr McFarland, Mr McGlone, Mr McNarry, Mr O'Loan, Mr P Ramsey, Mr K Robinson, Mr Savage.*

*Tellers for the Ayes: Mrs M Bradley and Mrs Hanna.*

#### NOES

*Mr Boylan, Mr Brady, Mr Bresland, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr W Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Dodds, Mr Doherty, Mr Donaldson, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Ms Gildernew, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Irwin, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Dr W McCrea, Mr McElduff, Mrs McGill, Miss McIlveen, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McQuillan, Mr Molloy, Lord Morrow, Mr Newton, Ms Ni Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Poots, Ms Purvis, Ms S Ramsey, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Shannon, Mr Simpson, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.*

*Tellers for the Noes: Mr Boylan and Mr Spratt.*

*Question accordingly negatived.*



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

*Motion made:*

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — *[Mr Deputy Speaker.]*

## ADJOURNMENT

### Non-Acute Hospital Provision in Armagh City

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I remind Members that the proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes in which to speak. All other Members who are called to speak will have approximately nine minutes.

**Mr D Bradley:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Tá an-áthas orm labhairt ar an ábhar seo inniu.

I thank the Business Committee for the opportunity to debate the provision of non-acute health services in Armagh.

As Members are no doubt aware, the re-establishment of devolution was a source of hope for many, including the people of Newry and Armagh. Those people elected us to the Assembly because they believed that local politicians would be better stewards of their interests than direct rule Ministers. Little did they know that devolution would threaten Armagh city with the closure of three hospitals. The people of the constituency are now asking us, their elected representatives, to step up to the plate and deliver on the promises that we made to them.

We are all aware that Northern Ireland Departments are charged with finding 3% efficiency savings over the three years of the comprehensive spending review. However, we did not expect those savings to impact on front line services to the extent that they have done, especially in Armagh, where the efficiency savings appear to have been directed. Efficiency savings of 3% should not mean the closure of three hospitals that serve the three most vulnerable groups in the community: St Luke's Hospital for the severely mentally ill; Longstone Hospital for those with severe learning disabilities; and Mullinure Hospital for the frail and elderly.

The closure of 50% of acute and specialist psychiatric beds is the most extensive closure in all the trusts in Northern Ireland. It seems to have been decided that Armagh will take the hit, because the proposals are dominated by the Southern Health and Social Care Trust's determination to make inpatient services fit into the new Bluestone mental-health unit at Craigavon Area Hospital rather than by an assessment of the population's current and future needs.

As we all know, Armagh is particularly dependent on public-sector jobs, which account for 37% of

employment in the area. The proposals could lead to the loss of around 200 jobs there. The only consolation that the trust can offer us is that no compulsory redundancies will be made. That would be a consolation if we were short-sighted enough to accept it, but we are not. Jobs lost through any form of redundancy are jobs lost; they are lost not only to those who hold them at present but to the local economy, our children and our grandchildren. Armagh does not have a strong industrial base, because of its location and lack of infrastructure. The area also does not have a well-developed retail sector. As I said, it depends heavily on the public sector for its survival. As elected representatives, we cannot stand idly by and watch proposals that will devastate Armagh be implemented.

Those who put those proposals forward cannot, any more than we can, be oblivious to their social, economic and political impact. Armagh is united on the issue across the community with all political parties and 16,000 signatures rejecting the proposals with one voice.

In the consultation, the trust proposed closing the Mullinure Hospital rehabilitation unit for elderly patients, which has 36 beds. It said that the demand for non-acute beds had declined, that the current three-site provision was unsuitable, that Mullinure Hospital had the lowest occupancy rate of the three sites and that it did not have the full range of services. The trust said that there were also concerns about the future availability of clinical cover during out-of-hours periods, and that there were delays in ambulance transfers from the hospital.

In response to the consultation, it was pointed out to the trust that it had failed to take into account the impact of the proposals on elderly relatives, carers and friends of patients, and that it had not developed measures to mitigate those effects. It was also pointed out that Mullinure Hospital had the shortest stay of the three sites, and that out-of-hours services could be provided by GP out-of-hours arrangements. In addition, it became clear through Assembly questions that the trust had overstated the ambulance issue. When those rebuttals were put into the mix, it was clear that, using the trust's own criteria, the preferred option should have been the continuation of the three-site model.

Furthermore, the trust failed to consider an additional model of retaining a dementia rehabilitation and assessment unit at Mullinure Hospital and transferring the dementia assessment and treatment unit from St Luke's Hospital to Mullinure. That model was rejected because the trust said that it would not address the serious concern regarding the difficulty of sustaining in-hours medical cover. That issue was never mentioned in the consultation, but has now become a driving factor in the process. It looks very much as though the trust was caught on the hop by the new Mullinure model proposal and had to find some reason to reject it.



In all this, the trust has not placed sufficient emphasis on accessibility of services. We saw earlier that the trust dropped its proposal to close a residential home on the basis of accessibility. The trust is committed, in its own words, to removing barriers to service. The closure of Mullinure Hospital will create a barrier to service access for many people in the Armagh district.

I appeal to the Minister to reconsider the issue of Mullinure Hospital. The Minister has been invited to visit the Armagh hospitals. I ask him to come to see for himself the situation on the ground and the level of care that is provided. I ask him to talk to relatives, who are very satisfied with the high standards of treatment that their loved ones are given. Mullinure Hospital is a new facility. In Armagh, it is a jewel that should not be sold off for short-term gains. It should be polished and shine in the crown of health services in Armagh for years to come.

Turning to the case of St Luke's Hospital and Longstone Hospital, the proposals ignore or dismiss the in-patient needs of any part of the mental-health, learning-disability or dementia services that cannot be accommodated in Craigavon Area Hospital. The proposals have been supported by a highly subjective and, in my view, superficial and biased centralisation option appraisal that is focused primarily on short-term efficiency savings of 3%. They do not sufficiently address mid-term and long-term service needs.

They are not future-proofed to meet the Bamford Review recommendations to develop a range of specialist psychiatric facilities for the most vulnerable patient groups. There is no mention of dementia or of challenging behaviour in line with recommendations 35, 51 and 53 of the Bamford Review. Where is the nursing and medical support for psychiatry, low-security or challenging behaviour? Where is the accommodation for learning disability, low-secure and challenging behaviour to be sited? Where are the step-down beds for forensic psychiatry to be sited?

Those issues are detailed in recommendations 81, 82, 100 and 146 of the Bamford report on forensic services, but they are nowhere to be seen in the trust's proposals. If the trust is required to provide, and has the capacity to provide, for all those facilities on the Armagh site, why is the trust proposing further extensive newbuilds on the already overcrowded, traffic-congested site at Craigavon?

Given the trust's projections of a significant increase in the elderly population — 44.4% growth by 2017 — one would have to ask why the trust is closing villas one and two in St Luke's Hospital, which is all of the statutory provision for that vulnerable and increasing patient group. Would it not be more prudent for the trust to maintain some statutory provision and expertise for this patient group, whose needs frequently cannot

be met by the private sector? Has the trust considered the reorganisation and optimum reallocation of vacant facilities on the Armagh site as a viable alternative to the Bluestone one-site option?

The closure of 50% of acute and specialist psychiatric beds is the most extensive closure in all the trusts. It has been justified as being essential to meet efficiency savings and to improve services. However, I believe that there are valid, less extreme alternatives for mental health and learning disability to meet the 3% efficiency savings contribution, while still maintaining essential adequate acute and specialist beds and fulfilling the recommendations of the Bamford Review by resettling any truly long-stay patients, but also providing for the low-security and challenging-behaviour patient groups.

It would be sensible to retain the two-site option, with the Bluestone unit at Craigavon Area Hospital and the Armagh site. It was rated as the best option in the board's previous strategic review. The reallocation of the paediatric intensive care unit, the acute admission ward and the addiction unit to the best vacant facilities at the Armagh site would avoid the significant expense of newbuilds in Craigavon.

There are further benefits to the two-site option. It would fulfil Bamford's recommendation for all patient groups, including low-security and challenging-behaviour patient groups, severely mentally handicapped patients, the elderly, and people with severe learning disabilities. It would also avoid the further expense of a newbuild on the already overcrowded and congested Craigavon site, maintain capacity and flexibility for future service needs, including mentally-ill patients who are diverted from the criminal justice system, and maintain the expertise and employment in the statutory sector in Armagh, rather than using a growing expensive diversion to a remote private sector.

The Southern Trust's proposals for Mullinure, St Luke's and Longstone Hospitals are not the best option for Armagh. They are not the best option for patients or staff, nor are they the best option for the future of employment in Armagh.

I ask the Minister to reconsider the proposals, with a view to coming forward with an acceptable plan based on the outlines that I have given today. I believe that they make sense for patients, for staff and for employment in Armagh. I know that the Minister cannot be here today, but I am assured that he will consider carefully the contributions made by each public representative here today. I trust that he will do that and, in doing so, reject the trust's proposals and come forward with a much more acceptable solution for Armagh.

A LeasCheann Comhairle, gabhaim buíochas leat as seans a thabhairt domh labhairt ar an ábhar seo inniu. Go raibh céad míle maith agat.

**Mr Irwin:** I thank Dominic Bradley for securing the Adjournment debate, which highlights the concerns of Health Service employees, patients and their families in the Armagh area. The Southern Health and Social Care Trust recently decided to press ahead with plans to reorganise and reduce services in the city, much to the disappointment of staff, patients and the wider community.

As was said in the debate last week on the axing of nursing posts, the power to change minds rests with the Minister. A decision by Minister McGimpsey to endorse the trust's proposals on services in the Armagh area would have a massively detrimental effect on its health services. I have spoken to many staff and service users who feel strongly that the trust is going down the wrong path to meet the requirements of the comprehensive spending review. Minister McGimpsey said that the review would not mean cuts; rather, he would find savings through efficiencies. Despite that pledge, the trust is flying in the face of the Minister's assurances by proposing to close wards and reallocate services.

Indeed, in a detailed response to the Southern Health and Social Care Trust's consultation on the proposed reorganisation, Armagh City and District Council, of which I am a member, questioned the trust's supposed patient-first ethos. That is because the trust's proposals do not have the patient at heart. Why reduce and remove services that have consistently been performing well in the Armagh district? Why force the most vulnerable to travel further and to be inconvenienced when there are highly respected services at the Mullinure, Longstone and St Luke's sites?

UNISON held a rally in Armagh on 19 April that, unfortunately, I could not attend. It is clear from those who did and from the thousands of people who signed our council petition that Minister McGimpsey has a big decision to make. I noted UNISON's call for the Department of Health to be exempt from the comprehensive spending review; however, that is not a realistic or acceptable solution. All Departments must make efficiency savings, and exempting the Department of Health would be a mistake. Even the Minister agrees that there are efficiency savings to be made in the Health Service.

I also voice my concerns about the detailed response that was tabled by our local council and about how that submission was received and treated by the trust. When we met a few weeks ago to hear the trust's verdict on the consultation, I left feeling strongly that our concerns and responses had not been adequately considered. Armagh City and District Council tabled options, including the provision of non-acute in-beds at Mullinure Hospital, but the trust simply moved the goalposts, without allowing any further comment from the council.

I call on the Minister to give a commitment that the detailed and collective response submitted by the elected representatives of the Armagh district be given adequate consideration and that the trust discuss the alternative positions that are outlined in our response. The Minister holds the key to the future of healthcare in Armagh city and district. The version of future service provision presented by the trust is very much at odds with the views of staff, patients and the wider public.

Minister McGimpsey must lean on his pledge to find efficiencies, and leave alone the hard-working and highly respected services that operate to a high standard in Armagh city. He must also instruct the trust to reconsider its options, taking into account fully the views of the area's civic leaders and allow a full and frank debate on the proposals.

**Mr Boylan:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom tacaíocht a thabhairt don díospóireacht.

I welcome the Adjournment debate and thank Dominic Bradley for securing it. However, I am disappointed, not so much that the Minister is not here, but that the debate has proceeded. Someone should be here to respond to debates such as this.

**Mr D Bradley:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Boylan:** I will in a minute.

I also want to put on record that the Executive agreed that the 3% efficiency savings were not to be taken out of front line services, and Members have already referred to that. Every Minister agreed efficiency savings, but they were not to be targeted at front line services.

4.30 pm

**Mr D Bradley:** I thank the Member for giving way. He expressed disappointment that today's debate was going ahead without the Minister's presence. I am sure that we are all disappointed that the Minister is not here. I am not here to lambaste the Minister; I am here to try to convince him to change his mind.

This debate was tabled on two previous occasions, and this is the latest opportunity that we have had to debate the issue in the Chamber. Were we to wait any longer, there would be no guarantee that the Minister would be present next time, so it is better to air the matter today.

**Mr Boylan:** I thank the Member for his intervention. I take his point, but I would have liked to have heard what the Minister had to say.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak about what could be one of the most important issues that will affect Armagh city and district for many years, if the Southern Health and Social Care Trust's proposals are approved by the Minister.

On Thursday 26 March 2009, I attended a board meeting at St Luke's Hospital, where I was given the chance to speak on behalf of the staff and patients of all three facilities in the area. Little did I realise that when I entered that meeting, I would witness two different sets of emotions. In the morning, I saw tears of joy and happiness because of the proposals to save facilities in one area. However, there were tears of sadness and disappointment in the afternoon because of the proposed closure and reduction of services in Armagh city. That was particularly poignant because I reside in that part of the constituency and I have a close affiliation with many of the people who are involved.

The trust proposes to close 36 non-acute beds at Mullinure Hospital and 47 inpatient mental-health beds at St Luke's Hospital. In total, it is estimated that approximately 176 beds will be lost across three hospitals. The trust has also proposed to resettle 60 long-stay mental-health patients and 33 long-stay learning-disability patients from Longstone Hospital into the community.

Mullinure Hospital has been open since 1989. It provides a day hospital, a minor-injuries unit and 36 non-acute beds that cater for frail, elderly people in Armagh and the wider area, many of whom are 70, 80 or 90 years of age. Two main functions of the Mullinure Hospital are to rehabilitate patients after acute hospital care and prepare them for a return home to the community, and to provide palliative end-of-life care.

St Luke's Hospital has been open for 184 years. It is the second-oldest hospital in Ireland. It has 47 mental-health inpatient beds. It is proposed that those will move to the Bluestone unit at Craigavon Area Hospital, which is already under severe pressure. The Bamford Review recommended the closure of larger institutions in favour of smaller community units, so does the proposal not contradict and defeat those recommendations? After gaining approval for a new 42-bed hospital on the St Luke's Hospital site, why has the trust decided to shelve those plans?

If patients from Longstone Hospital are to be resettled into the community as proposed, that must take place in Armagh, given the vulnerability of many of the patients. Quality and consistency of care has to be at the core of such matters. Consideration must be given to the staff who would have to adapt to different working conditions and surrounds if those proposals were implemented.

For many years, it has clearly been recognised that employment in Armagh city has never been heavy-industry based or orientated towards major retailing, private investment or entrepreneurialism. Rather, there has been a reliance on the public sector, niche shops, small indigenous businesses and tourism to generate employment and drive the local economy.

Public-sector jobs account for between 35% and 40% of the total job provision in Armagh, and the health sector provides 18% of those jobs. One can see how important those jobs are to the local economy. If the proposals are implemented, it is conceivable that up to 300 jobs could be lost. That could signal the demise of the public sector in the area and expedite the move away from the city of many other jobs in education or administration. Under the new council structures in 2011, Armagh could lose out on all fronts.

Healthcare, including mental-health care, care for elderly people, respite care and care for people with learning needs or disabilities, has been provided in Armagh for many years. During the conflict, healthcare providers in Armagh made no distinction between people; each and every patient was cared for equally. Over the years, an excellent, dedicated, professional and highly skilled pool of workers has provided high-quality healthcare. As a result of drastic cuts, those highly skilled jobs and members of staff could be lost permanently to the community and to Armagh.

Members and representatives of staff from the three hospitals and from Armagh City and District Council submitted evidence during the consultation process, including new suggestions for the trust to consider. However, they believe that the trust has not seriously considered those suggestions. Furthermore, they believe that, before the consultation period, the trust offered those who will be affected most by the proposals little opportunity to make a positive contribution.

As I said, I am disappointed that the Minister is not here. Nevertheless, would it not be more practical for the Southern Health and Social Care Trust to evaluate all the facilities, public and private, in its area to ascertain whether there are pressures on other aspects of the healthcare that it provides? If so, would it not be feasible to transfer or relocate those services to the three hospitals, not only to alleviate pressure but to create and sustain jobs in Armagh city and the surrounding area? Go raibh maith agat.

**Mr Kennedy:** I thank Mr Dominic Bradley for securing this important debate. As a Member who represents the Newry and Armagh constituency, I recognise that this debate is an important contribution to facing up to the ongoing concerns about hospital provision in Armagh city. At the outset, I pay tribute to all health staff and workers, who, over many years — indeed, generations — have provided care and attention to a great many people in the complex of St Luke's, Longstone and Mullinure hospitals.

I know that the local health trust's recent decision has caused much angst among Health Service workers, patients and people in the Armagh area. The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety is considering those decisions, and I know that he fully



understands all the issues involved, some of which are complex and difficult. Nevertheless, those difficulties must be faced up to. I also know that although the Minister is not present in the Chamber he will take a keen interest in the Hansard report, which I hope he will have an early opportunity to study. Moreover, I hope that he will have an early opportunity to come to the Mullinure Hospital — indeed, the entire complex — if he has not been there already. In addition, I hope that a meeting can be arranged between the Members who represent the constituency and the Minister to discuss matters further.

Local party councillors and I have taken the opportunity to meet the Health Minister to discuss those matters.

4.45 pm

The future of non-acute hospital provision in Armagh is important, but it is also important to place the debate in context and look at the processes of change that will affect overall decisions. Members will be aware of the recommendations of the Bamford Review, which all parties endorsed and signed up to, and for which they have enthusiasm. The difficulty for us is that the implementation of the Bamford Review will, of necessity, mean change. However, that change must be well managed, and, if that is to happen, we must ensure that non-acute health provision is retained in Armagh.

As local representatives, we are concerned at the impact of job losses in the public sector and the adverse impact that that would have on Armagh. We will seek to retain as many public-sector jobs as possible, be they in health, education, local government or Government agencies. That has to be a priority for Members who represent Newry and Armagh and the representatives of the wider community.

Regardless of whether we like it or not, the economy in Armagh, rightly or wrongly, is built on and relies heavily on public-sector jobs. Therefore we need to see how those jobs can be protected and if possible enhanced. I, with other Members of the House, have encouraged, welcomed and participated in the Armagh United campaign, which was formed and organised by the local council to protect public-sector jobs. I want that campaign to succeed. If it is to succeed, I believe that we, as political and party representatives, have a responsibility to work together and put aside personal interests and party advantage. Playing to the gallery and political grandstanding will not serve our constituents well. Instead, we must work together and build consensus to see how we can go forward.

We need to work with the local council and the health authorities, the Administration and the relevant Departments for the future development of the complex

that comprises Longstone Hospital, Mullinure Hospital and St Luke's Hospital.

There is an urgent need to create an effective estates strategy that will examine the management of sites and consider what public-sector services they should provide. I look forward to ongoing representations on the issue being made to the Health Minister. I understand the importance of the issue and I encourage Armagh United and the local council in their campaign. Furthermore, I appeal to local representatives to stay united on the issue, not to use it for party advantage and — considering that all of their parties are signed up to the recommendations of the Bamford Review — to be realistic in their anticipated outcomes.

**Mr D Bradley:** Does the Member agree that the trust's proposals contain a misinterpretation of the Bamford Review term "long stay" to include specialist, low secure/challenging behaviour bed provision and that the Bamford recommendations 35, 51 and 53 require provision for patients with challenging behaviour and those with dementia. Furthermore, does he agree that recommendations 47, 48 and 99 require provision for patients with challenging behaviour/low secure requirements and severely mentally-ill patients, and that those have been ignored by the trust's proposals?

**Mr Kennedy:** I certainly accept that, when making any final decision on those issues, the Minister will have to consider the full implementation of the recommendations of the Bamford Review and what that really entails, including whether the recommendations are being properly applied in this case. There are clear concerns that must be addressed.

At the public rally in Armagh, members of the UNISON trade union spoke with various representatives about the Ulster Unionist Party amendment on the 3% efficiencies target affecting health services. It is with some regret that I mention that, apparently, some Members gave commitments that they would support that amendment but then reneged on them. Let us not divide on all those issues. I caution members to stay united. Armagh is united, as it should be, and its representative must be united in the face of very difficult and challenging decisions.

**Mr Brady:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I, too, thank Mr Bradley for securing this Adjournment debate. I accept that he is not here to lambaste the Minister, but rather to convince him of his point of view. The Minister might be easier to convince if he was present in the Chamber, but, unfortunately, he cannot be here.

Sinn Féin believes that people have the right to social, economic, gender and cultural equality. Creating the conditions for establishing an equal society means recognising that many diverse groups need enhanced protection within the state. Many of the issues that



must be addressed when promoting social inclusion relate to the provision of, and access to, quality services. People in all walks of life must have equal access to equal services.

In its publication 'Changing for the Better', the Southern Health and Social Care Trust made a number of proposals. The trust stated that it had consulted widely with older people, including focus groups. It was informed that, in future, those people would not want to be cared for in a residential care setting, preferring instead to maintain their independence and remain at home. Apparently that has been achieved through the development of rehabilitation and support services and the increased availability of respite choices and 24/7 home care.

Having spoken to staff in Mullinure, St Luke's and Longstone hospitals, it seems clear that staff were not consulted to any great degree. Their input and views on all those issues would have been very important. The trust is proposing to centralise mental-health inpatient care to the new £12 million state-of-the-art facility at the Craigavon Area Hospital site. Given the increasing numbers of people who present with mental-health problems, it appears that the trust is putting all its eggs in one basket. Statistically, 43% of people who claim employment and support allowance — formerly known as incapacity benefit — present with mental-health and behavioural problems, so those problems are very much on the increase.

The trust proposes to continue to reduce the numbers of people with learning disability in long-stay hospital care. That would lead to the closure of three wards in Longstone Hospital over the next two years and 33 people with learning disabilities being resettled into new supported-living accommodation in the area. That is fine in principle, but what happens if there is no supported-living accommodation in the area? It is those 33 people who will bear the brunt.

The closure of St Luke's Hospital would have a detrimental effect on patient care. There would also be serious implications for the public, as well as a severe impact on staff in ancillary services, who may lose their jobs. Up to 280 to 330 jobs will be affected by the trust's proposals, which will have serious repercussions for Armagh and the surrounding district.

The Bamford Review has already been mentioned, but the Bain Report advocated the decentralisation of public-sector jobs. The strategy to relocate elsewhere is wrong, particularly in the context of the RPA. Armagh city and district needs those jobs and relies on them for its economic well-being.

It needs increased job opportunities, not job losses. Job losses will affect many families in the area.

Above all, staff feel that patients, and their care, must come first. In talking to staff on all those sites

— experienced staff who have been in post for many years — it is apparent that the trust has not addressed their views and considerations adequately. Those people are on the front line, and it is essential that their views are considered. In talking to staff, I have found that they have a realistic and pragmatic approach, and they realise that certain things need to change. However, they feel that their interests, and those of the patients, have been sacrificed on the altar of efficiency cuts. We were all told that front line services would not suffer in the efficiency cuts.

Before any decision is made, I ask the Minister to consider all aspects of the situation. The views and input of all the relevant parties must be addressed fully.

I apologise for Minister Murphy's being unable to be here; he has ministerial business. Nevertheless, he will lend all his support to the matter, and, like the rest of us, he will endeavour to do all that he can to maintain those hospitals on site.

*Adjourned at 4.56 pm.*



# **Committee Stages**





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# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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## COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION

22 April 2009

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### EDUCATION BILL (NIA 3/08)

#### Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Mervyn Storey (Chairperson)  
Mr Dominic Bradley (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mrs Mary Bradley  
Mr Tom Elliott  
Mr Trevor Lunn  
Mr Nelson McCausland  
Mr Basil McCrea  
Miss Michelle McIlveen  
Mr John O'Dowd

#### Witnesses:

Rev Ian Ellis	} Transferor Representatives' Council
Rev Trevor Gribben	
Rev Robert Herron	
Rev Trevor Jamieson	

**The Chairperson (Mr Storey):** This morning I welcome members of the Transferor Representatives' Council (TRC) to the Committee: its chairman, Rev Robert Herron, Rev Trevor Gribben, Rev Trevor Jamieson, and Rev Ian Ellis. Gentlemen, I invite you to make your presentation, after which members will have the opportunity to ask questions. Thank you.

**Rev Robert Herron (Transferor Representatives' Council):** Thank you, Chairman, for the welcome and also for the opportunity to address the Committee. You have already received some of our papers, which include our response to the Education Bill and, relevant to that, our response to policy paper 20. We have also produced a summary sheet of other points that we want to make during the meeting.

At the outset, I will say that although there are several issues on our summary sheet, our major focus will be on one of them, namely representation. If members have questions on other issues, however, we are happy to take them. Trevor Gribben may comment on religious education. Ian Ellis will discuss our main concern of representation.

We do not want to be negative; we want to make a positive contribution. That said, we have serious concerns. We feel that we are starting off on the back foot. We had to argue our case strongly on transferors' representation on schools' boards of governors. We appreciate the listening ear that political parties have given us, and we acknowledge the response to our representations. Ian will address the problem of representation, which must be solved.

**Rev Ian Ellis (Transferor Representatives' Council):** Thank you, Chairman. I will address the first page of the sheet containing our summary points. I want to say a few words about our vision for education and why we believe that Churches ought to be involved in it. It sets the context of what is important to us as Churches.

The transferor Churches are fully committed to public-sector education; that is demonstrated through our involvement as school governors. At present, schools' boards of governors are being reconstituted for the next round of four years. The four of us are involved in ringing people who already serve on boards of governors and asking them whether they want to serve for another four years.

In doing that, we have become aware of the scale of governors' dedication and commitment. Almost everyone we ask says that they will serve again; only a few say that they have done their term and want to be replaced. Largely, we get a positive response. There are some 1,800 governors throughout the Province; that is a big commitment from the Church to provide volunteer governors to schools.

That demonstrates where we as Churches are at grass-roots level in schools by providing that kind of input into education. However, when we transferred our schools, we did more than that and we were given more than that; we were given a role and a voice in the management of the schools' estate across an area board as well, and I want to return to that point.

We do not feel that we are in education to dominate or control schools; however, we feel that we have an influence to bring to bear and a contribution to make to what is important in education. We believe that, across Northern Ireland, most parents want their children taught in a context of Christian faith. That seems to be demonstrated in all the censuses and polls.

Across Northern Ireland, 85% of the population declare themselves to be of a Christian denomination; in the controlled sector, some 78% of children are from the Protestant community. There is, therefore, a very strong connection with our own community in the schools that we represent. It is also important to acknowledge that controlled schools have a diversity of beliefs, but the statistics show that the majority belief is from the Protestant Churches, and the transferor

Churches represent about two thirds of those — 86% of the 78% are from our Churches. It is from there that we get our base.

We are keen to emphasise that we are not in schools to dominate but to contribute a view of education that, we believe, parents share, and to do that with other partners in education and with those who have equal rights to participation. Christianity is still the dominant social determinant in Ireland; there are other faiths, and those of no faiths, and we are able and willing to work them. In our vision statement for controlled-sector schools we say that schools should foster tolerance of and respect for the beliefs of others and also respect the rights of those with no religious belief. It is a subtle influence in education, but it is real and is based on our Christian faith.

I can give an example of that influence: ‘Newsround’ on children’s BBC had an interesting survey this week that showed that children from Northern Ireland say their prayers more than children from other parts of the UK — 57% of children in Northern Ireland pray as opposed to 22% in the UK generally.

**The Chairperson:** Perhaps that is because of the politicians that they have. *[Laughter.]*

**Rev Ian Ellis:** They need to pray for as much help as possible. *[Laughter.]* That survey is a wee indicator of the kind of people that we Irish are; there is a latent spirituality that sets the tone, I believe, for our schools as well.

However, to come to the substantive point: in the 1920s and 1930s, we handed over control of our schools to the state. It is important to note that we did not hand over ownership of the schools, because when those schools cease to be used as education establishments, there are reversionary rights under which they return to the Churches. To safeguard that, Churches were given a statutory place on area boards to have oversight of the planning and safeguarding of those properties. In later legislation, we were given places on the boards of all controlled schools, not just those that we had owned; therefore, it was recognised that transferors had an oversight role in the management and planning of the controlled-schools estate. We believe that the Education Bill removes that statutory right, which was about safeguarding the schools that Churches established and to safeguard an interest in planning for their future.

Among the proposals in the legislation is one for a separate ownership body. It rejects the idea that the education and skills authority could be the ownership body of the controlled-schools estate because there is a feeling that the ESA would in some way contaminate or be influenced.

However, whatever model is proposed, transferors should have a right to representation on the proposed body.

One of the proposals is a separate ownership body. We had a helpful discussion with departmental officials, including Chris Stewart, who explained some of the proposals to us. Chris was also able to tell us that, because of the application of equality legislation, transferors would not have places by right on any ownership body. It would be up to Churches to apply and be subject to an appointments process. That seems to us to be a serious injustice and a denial of rights that were given to us.

More than that, it is also about parity of esteem, because of how that works out in other sectors. For example, our Catholic colleagues will continue to have a place by right on an ownership body and will continue to have decision-making powers regarding planning of their schools estate; yet the Protestant Churches will no longer have a role by right in any decision making regarding the control of the schools estate or whatever it will be called in the future.

There seems to be a huge injustice and a disparity in decision-making and the rights of the Protestant community; we wish to make that point strongly this morning. It is a conundrum. One can see in the policy papers a great struggle with finding a place for the controlled-schools estate and a representation for that sector; a body that will somehow speak for its ownership and its planning for the future. All the models outlined in the policy paper pose problems for us. The basic problem is that there will be no place by right for transferring Churches in an ownership body — a body that will have a say in the planning of the controlled-schools estate in the future.

We are perfectly happy with the idea of a representative body, because we believe that the controlled estate needs a cohesive body to speak for it and to plan for it and to have an input into its ethos. Anyone on that body would need to have a place on an ownership body, because ultimately that will be the body that makes the decisions on new development plans or the disposal of previous estate.

Whatever model is arrived at — and there must be some creativity with ideas; you MLAs came up with a solution to the problem of governors — it must be a solution that enables the two major traditions in Northern Ireland to feel that they have parity of esteem and parity in protection of ethos. A failure to do that would be a denial of parity of treatment to the two major communities in Northern Ireland.

Those are the general points that we want to make at the moment. Trevor wants to make a further comment about support for religious education.

**Rev Trevor Gribben (Transferor Representatives' Council):** I affirm everything that Ian said. The phrase with which he ended is where I would like to begin: parity of protection of ethos. The transferring Churches want to see our ethos as protected as the ethos of any other sector or any other Church. The transferor Churches' approach to religious education has always been different from that of other Churches; we have never been interested in the concept of religious formation as a part of education, but the concept of religious education has been valued by all our Churches and parents.

Our submission refers to the new role of the ESA in the training and advisory support services for teachers. We wish to make the point strongly that we feel that, under current systems, support for religious education in the controlled sector has constantly diminished. As advisory officers either retire or move on from posts in education and library boards, their posts are often not filled. On occasions, a religious education advisory officer giving support to schools in the controlled sector has to multitask that with perhaps several other elements of his or her job description.

It is important for religious education to have the protection of an advisory support service, for teachers to receive the necessary backup and for that compulsory part of the syllabus to be given the same support as any other subject. We note the proposal for that support to be transferred to the ESA under the new arrangements, and we want to put down a strong marker that a support service for religious education must be provided.

Linked to that is the issue of inspection, to which we also refer in our submission. Religious education is taught by professionals, and we want them to be trained in the delivery of religious education and to be as professional as any other teacher; we also advocate that they be inspected professionally. The current system whereby boards of governors must request inspections of religious education before inspection is not satisfactory. At its meeting tomorrow night, a board may pass a resolution to inspect, but if a school's inspection is not for two years' time, the inspection of religious education may not take place. Often, religious education is not inspected in controlled schools, even when a board of governors has expressed its desire for that to happen.

At point 6, we raise the issue of inspections by laypersons. We note that legislation provides an opportunity for specialists to work alongside the inspectorate on specialist subjects. Often, the laypeople are teachers, perhaps of religious education, who accompany an inspector whose speciality may not be in that subject. We want parity of treatment for religious education in controlled schools, both in the support and advisory service and inspection. That is a sub-point of the protection of ethos. The continuation

of public worship, the Christian ethos of a school and the place of religious education are all part of that protected ethos.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you for your presentation and for your detailed submission setting out many of the issues arising from paper 20. I want to pick up on the issues relating to the body that would be established to own the controlled sector. Given the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 and all that flows from it, if you had a choice, on which of the two would you prefer representation: the ESA board or a body established to own the controlled sector?

**Rev Ian Ellis:** That would depend on the functions of an ownership body. Our response to policy paper 20 sets out a range of functions for the ownership body, some of which seem to duplicate those of a representational body. At the end of the day, we were not sure which body would have the final say on planning, disposal, area-based work, ethos or the nomination of governors. There seems to be a considerable overlap between those two bodies. Whatever the outcome, we ought to have a place by right. We were told that it is not possible for us to be represented on the main board, which will be made up of technocrats or local councillors.

**Rev Robert Herron:** The functions of the ownership body are our main concern; ownership itself is not a major issue for us. It would depend on what functions owners would be given. We wonder about the logic of the situation: how can the ESA be a publicly appointed body and, at the same time, be accused of bias? That implies a problem with the process of public appointments.

**The Chairperson:** Speaking personally, there is also an issue about how to deal with equality or inequality.

On the one hand, one group argues that the education system is exempt from certain elements of equality legislation; that group has a case, given the fact that, for example, the Catholic certificate gives a preference to one sector of the educational world.

On the other hand, we have been told that the establishment of a body that is to govern, or be responsible for, the ownership of the controlled estate must be subject to equality legislation. Do you see that as an attempt to perpetuate the inequality in the system?

Is it a fair reflection of school provision in Northern Ireland at present to say that the various sectors are not being treated equally in legislation and in practice? Do you agree that an opportunity exists, if people are willing, to address inequality — which is the Minister's view — to get it right and to create a level playing field for the first time in a long time in how education is delivered?

**Rev Robert Herron:** Some of my colleagues may also want to speak on that matter.



We do not underestimate the complexity and difficulty of bringing about change in the education system, as it has evolved over years and has included compromises and political agreements, and different solutions have been found for the different issues that have arisen. Changing or tinkering with one part of the system will have a knock-on effect on the rest of it.

The Transferor Representatives' Council is looking for some kind of parity with the Catholic Trustees. The context has changed because, today, all Northern Ireland schools' capital and revenue are 100% funded. Therefore, I am not sure what ownership means in that context and why it is being used at all as a model for developing the future of the education system.

I could speak at length on the matter. In my experience, vested interests and issues of ownership add to the difficulty of finding solutions for, and agreement on, area planning at local level.

Some of my colleagues and I addressed the issue of teacher appointments at another Committee; the Churches are concerned about it.

**Rev Trevor Gribben:** The concept that the transferring Churches cannot be represented in the controlled sector because of equality legislation when other Churches are represented in another sector is totally illogical. The school system in Northern Ireland is 100% publicly funded; therefore, equality legislation should be applied across that system as a whole.

To speak bluntly, if one community is represented in one sector, it is equal for another community to be represented in another sector. That is equality. Under current legislation, the transferring Churches have a legislative right to be involved in the controlled sector; they also have an historic right, because of the transfer and ownership of schools in the twentieth century. Therefore, for those Churches to be told that they can no longer be included because of equality legislation is, basically, discrimination, given the fact that another Church can be involved in another sector.

The equality legislation is being applied through the ownership model. Since every school receives 100% funding, the entire educational community should be considered together. People should look at the whole picture and ask whether it is fair. It is a gross injustice for one community's Church to be represented in one sector and for other community's Churches to be excluded from another sector because of equality legislation.

**The Chairperson:** This is a very wide-ranging issue, and I want to move to questions from members.

However, on that point, the Minister said that there were "structural" inequalities. The Committee wrote to the Minister last October asking her to set out those structural inequalities; it is mid-April and the

Committee has still not received a reply. Transferor representation is an issue that the Committee must get to the bottom of, and we have the opportunity to deal with it. As the Committee endeavours to do that, The TRC's comments and views will be very welcome.

**Rev Trevor Gribben:** As Ian said, we are not the only voice in the controlled sector; we want to state that clearly. However, the statistics that we have given you, which are from the census and from the Department, show that the TRC Churches represent two thirds of pupils in the controlled sector.

Therefore, excluding the TRC Churches from representation in that sector because it is difficult to find how the other third will be represented appears ludicrous to us.

**Mr Lunn:** On the matter of equality, it appears that the council has been told that granting it automatic rights of membership to the ESA would breach equality legislation. The Department seems to put that slightly differently by stating in its review of public administration response:

"Appointments will reflect the merit principle, and no organisation will be given automatic membership rights."

I will be asking Chris Stewart the same question later, but please give me your thoughts on that.

The first qualification for membership for the majority of local councillors — who may not represent an organisation but who do represent a significant grouping — is that they must be members of a body of local councillors. That seems to contrast with your council's exclusion. Has the TRC anything to say about that?

**Rev Robert Herron:** We are talking about a political decision.

**Mr Lunn:** I am not asking about the merit of appointing councillors to the ESA; however, there appears to be a contradiction on the basis of equality.

**Rev Robert Herron:** That may be the case.

**Rev Ian Ellis:** We are not here to bash politicians; we do not want to do that.

**Rev Robert Herron:** Politicians, some of whom are members of the Committee, are involved in the Western Education and Library Board (WELB), which I have chaired for a couple of years. I believe that politicians have made a positive contribution to the board. I do not want to take away from that good work — their knowledge has helped to find local solutions to difficulties. I have more of an issue with the ESA's ability in that area than with its representational make up.

**Mr Lunn:** My remarks have been taken up wrongly. I am not asking about the merit of councillors as contributors to the ESA — I am sure councillors with a



contribution to make can be found somewhere — I am asking about equality.

If organisations are not given automatic membership rights, how is the word “organisation” to be defined? The organisation or group in question could be the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA). However, a selected grouping of people will have automatic membership rights to the ESA. Yet, historically, I completely agree that the TRC is being denied its rightful place on that authority.

**Rev Ian Ellis:** We agree with that analysis. We believe that to be unfair.

**Rev Trevor Gribben:** I do not doubt that once a certain number of councillors has been appointed, an attempt will be made to create balances in that group and that it will not consist of councillors from just one section of the community or from a single party. It is not unreasonable to suggest that there should be representatives of the Churches — say two or three — and to have a balance in that group as a way of bringing several Churches into the ESA. There are many creative ways of doing that in Northern Ireland, provided that the will exists.

**Mr Lunn:** I am beginning to wonder who the politicians are at the meeting, Chairman. Thank you, gentlemen.

**The Chairperson:** We will ask Chris later about the issue concerning definitions. Councillors, for example, are to be appointed on merit and could, therefore, be all unionists or all nationalists. A publicly owned body would be subject to section 75, and consideration would have to be given to a whole raft of views. Given your comment that you represent 85% of the Protestant community, there is a question about how that circle can be squared.

**Mr McCausland:** I welcome the fact that the issue of equality has been placed high on the agenda. The point was made earlier that we have had an ad hoc arrangement whereby certain aspects have been added on over the years and changes have been made. The current system already has inequalities, and there is a danger that we will have a system that has even more inequalities. However, now that we have started to deconstruct the education architecture and put it together again, there is an opportunity to address those inequalities, and it is one that should not be missed.

You said that the Roman Catholic Church is represented on the ownership body for the maintained sector. I would go further and say that the Roman Catholic Church is the de facto ownership body. The trustees are all bishops, and, as a Roman Catholic layman pointed out to me, laypeople cannot get on to that board. There is a clearly a disparity between the situation in one sector and other sectors.

I am interested in your point about legislation, which is a matter that we have raised with Chris Stewart. I would focus more on the ownership and representative body for the controlled sector rather than on the ESA. As you rightly said, the children who attend those schools are overwhelmingly from Protestant churches. Did Chris Stewart give any indication about how to resolve the problem of equality legislation preventing the establishment of a statutory ownership body that reflects the community that the schools serve? Or, did he merely acknowledge that it is a difficulty?

**Rev Ian Ellis:** Chris can verify his position but, in our initial conversation with him, I think that he was saying that the ownership body would have to be a non-departmental public body and that equality legislation would, therefore, restrict membership. I think that there was a suggestion that some of the ownership body's powers may be devolved to a representational body. It would be easier for us to find our way on to a representational body because we are represented in the schools. Considering that option may be a way forward, and that is why I responded to Mervyn's question about which of the two we wanted by saying that it depends on function. There may be a way forward in undertaking some creative thinking about what roles and functions the two bodies have.

**Mr McCausland:** Did Chris come back on the point that shifting responsibilities from one body to the other would create inequality because the ownership bodies would have different powers?

**Rev Ian Ellis:** We have not heard anything more since that initial conversation.

**Mr McCausland:** Changing the ownership bodies would raise issues of inequality. There would be a high-level ownership body with a lot of powers in one sector and a lower-level ownership body with limited powers in another sector.

Surely schools could effectively thumb their nose at a purely voluntary and representational body — to which powers had been shifted from a statutory ownership body — and tell it to go away because it has no influence. In trying to resolve one problem, we would be creating two new inequalities. The best way to address the matter may be to go back and ascertain what the legislative problem is, because the education system already has equality exemptions in regard to teaching appointments. Perhaps we should consider that.

**Rev Robert Herron:** That is partly why, for us, it is an equality and a rights issue. It is about rights of representation.

**The Chairperson:** In fairness to the TRC representatives, Nelson, they received the response from the Department only today. They will have an opportunity to respond to that as, obviously, there will be issues. However, it is interesting that in its responses

to the issues of ownership and representation — and this is the point that Nelson made — the Department said:

“each will be associated with separate and distinct functions. In the case of Catholic education, the ownership and representative functions will both reside with the Catholic trustees. This cannot be replicated exactly for the controlled sector.”

A clear issue continues to emanate — we do not have equality. That information has been passed to you, so you will have an opportunity to comment on that.

**Rev Trevor Gribben:** In response to that, and to what Mr McCausland said, we feel that the controlled sector is already a weak sector. Whatever comes out of the change must strengthen the controlled sector, give it a strong voice, and make it cohesive. It is vitally important that the sector is able to have an advocacy role with the Department and with the ESA. Whatever the arrangements are, the controlled sector's voice, and therefore the TRC's voice within it, has to be as strong as that of any other sector. That is equality. As far as we are concerned, anything that weakens the cohesiveness of the controlled sector, and does not take the opportunity to build on it, is a retrograde step.

**Rev Ian Ellis:** We have concerns about the proposal in policy paper 20 that schools could become their own owners. It is not that we are against autonomy, or against schools being given some powers to make their own decisions; however, we are afraid that the controlled sector could become fragmented, with large pieces of it floating off on their own. To re-emphasise what Trevor said: a strong cohesive force is needed to keep the sector together, and that is what a representational body should do. That is an outworking of one of those proposals.

**Mr Elliott:** Thank you very much for your presentation and for the information that you provided. Reverend Gribben did, eventually, get to the point that I was going to make about discrimination. From what I have heard and what I have read, I feel that you have a sense of discrimination. When you say that the controlled sector is weak, do you mean that the Transferor Representatives' Council's position within the sector is weak, or, that the controlled sector is weak overall?

**Rev Trevor Gribben:** Overall, we feel that the controlled sector, as a cohesive sector, is weak. Within the sector, the transferors' voice — which is a significant, although not the only, voice within the sector — has no support. For example, we are probably one of the only bodies to come before you that has to carry out our role in our spare time. We have to drop other pieces of work and go off and hire solicitors to help us to carry out our role. However, other sectors that come before you have publicly funded officials to draw up their papers. Already, the TRC's voice within the controlled sector is weak. There is no one with publicly funded

support that could come before the Committee and speak for that sector.

**Mr Elliott:** When we first heard about the Education Bill, we thought that it was going to be all-embracing. We believed that it would take in all bodies and that there would be an end to separate representation for the integrated sector, the Irish-medium sector and the Catholic maintained sector. We thought that everything would come under one remit. Now, it appears that we are moving away from that.

Would you prefer all sectors to be brought under one body or would you prefer each body to retain its own identity and for the TRC to remain as a separate entity and, as Reverend Gribben said, strengthen its position?

**Rev Ian Ellis:** There are two answers to that question, one of which is idealistic and the other pragmatic. Given that all schools are, effectively, funded by the public purse, ideally, it would be wonderful if everything was as one. Furthermore, if a funding rather than an ownership model could be adopted, there would be one ownership body, and all sectors would be represented.

Pragmatism dictates that that would never work because the Catholic sector will always want to have a say as the trustees are the technical owners of their schools, and there is a resistance to tamper with that. Pragmatism also suggests that it has worked reasonably well for some sectors to have their own representative bodies. Therefore, the expedient answer is that it seems as though there will be different bodies in the future, and, if that is the case, we want to be part of the support body or the representational body for the controlled sector.

Although we believe that the controlled sector is weak at the moment, it has been supported well in the past by the area boards, and we do not wish to undermine the good work that those boards have done in speaking for the controlled sector. Any boards that I have been associated with have always had a special interest in the controlled sector as a result of their being the technical owners of the schools. However, the area boards have also had to be neutral and provide education provision to all sectors of their work.

To repeat, if we are going to different bodies — and it looks as though we will — there ought to be a strong representational body for the controlled sector. We want to be part of, and contribute to, that body.

**Rev Robert Herron:** One of our concerns is that some of the proposals could entrench education in segregated systems forever and leave no room for the concept of a shared future. In the past, as churches, we have made compromises in not providing denominational education in our schools. That has been an agreement between us, but I do wonder where all this will take us.

**Mr D Bradley:** What were the reasons for the Churches transferring ownership of their schools to the state? Furthermore, what advantages did the Churches get from those transfers?

**Mr Elliott:** Do any of the witnesses remember those transfers? *[Laughter.]*

**Rev Trevor Gribben:** Ian is the oldest and most senior member. *[Laughter.]*

**Rev Ian Ellis:** The transfers were inextricably linked to the politics of that time. We effectively had a Protestant state for a Protestant people, and the Churches felt that they were handing over their schools to a state that would be supportive of them.

An economic element was also involved, because the churches realised that they could not continue to provide universal education from their own means. At that time, the theme of universal education was current across the British Isles, and it seemed to be a good idea to hand over our schools to invest in the future in Northern Ireland. Therefore, the churches provided the state with ready-made schools and placed those schools in the care of the state for the future. That was done on the understanding that the churches would have an oversight role and would thus safeguard the future education of children. It was a mixture of those considerations and a belief in the common good, because we knew that those schools needed to be improved and their facilities expanded. Only a state system funded by Government could achieve that.

Our Catholic colleagues took a different view, as you know. They held that they could control the ethos of their schools only by retaining ownership of them. The irony of it all — and I say this without malice — is that the Catholic sector has ended up being 100% funded by the state. It retains ownership of its own schools and has a determining element in the control of its ethos and religious education. As a by-product of that, it also has its children taught in Christian formation, which is paid for by the state.

With hindsight, our Catholic colleagues have come out of it very well. We are in the business of partnership and, as church people with an interest in education, we see it as part of the ongoing mission of the church to be involved in education. We want to be involved in education, but in partnership with others. We live in a more diverse world now, and our views are shared by many; there are those who disagree with us, but we want to work in partnership with them. That is a potted history of what happened and why.

**Mr D Bradley:** Thank you for that. The reason I asked that question was to establish the fact that we are working in an historical context. Things change, and people react to that in different ways. Reverend Herron said that plasters have been stuck on here and there to try to repair and improve things, and we are left with

this situation. At present, you feel that your voice is not heard to the extent that you want it to be. In the past, county education committees were supportive towards your schools, and in recent times, that has been true of the education and library boards. That support has meant that, as transferors, your voice was behind those organisations, rather than to the fore, and perhaps became lost.

In an evidence session with the Committee, representatives of the Catholic sector made the point several times that they were not asking for anything that they did not expect other sectors to be given. I do not get the impression that the Catholic sector is trying to dominate any other sector. It has stated in its papers and pronouncements that it is supportive of all sectors being treated equally. Unfortunately, historical circumstances may mean — for example with respect to the equality laws that you referred to earlier — that certain difficulties have arisen and we must try to overcome them.

We are talking about some form of ownership body on the one hand, and on the other, a sectoral-support body. What sort of linkage do you see as necessary between those two bodies?

**Rev Trevor Gribben:** Fundamentally, we see that as a potential problem. However, if that is going to be the system, the linkage must be something that goes beyond mere consultation of the sectoral-support body. On a particular proposal, the voice of the body may be only one of a potential 15,000 consultees, and it must carry weight. There must be a strong link. As Robert said earlier, it is down to functions. In one possible model, if an ownership body were simply the holding trustee, which operated merely on the instruction of another body, and all the key functions were with the sectoral body, that would be close to giving parity between sectors.

I take the Chairperson's point that there is a difference if the ownership and representative functions reside with one body. However, in a pragmatic way, if the sectoral-support body had most of the functions of, and the right to be involved with, the ownership body, and not to just be consulted as 20 other groups might be consulted, strengthening that relationship would be important.

To answer your earlier point, we also want to affirm the right of protection of ethos for all sectors. We want to affirm that parity of protection of ethos counts for the Protestant and the Catholic sectors in education. However, the current proposals deny us that parity of the right to protect our ethos.

**Mr D Bradley:** When you talked about the link between the sectoral-support body and the ownership body, you said that you would feel more content if the sectoral-support body had the majority of functions.



Have you raised that point in your conversations with departmental officials? If so, what sort of response have you had?

**Rev Robert Herron:** We were quite surprised by the content of policy paper 20. We were aware of a suggestion that an ownership body and a sectoral-support body should be created as distinct organisations. However, we were surprised to discover that the paper set out the functions that an ownership body would have on issues such as area planning and the nomination of governors. We were even more surprised when we discovered that an ownership body was being created that we did not have membership rights to.

**Rev Trevor Jamieson (Transferor Representatives' Council):** I will simply echo what Mr McCausland said. One of our grave concerns with the consultative role of the representative body would be that, eventually, a body with absolutely no power would be bypassed and become irrelevant; therefore, membership of such a body would be irrelevant.

**Mr B McCrea:** Sort of like the Assembly, then.

**Rev Trevor Gribben:** You may well say that; we could not possibly comment. *[Laughter.]*

**The Chairperson:** Dominic Bradley said that there are difficulties that we have to overcome. We had difficulties, for example, about policing, and certain parties insisted that legislation had to be changed to overcome those. Some of us were not happy about the legislative method that was used, but it was used to overcome a difficulty.

We cannot simply bypass the challenge that is posed by the Education Bill. The difficult issues must be addressed and resolutions to them must be included in the legislation. If they are not, the Bill will not pass. That is the reality. Inequality is not simply perceived; it is real. As we start to scrutinise the Bill, we can see it clearly. Regardless of what happened in the past — hindsight is a perfect science — we now have the opportunity to ensure that we get it right. That the Committee's role. If we all say that we are making a new society, those are the issues that we must address.

**Rev Robert Herron:** In some ways, the simplistic way of considering this is to say that it is a Protestant/Catholic issue. However, our special schools — which are controlled schools — serve the whole community. It is important that there is Catholic representation in the development of those schools. In some controlled schools in the west, approximately 90% of the children come from the Catholic community. I imagine that those schools are providing those children with a Catholic education.

**Mr D Bradley:** Am I right that your main bone of contention is the fact that you will not have a place on

that body by right? If it were possible to overcome that problem, how far forward would that bring you?

**Rev Trevor Gribben:** That would address the issue of parity among sectors and would be a step towards dealing with the core issue. I want to link the issue to the comments made by Mr Bradley and the Chairperson: when Churches transferred control of the ownership of schools, they reached an agreement with the state that was based on trust and legislation. Policy paper 20 fundamentally ruptures that agreement and attempts to erase its legislative basis. Through devolution, the Assembly now represents the state, and we urge it not to rupture that trust and legislative basis, which is fundamental to us and our community.

**Miss McIlveen:** Thank you for your presentation. We heard a lot today about equality, and I have a certain amount of sympathy with your concerns. However, given that you advocate the idea that voluntary grammar schools should continue to employ staff, and so on, I do not understand your comments about the single employing authority. That authority would, surely, ensure equality across all sectors, including your own. Will you expand on your earlier comments about clause 3?

**Rev Trevor Gribben:** As Ian said earlier, in an ideal situation, one employing body would secure equality and necessary protection. In clause 3, people in our churches and some others feel strongly that the voluntary grammar sector should retain that employment right. In a pragmatic world, if different bodies will have employing rights, we must ensure equality. In an ideal world, the TRC would not oppose the notion of one employing body. People in the Protestant community and in our churches want to protect the independence of voluntary grammar schools. We are merely reflecting points that have been made to us. However, the TRC would be comfortable with the concept of one employing body.

Some of my colleagues are involved, as individuals, in voluntary grammar schools. The Methodist Church, the Church of Ireland, and the Presbyterian Church have strong links with some schools. Therefore, our community has differing views. However, the TRC would be happy with a single employing authority for the reasons that you stated.

**Miss McIlveen:** I wanted that clarification because the issue was included in your submission and had been mentioned previously. Your submission mentions the duty of boards of governors to achieve high standards of educational attainment and how the concept of lay governors challenging professional teachers about their work could lead to a breakdown of trust, and so on. What clarification do you want on that matter? What support would be required?

**Rev Ian Ellis:** Everyone supports the concept of raising standards in schools — it would be foolish to



say otherwise. We all want our children to do well and to do better, and we want underperforming schools to improve in the future. We support the principle of school improvement. However, we have served as members of boards of governors for many years and have developed relationships of trust and understanding with professional teachers and principals. If Government suddenly gives governors a responsibility for raising standards and challenging the staff performance, those relationships may be breached. It will be difficult for governors to fulfil that responsibility.

In our response we suggest that governors will need substantial support in that challenge role if we want them to be able to perform those duties. At the minute, we are trying to re-enlist governors for the next round, and we are telephoning people and asking them to stand. If I were to tell them that we want them to take on a new role next time around that will require them to challenge the principal on his or her performance and the results and the level of pupils' achievements, they might decide not to stand because it would bring them into a terrain on which they would be uncomfortable.

We acknowledge that school improvement is a good objective, but we need to be careful about how it is implemented and the expectations that are placed upon governors. We are flagging up a concern about volunteers being expected to deliver a professional service.

**Miss McIlveen:** I wanted to ask whether you told the individuals whom you phoned that governors' roles might change. However, it seems that you did not.

**Rev Ian Ellis:** No, we kept quiet about that. *[Laughter.]*

**Rev Robert Herron:** We introduced that issue, because it was raised as a concern by folk at our general assembly. It is a role of governors to ensure that schools are well run and improve. However, sensitivity and professionalism are required, and a great deal of training is required to support and address those issues. Those are the main reasons that we included it in our response.

**Rev Trevor Gribben:** The professional support that is necessary to enable governors to take on that role is vital. It is important that lay people, in the educational sense, have educational support if they are to take on such a challenging role. It must be handled sensitively.

**Miss McIlveen:** It is critical that capacity building be built in.

**Rev Trevor Gribben:** That is correct.

**Mr D Bradley:** Boards of governors, individually or even collectively, would not be dealing with teachers on the chalk face; that would go through a principal and a senior management team. Under present circumstances, one could argue that there is a duty on boards of governors to ensure that standards in the school on whose board they sit are as high as possible.

**Rev Robert Herron:** That is right. If there are issues involving a principal —

**Rev Trevor Jamieson:** May I respond to that? I have sat on a few boards. The proposals cause a fundamental change in the dynamic of relationships. Those of us who are in the real world will recognise that the change in the functions of the boards of governors, with the principal's guidance, will bring about a complete change in the dynamic of the relationship between the two. There is potential for conflict between boards of governors and principals. The issue of support echoes the second point, which relates to the need for a local presence throughout the system. Although we acknowledge the ESA and the concept that it will provide a comprehensive education system for the whole Province, there will be a need for a dynamic, vital, local presence that provides the support that the boards have provided in the past.

**Mr O'Dowd:** I am not sure that the dynamic for boards of governors is changing so much. It may be more emphasised in the ESA, but the role of board of governors is to improve standards in schools and to hold the principal and the senior management team to account on those matters. I agree that there needs to be training and support for boards of governors, but if we are to raise standards in the controlled sector, the boards of governors are key. There is no doubt about that.

I want to return to the issue that has dominated the meeting. You say that the TRC has a right to be on the ownership body, and you base that on legislation. To what legislation are you referring?

**Rev Trevor Gribben:** The continuing rights of the TRC Churches to be involved in the wider oversight of education in the controlled sector outside boards of governors. That oversight exists now in our right to be represented on education and library boards, which own and control the controlled-schools sector.

Those rights have evolved through education authorities to the education and library boards. We also have a right on the transfer of the control of ownership — and Ian's earlier point on that was subtle, and took me a long time to understand. We transferred control, but we did not give ownership away, because there is a reversionary right that ownership comes back to the Churches if the state no longer needs a school. Our right to guard the ethos of controlled schools was protected by being involved in the ownership body. That right has come directly down to the education and library boards, and the proposals in the Education Bill rupture that right.

**Rev Ian Ellis:** The 1986 Order sets out that membership of the area boards is composed of different parties: local councillors, trustees and the transferors; the proportion of transferors on the boards is determined by the population of controlled schools. If the population

of controlled schools moves up and down, the transferors' proportion of seats on the area boards moves up and down slightly. There is, therefore, a direct link between controlled schools and the presence of transferors on an area board.

**Mr O'Dowd:** I just wanted to clarify that for my own research. Politics in this society is often driven by the mantra that if one side has it, the other side has to have it. However, the Catholic Church owns its schools, and unless the Catholic Church gives up that ownership or the state nationalises its schools, that is how matters will remain. Therefore the ownership body of the Catholic-schools sector rests on that legal basis — and it is a legal basis rather than a concession or an advantage given to one side. The Catholic Church owns its schools, and it, naturally, will be the ownership body.

That is why I am trying to tease out the point about ownership of the controlled sector and the transferors' right to ownership in it. I was not aware — and it is an interesting point — that if the state no longer requires a school, it reverts to the transferor Churches. Does a school automatically revert to the Church or is there a procedure to go through?

**Rev Trevor Gribben:** There are fewer transferred schools in the system because new schools have been built and old schools have been knocked down. However, one school with which I was involved, and of which the member will know, was Cladymore primary school outside Markethill. When it ceased to be a primary school, a new school was built in Markethill and the small rural schools merged with it. In that case, Cladymore primary school reverted to the ownership of Cladymore Presbyterian church, which was the transferring body. That was a legal precedent, and one of the reasons why the Churches were given rights to be on the ownership bodies: to protect their rights of reversion but also to have oversight of those schools.

We have never argued that we should comprise 100% of the ownership body: we recognise that the trustees own the schools, and that they, therefore, are the ownership body in legislation. Equally strongly in legislation, we are, by legal right, part of the ownership body of controlled schools, and we feel that that should be continued in the new legislation. That was a right given to us by the state as part of an agreement when our schools were transferred, and that right should continue.

**Mr O'Dowd:** My last point goes back to what the Rev Trevor Gribben said about religious education: I did not pick up his whole point about the inspection of religious education. You said that if a board of governors passes a resolution, it might not be carried out fully. Could you go over that point again?

**Rev Trevor Gribben:** Yes; it links to how the present system deals with religious education, and we fear that the new system might be even worse. Religious education is a compulsory subject, yet it does not receive the same resources as other subjects.

Since the education and library boards' advisory support service is shrinking, we want to ensure that there will be strong support in the ESA. Unlike other subjects, religious education is not inspected automatically when inspectors go to a school.

A board of governors has to request an inspection; under the present system it has to request it just before the official inspection; a board of governors cannot pass a resolution that it wants religious education to be inspected now and at all points in future. When I was the chairperson of a board of governors, I was utterly surprised that inspectors did not inspect religious education, even though we had passed a resolution to that effect two years previously. That is a flaw in the system, but it is symptomatic of the fact that religious education is not resourced and supported as other subjects are.

**Rev Ian Ellis:** Trevor is quite right about the process. In recent years, however, the Department has seen the need to enhance the support that religious education requires. When the new revised core syllabus was implemented, a piece of work was commenced with the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), for example, to devise some new materials and to support religious education. We acknowledge that. It is not that there is no support; work is being carried out.

However, looking to the future and the way that curriculum support is advancing, we must make sure that religious education does not become the Cinderella subject; it should receive parity of esteem with other subjects in the curriculum.

**Mr O'Dowd:** I am surprised, and not just from a religious point of view. Religious education involves a great deal of reading and research, which could be used to improve literacy; therefore I am surprised that there is no inspection to assess how it is delivered.

**Rev Ian Ellis:** One of the things that we discovered while working with CCEA is that there are strong links between religious education and other parts of the revised curriculum. Very obvious links can be made in relation to a child's understanding of the world, relationships, reconciliation and living with others in diverse societies. That links strongly with religious education. Religious education has a strong place in the school curriculum, and we think that the Department is also convinced of that. We want more and more support.

**Mr D Bradley:** Religious education is often one of the core subjects. I do not know whether there still are

core subjects, but some schools used to designate English, maths and religious education as the three core subjects for GCSE choices.

**Rev Ian Ellis:** It is one of the most popular GCSEs.

**Mr McCausland:** One of the requirements under legislation for the Equality Commission, for example, is the need for its membership to be reflective of the Northern Ireland community. Should the ESA's membership be reflective of the community of Northern Ireland since it is serving the entire community of Northern Ireland?

**Rev Trevor Gribben:** Yes.

**Mr McCausland:** My point is that some matters are in legislation and some are not. If something is not in legislation, it is forgotten about.

My second point is about boards of governors. Not long ago, I attended a prize-giving in a Catholic maintained school. It was noticeable that the ethos was different from a similar event in the controlled sector in that the church, the parish, the school, the business community and the political community were all there very much as one; they were all supportive of one another. All those sectors endorsed education by being there and demonstrating that it was important and should be valued. I know that it is more complex, but what is your assessment of the comparison between that and practice in the controlled sector?

**Rev Robert Herron:** It varies from school to school. I recently attended the opening of Lisneal College. The Minister also attended, and she chatted to me about the Church presence. It was very much a religious ceremony, but local politicians and folk from the community also attended.

**Rev Trevor Gribben:** As we said earlier, capacity needs to be built into the controlled sector to protect and strengthen ethos, which is stronger in the primary sector than in the secondary sector.

**Mr McCausland:** Is it stronger in rural areas than in the greater Belfast area, for example?

**Rev Trevor Gribben:** It may be. I agree with Robert that it often depends on the school and its direction and ethos. It is not as universal; it is not as "catholic" with a small "c".

**Mr McCausland:** Who was CCEA working with on developing those new materials, and are they finished?

**Rev Ian Ellis:** A working group was established from a wide range of providers: advisers on religious education from the maintained and controlled sectors; representatives from Stranmillis University College and St Mary's University College; members of the Northern Ireland Interfaith Forum to reflect the input from other religions, and representatives of Queen's University Belfast and the University of Ulster. That

wide-ranging group produced several new materials; one is a compendium of resources for world religions for Key Stage 3; and another resource, based on reconciliation, is designed to help pupils to understand that they live amongst a wide variety of children and how to break down barriers. The working group has provided some useful materials.

**Mr B McCrea:** We have talked much about ownership, rights, legislation, and so forth. However, it strikes me as a case of the emperor having no clothes. It is fundamentally unfair for the Roman Catholic Church to have certain rights that the Protestant Churches do not. I do not care whether there is an historical or legal basis for that; it simply is not right. It is a moral question, and I want to put on record that any fudge that does not address that imbalance is fundamentally unacceptable to society.

Having put that on record, and for the benefit of those from the Department who may be listening, if that imbalance is not redressed, our entire society is finished. It is morally questionable that we are even discussing it; we must find a solution. That is part of the argument that you good folk have presented to the Committee, and it is one of the reasons that the Ulster Unionist Party remains opposed to the entire ESA.

Your submission on policy paper 20 states:

"The government seeks to use equality arguments to betray its agreement and the principles underpinning its contract with the Churches and the Protestant Community."

I am interested to hear what equality arguments have been put to you that support that statement.

**Rev Trevor Gribben:** We consider it a fundamentally flawed way of applying principles of equality. It beggars belief that the Department often does not deem it necessary to carry out a full equality impact assessment on some of the papers, given the huge inequality that they create, to which you and other members referred. The system applies equality legislation sector by sector: it examined the maintained sector and decided not to apply equality legislation because the trustees owned the schools; it considered the controlled sector in isolation and bluntly said that there should not be so many Protestants on the ESA board because that would be unfair.

However, if equality legislation were applied to all publicly owned schools, the Catholic Church and the Protestant Churches would both be represented in the oversight of education, which would be fair. The basic inequality of equality legislation is the consideration of its application in several narrow parts. Logically, if one considered an entire society in separate small bits, everything could be said to be unfair. Equality legislation must be applied to the entire education community, not sector by sector.



**Mr B McCrea:** It would be useful to have a paper or correspondence on that subject, since equality legislation is supposed to be the bedrock of everything that we do. If the legislation is being applied in a way that is not conducive to its principles, that is the biggest gun in your armoury. However, you have not highlighted it sufficiently.

**Rev Robert Herron:** That is exactly our point: ownership rather than funding is being used as the model, and that immediately disadvantages us.

**Mr B McCrea:** I understand the funding point, because I have heard it made by other members. It will be in the Hansard report that some people said that voluntary grammar schools are 100% funded and will play by the same rules as everybody else. If that applies to voluntary grammars, it applies to the controlled sector too.

We must find a better model — some solution must be found. However, there is a separate issue on which the TRC may want to reflect and that the Committee may want to take up, which is whether equality legislation that affects us all is being applied properly. I have the TRC's comments and will talk to the witnesses afterwards, but it would be useful for them to write to the Committee on that subject.

Having stated my absolute objection to that inequality, I will move on. The TRC is concerned about the absence of detail in the local ESA service arrangements. Will you expand on that? What principles or characteristics would the TRC like to see included?

**Rev Ian Ellis:** I will quickly respond to that, but, as representatives on area education boards, Trevor Gribben and Robert Herron will provide a fuller answer.

From being on a school board of governors, I know how much the principal depends upon the local area board. If, for example, a school's boiler breaks down, they know whom to ring in the area board. That person not only knows the principal, but knows the school, the boiler and which boiler technician to contact to fix it. The board has detailed local knowledge and understanding.

If there is a question about school finances in planning for the future, the governors can ring somebody in a local board who knows the school's profile, its staffing commitment and something about the demographic direction in which the area is headed. That local knowledge means a great deal to school principals.

As governors and people who work with schools, our concern is that that local touch could be jeopardised by a centralised authority, and I have tried to reflect that concern in our comments.

**Rev Trevor Jamieson:** I echo that, and take the analogy further into support services, teaching, and the

work that the classroom assistants' services have done in area boards, particularly the Youth Service.

A fair percentage of Youth Service work is done through voluntary organisations, many of which are church organisations. As Churches, our contact with local youth leaders and youth officers is invaluable. It would be disastrous for the Youth Service if that local contact were to be hived off to some other body, taken away from education altogether or completely centralised.

**Mr B McCrea:** I do not wish to labour the point about change and the need for support — and I hear that the TRC does not have the professional support extended to others — but it strikes me that the TRC is in a good position to outline areas of support or the methodology that people may want to see adopted. If the TRC can find the time, it would be useful for the Committee to receive those suggestions.

It is great to say, in principle, that a course of action will be taken, but, as Ian said, that involves logistics. I do not know whether that is something that the witnesses can do or whether they must feed their knowledge to somebody with the required logistical experience. However, it would be useful to find out.

May I finish on the point almost at which we started? On the subject of putting councillors on the ESA boards, the TRC's submission to the Committee states:

"The TRC recognizes that politicians believe that this provision safeguards democratic accountability."

However, it also states:

"councillors can be caught between... balancing the desires of constituents".

How would you address that issue? Would including people from the TRC change the balance? How does the TRC propose to deal with the issues that it raises?

**Rev Robert Herron:** The added difficulty that councillors have is that some of these issues arise at sensitive times when elections loom. That can lead to delay.

**Mr B McCrea:** You can say things that we cannot, so spit it out.

**Rev Robert Herron:** It is important that local councils in Northern Ireland develop their roles and responsibilities. Councillors do; there is no question about that and we all agree on it. However, I am not totally convinced that a role in the ESA is a way of doing that.

**Rev Trevor Gribben:** That said, we recognise that there is a democratic deficit, caused by years of direct rule. There should be democratic accountability at every level in education; it depends, however, on how that is achieved and what the balance is. We need to find a good way forward. The balance on the education



and library boards, where locally elected representatives sit alongside others representing other sectors and interests, works creatively at times, but often gets things done that would be hard for one group working on its own to achieve.

**Mr B McCrea:** There are two ways of looking at the democratic aspect. Some suggest that at the next tier up at the ESA main board we should have MLAs, not councillors, represented; others say that that is unnecessary because the ESA can be held accountable through this Committee, the Minister and the Assembly. Have you any views on whether either of those arrangements would work?

**Rev Trevor Gribben:** We have enough trouble sorting the Churches out without getting into a war between councillors and MLAs.

**Mr B McCrea:** It is so much easier to fix other people's problems than one's own.

**Rev Trevor Gribben:** Each of us may have private views, but the Transferor Representatives' Council has no official view on that matter. *[Laughter.]*

**The Chairperson:** Now, there is a political answer.

We want to turn to the departmental officials, and the witnesses are welcome to stay for that. Rev Robert Herron referred to the fact that the argument is about ownership as opposed to funding. Five hundred schools were transferred in the 1940s, some of which the Churches still own; but the Department cannot identify how many.

**Rev Robert Herron:** One needs to identify deeds and transfers and perhaps, as we have recently been led to believe, some of the schools may have been operating under some kind of licensing agreement. It is complex.

**The Chairperson:** When a school in my constituency was closed I was told that ownership was not a big issue; the school was simply closed and the detail was left to be sorted out. The North Eastern Education and Library Board was going to close the school, and the question of who owned it was left to lawyers. That is the problem. I want clarity on that point. I noticed that you raised that issue in your paper, and we will ask the departmental officials about it when they attend.

**Rev Trevor Gribben:** We will be interested in the answer.

**The Chairperson:** You may stay to hear it.

Gentlemen, thank you for your evidence, your attendance and your papers. You will have an opportunity to come back to us about the response to the paper that the Department has given us today in response to your paper.



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# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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## COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION

22 April 2009

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### EDUCATION BILL (NIA 3/08)

#### **Members present for all or part of the proceedings:**

Mr Mervyn Storey (Chairperson)  
Mr Dominic Bradley (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mrs Mary Bradley  
Mr Tom Elliott  
Mr Trevor Lunn  
Mr Nelson McCausland  
Mr Basil McCrea  
Miss Michelle McIlveen  
Mr John O'Dowd

#### **Witnesses:**

Mr Chris Stewart       } Department of Education

**The Chairperson (Mr Storey):** We turn to the response from the Department. I see that Chris is on his own; his colleagues have forsaken him.

**Mr Chris Stewart (Department of Education):** It takes a brave man.

**The Chairperson:** Chris, I reiterate our disappointment that we received the Department's paper only yesterday afternoon. Some members may have seen it only when they arrived in their offices this morning. We convey, again, in the strongest possible terms, that we are not happy with the timing.

**Mr Stewart:** I appreciate that. It is not good enough for the Committee to receive the papers late on the afternoon prior to the meeting. On this occasion — and it is not an excuse that I can offer for previous occasions — the delay was caused in getting the paper cleared over the holiday period. That added to our difficulties. Your point is a fair one, and we will endeavour to do better than we have done in the past in getting papers to the Committee.

**Mr B McCrea:** Chris, you always make apologies to the Committee, but does anyone beyond you actually listen or care about this?

**Mr Stewart:** Yes; my apologies are on behalf of the Department. We recognise that our performance has not been good enough on the matter, and that we need to improve it.

I am conscious of pressures on the Committee's time and the fullness of its agenda. If it meets with the approval of the Chairperson, I will make a short presentation to cover both sets of issues that my Transferor Representations Council (TRC) colleagues raised. I will begin with some specific matters relating to the Bill, and move on to comments on policy paper 20, about which most of the previous session was focused.

I have four particular points regarding the Bill, the first of which concerns the education and skills authority (ESA) membership. I stress that this is about membership of the ESA, not the similar issue of membership of the ownership body, which is a point that I will come to shortly. We note the TRC's strongly held view that it ought to have guaranteed membership of the ESA. However, as I explained in the submission, that is not feasible for three reasons.

First, the policy is that employment arrangements for the ESA membership will reflect the merit principle, and no organisation will be given automatic membership rights. Secondly, the TRC suggestion is based on a perception that the ESA will succeed education and library boards as the owner and managing authority of controlled schools. As members are aware, the intention is that the second Education Bill will remove both those functions from the ESA; therefore, it is difficult to see a rationale for giving the TRC ongoing membership rights for the ESA on the basis of two functions that are temporary and short term.

Thirdly — and this is the main issue that has been discussed a number of times — the provisions that would give the TRC membership rights are likely to be outside the legislative competence of the Assembly, as defined by section 6 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

The second issue about the Bill is that of committees and local structure. TRC colleagues touched on the matter at the end of their presentation. Like other stakeholders and members of this Committee, they would like to see more information and more detail about what the committee and local structures of the ESA will be. We owe the Committee a paper on that, and that is being prepared.

The Minister wants to take the Committee's views on the detail of what the committee and local structure of the ESA will be. She does not see the need to specify those matters on the face of the Bill, but will be very interested in the Committee's views as to what the detailed arrangements would be.

We agree fully with what the TRC has said on the need for training, advice and support for governors.

That is we propose to make it a statutory duty in the Bill that the ESA should provide, or should secure the provision of, such training, advice and support. That is clearly vital for the role of governors.

Finally, we agree entirely with what our TRC colleagues said about the issue of the religious education curriculum in the Bill. It is extremely important that schools receive the advice and support that they need on every subject on the curriculum, including religious education. We will expect the ESA to address that matter seriously.

We also welcome the positive comments from the TRC on the inspection process. We understand its reservations about how that process is operated in practice, but we welcome those comments on the nature of education, which has been rightly described as a very important means of contributing towards raising standards. Again, we want to give serious consideration to the concerns that have been raised about how inspection operates on the ground. I will certainly pass those comments to inspectorate colleagues.

I will now address the issues that were raised about policy paper 20. The key issue that was raised by TRC colleagues is the ownership of controlled schools, and related matters. The TRC has argued strongly that it ought to have guaranteed membership of the ownership body. It has based its arguments on the historical agreements, its views on equality, and on the fact that the population served by controlled schools is predominantly Protestant.

We understand all the arguments, which the TRC has put to us cogently and consistently throughout the process. We appreciate the very obvious strength of feeling and sincerity with which those arguments have been made. However, those arguments does not change the fundamental legal position, which is that although TRC membership of the ownership body is possible, and would indeed be welcomed, it cannot be guaranteed in legislation. That is because the Assembly simply cannot legislate in the way that the TRC has suggested. It would amount to discrimination.

The Department is acutely aware of the legal position, the constraints that it places upon us, and the very real concerns that arise as a result of that on the part of stakeholders and Committee members. That is why our efforts have focused on underpinning the role of the TRC, not on the ownership body, but on the representative body, where, because it will not be a legislative body, there will be fewer constraints and a much greater potential for us to ensure that the TRC has a significant role.

It is in that context that we responded to the TRC's request for guaranteed membership of the ownership body. It is not just that that is not feasible; it is not important and it is not necessary. Ownership is not the

real prize; a role on the representative body is the real prize. To a number of sectors, ownership of physical assets is regarded as very important. However, it will not convey any advantage or disadvantage to any school or sector. By contrast, the roles and functions that the TRC considers important — and described this morning as being important — and those that it wishes to exercise and be involved in, will be assigned to the representative body. Therefore, the provision of a voice for the sector; the defining and the fostering of the ethos of the sector; the contributing to the development of education policy and; perhaps most significantly of all, taking part in area planning, are roles that we see falling to the representative body and not to the ownership body.

Having considered the responses to the consultation on policy paper 20, the Minister feels more strongly than ever that, where possible, sectoral functions need to be very closely linked to sectoral ethos. As a consequence, we feel that the role of the representative body should be given priority, and that the role of the ownership body should be narrow and technical — more narrow than we suggested in policy paper 20 — and limited to the stewardship of publicly owned assets and only that. The important role — what the TRC described to me as the power and the influence — ought to be with the representative body, on which the TRC will be present.

In today's submission, I acknowledge that one particular function — the role of the submitting authority — presents us with a challenge in relation to the controlled sector. Creativity is called for if that role is to fit within the logic that I have just described. The reason for the establishment of the submitting authority role is to ensure that sectoral ethos is reflected in governance and employment arrangements. That is something that all sectors have told us is very important to them. For most sectors, there is a relatively straightforward technical solution. The submitting authority role can be assigned to the owners or trustees of the schools, because they happen to be the custodians of the sectoral ethos. However, for the controlled sector, things are not that straightforward, and that arrangement may not work or prove to be satisfactory. That is because the representative body, not the ownership body, will develop and foster the ethos.

We have outlined two options that might help overcome that. The first is to place the submitting authority role directly with the boards of governors, most of which will, of course, include TRC governors. The second is to place a requirement on the ownership body — if it has a submitting authority role — to consult and involve the representative body. In either case, the aim is for the representative body to be placed in a position to provide leadership and direction



over the submitting authority role. The intention behind all the arrangements, and behind both options, is to place the controlled sector in the same position as other sectors, with governance and employment arrangements that reflect the ethos of the sector as developed by a genuinely representative body.

The constraints of the current law mean that the route to be followed in order to achieve that is clearly not the route that the TRC, and perhaps many Committee members, would wish to follow. Nevertheless, it is our contention that the end result will be the same, and will give the controlled sector something that it does not have today — a clear ethos that is recognised, celebrated and reflected in administrative arrangements.

I will pause at that point, because I am sure that members want to ask one or two questions.

**The Chairperson:** I am somewhat perturbed by the comment that the ownership arrangements do not give the maintained sector some degree of preference over and above any other sector. The representatives of the TRC have a contrary view.

On the issue of ownership and representation, in the briefing paper, you state:

“it is not feasible to continue with or replicate the current ownership arrangements.”

On the one hand, you are saying that is not really a big issue. Yet, on the other hand, you are saying that the arrangements cannot be replicated. Therefore, we have a mess that clearly needs to be resolved in order for other sectors not to feel like they have been left out in the cold.

In your submission, you talk about the general functions and duties of the ESA and the fact that the Minister does not want to be prescriptive by putting a lot of structures on the face of the Bill. You also stated that a load of those organisations will be in existence within the footprint of the existing organisations. In addition, you said that that will change significantly in the following years. Therefore, there will be further change as the ESA evolves.

We are being told that the reason we are starting from here is because it has to be right. You also state that it is important that the legislation is not unduly prescriptive and that it provides the flexibility for the ESA to transform services in a way that is sensitive and responsive to local needs. However, the Department, in bringing this process to where it is to date, has not been sensitive or responsive to the needs that have been expressed. Therefore, how can people have any confidence in the ESA, if it is not sensitive and responsive to local needs? A prime example of that unresponsiveness is that, six months into the process, the controlled sector has not had one issue addressed.

No sectoral body has been set up, no subgroup of the six to eight people has been established, and no business case for the controlled sector has been made. Pen has not been put to paper to prepare a business case. Yet, the other sectors — the maintained sector, the Irish-medium sector, and the integrated sector — all have business cases. What about the controlled sector? It has not even got a look in.

When is the Department going to take seriously this issue and start to put something of substance in place? We do not want to hear phrases such as “we appreciate”, “we understand”, “we have a concern”, “we know”, and then to be told that we cannot have something put in legislation.

We do not accept that you cannot put something in legislation. Other things have been put in legislation, because people have said that, politically, it must be done. Politically, this will be done; it will be in legislation. Our concern is that there seems to be more and more problems. There is no equality.

**Mr Stewart:** You made a number of significant points. I will deal with your last point about legislation first. Of course it is not for me, as an official, to say to any politician what is politically possible; rather, my role is, merely, to explain the legislative framework within which we currently operate. If politicians decide to change that framework, of course, that is what will happen; however, until that happens, the legislation is what it is. That is defined by section 6 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, which is an extremely blunt instrument. Quite simply, it says that the Assembly cannot legislate in any way that would be discriminatory. That is that reality of the situation that we face, and that is why we cannot give the TRC guaranteed membership rights on any public authority.

Previously, Mr McCausland asked what would be required to change that situation. There would have to be an amendment to section 6 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. That is an excepted and cross-cutting matter, so it would require a decision by the Executive and the consent of the Secretary of State to do so. If that were to happen, section 6 could be changed.

**The Chairperson:** Or, there could be an agreement to maintain a cohort of education and library boards, and therefore, the ownership issue would automatically be dealt with. That would not affect section 6 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

**Mr Stewart:** That is right. Section 6 would have no bearing on such an arrangement, because it would not involve new legislation. That solution would be technically feasible.

I shall return to some of the other points that were raised. With respect to the lack of progress on a number of issues in the controlled sector to which you rightly pointed, I will not fall into the trap of offering

you platitudinous answers. We recognise that the Department needs to put a bit more resource into that area than it has been able to do heretofore, and it will do so.

Alongside that, I ask to Committee to recognise the difficulty and complexity of taking forward such an exercise in a sector in which there is no tradition of operating in that way. It is a foreign concept to many in the controlled sector. In my discussions and conversations with folk in the sector to date, there has been an initial wariness and concern. However, that has usually been followed quickly by growing enthusiasm when they recognise the opportunity for the sector to achieve parity of esteem and to operate — perhaps more so than it was able to do in the past — in a way that is much closer to the way in which other sectors operate. However, for a sector of that size, complexity and diversity, it will take time.

I was struck by what colleagues from the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) said to the Committee — on a number of occasions, they have said the same thing to me — about the difficulties that the maintained sector faced in the early days when the CCMS was established as the sectoral body. It took a number of years before there was widespread acceptance of its role, until it had sufficiently matured and developed to the point at which it enjoyed the confidence of the maintained sector. It took a great deal of effort to get there.

Lest members fear, I am not offering that as an excuse for us taking years to do anything in the controlled sector. That would be unacceptable. We must get arrangements in place and up and running as quickly as possible, alongside those in the other sectors. However, it may take time before those arrangements mature and develop sufficiently enough to operate at the same capacity as those in other sectors.

I turn now to the matter of perceived advantages that stem from ownership. I entirely accept that that is something about which many sectors and stakeholders feel strongly. However, we contend that the arrangements that we put forward in the Education Bill do not allow for advantages stemming from ownership. Ownership is not associated with being an employer or with having a statutory authority. Ownership does not give any sector or school a position in area planning that any other sector or school would have. There are simply no practical, on-the-ground advantages associated with ownership. I recognise that the perception is to the contrary, but the reality is as I described it.

With respect to local structures of the ESA, we recognise the concerns and the desire for more detail. However, it remains our view that an attempt to specify those structures in the Bill would be counterproductive. A number of members have

emphasised to us — many times — that what works in Belfast may not work in Fermanagh or Derry and that we need locally sensitive solutions to reflect the needs and realities of the communities and schools in those areas. Therefore, any attempt to specify that and all the variations that would be required on the face of a Bill would make it an extremely lengthy, difficult and, ultimately, counterproductive exercise. It would also take away the flexibility that is going to be required over the next few years. The ESA will begin with the footprint of the existing organisations, but no one believes that that is the footprint that the organisation should continue to have — changes will be required.

At present, the full detail of all those changes is not available to anyone. It must be planned, carefully thought through and consulted upon. That will take a period of years. We are simply not in a position to specify that on the face of primary legislation. If we were to attempt to do so, we would do education a disservice.

That was a long, rambling set of answers. Therefore, I will stop at that point. There may be points to which you want to return.

**The Chairperson:** The question was long and rambling. I want to pick up on one point, because it contradicts what is stated in the paper. When I asked you about the possibility of a cohort from the education and library boards remaining, you said that that is feasible. However, that is not what it says in your paper, which states:

“The Department fully appreciates these concerns. However, it is not feasible to continue with or replicate the current ownership arrangements under the RPA.”

Which is it?

**Mr Stewart:** It is technically possible to leave legislation in place as you described. However, it is not an option that the Minister would favour. That is what I meant by the reference in the paper to its not being feasible.

**The Chairperson:** Therefore, “it is not feasible” means that the Minister does not agree.

**Mr Stewart:** Yes. However, if your question is whether it is technically possible to leave a proportion of the existing organisations in place, then, yes, it would be possible.

**The Chairperson:** Michelle will now ask a question, followed by Basil. Sometimes, I get criticised for the order that I take, although I do try. I have a piece of paper in front of me with a list of members who have indicated that they want speak.

**Miss McIlveen:** Do not worry, Basil; I will be quick.

Your paper, under the title “Functions and general duty of the ESA”, stated that:

“The Department recognises that the majority of children who attend controlled schools have a Protestant community background. It is recognised that the ethos of most controlled schools, and the controlled sector generally, has a significant Christian Protestant dimension. Equally, the Department agrees with the TRC that the controlled sector ethos must be based on inclusivity, the recognition of diversity, and the promotion of equality.”

That last sentence concerns me, because it gives the Department the opportunity, perhaps, to dilute the Protestant/Christian ethos in an attempt to achieve diversity, equality, and so on. Given that that is expected of the controlled sector, I want to know whether the Department will give guidance to the Catholic sector that it must also achieve those aims.

**Mr Stewart:** Of course we would. Requirements of law and policy would apply equally to any grant-aided school. Let me reassure you that there will be no attempt by the Department or the ESA to artificially engineer the ethos of individually controlled schools or the controlled sector. The paper recognises that the ethos of the controlled sector reflects the choices that parents have made for generations to send their children to particular schools or schools that have a particular ethos.

Therefore, as we said previously, neither ethos, nor its definition, are in the Department’s gift. Ethos is chosen by schools, sectors or communities, and the Department recognises that. We suggest that the controlled sector — much more so than has been the case in the past — needs to feel empowered and to have its ethos recognised and celebrated in a way that has not, perhaps, been the case in the past. It may have felt that it was required to behave in a way that was almost in denial of its ethos; as though it were a secular sector without a strong Protestant/Christian tradition. We are saying that that is not the case. Its ethos exists and ought to be recognised and celebrated.

**Miss McIlveen:** I am concerned that that response allows the opportunity to skew a school’s ethos in order to meet the demands of a minority in that school, whereas that is not necessarily the case in the Catholic sector.

**Mr Stewart:** We hope that any grant-aided school would attempt, both in its ethos and daily operation, to meet the needs of all children in the school from the background or ethos to which they subscribe.

**Miss McIlveen:** My point is made, thanks.

**Mr B McCrea:** Perhaps, I will make it again. There seems to be an issue about how equality legislation is brought forward. Certainly, you will have heard, when we talked to other colleagues, that they believe that equality legislation or aims and ethos are, in some way, being used against them. What applies to one sector does not necessarily apply to another. It seems that, once again, we have got ourselves in mess.

On the issue of equality, the question is about whether we are going to have a series of representative structures, each of which is internally consistent in the whole, or whether there will be some overarching approach to equality. It appears to me that there is a mismatch — we use the overarching role sometimes, and the sectoral role at other times. We need clarity on that.

I understand the argument, Chris, because you made it to me months ago, about not getting concerned about the ownership because all the powers lie elsewhere. However, I am really surprised that you have been unable to convince colleagues in the TRC or others that that is the case. There is a fundamental concern and perception about the issue of ownership. I suspect that part of the problem, if you heard the submission from the representatives of the TRC, is that when schools were originally transferred, there were certain expectations. However, over time, and for all sorts of good reasons — for example, changes of funding arrangements or whatever; we all know the history — we have ended up in a situation whereby what was intended is now almost the opposite of what has been achieved.

I do not know how we address those concerns without putting it down in very detailed legislation. I understand that there would then be the difficulty that that legislation would have to be amended if it did not work out. However, there is a genuine concern, and it comes down to what you said in your paper:

“This will change significantly in the following years as the organisation transforms its functions and services.”

It is fundamental to our overall concern — and I have expressed this to you before — that there is an idea that we will simply get to a point in time when that is acceptable, and then it can be left open to regulation, ministerial direction, and so on for the next stage of development. That is unacceptable. If that were the case, people will have decisions imposed on them that are, frankly, not what they want. In a democratic society, that is a failing.

I know that it will require a lot of drafting, and I know that it is difficult, but what we want to achieve must be put down in black and white. We need help from you on that issue.

**Mr Stewart:** I would not worry about the drafting — officials love drafting in detail; that is our daily bread. It is not for me to determine the appropriate approach to legislation; that is up to the legislators — yourselves and the Assembly. If the Assembly decides that more details and more prescription in legislation are required, that is what will follow. We, as officials, will respond to what Ministers, the Executive and the Assembly tell us we must do.

The issue of equality legislation is, perhaps, narrower and more acutely focused than is sometimes perceived.



As was mentioned earlier, a great deal of equality legislation does not apply in the field of education. The issue here is purely section 6 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and the Assembly's legislative competence.

The TRC argued clearly and cogently about the role that it wishes to play in education, the historical reasons for it and what it is trying to achieve. They suggested what, to them, is the most straightforward route to achieve that, which is a continuation of the current arrangements, whereby they have membership of the relevant statutory authorities. The difficulty that we face — and it is a purely technical difficulty — is that it is simply not possible to do that in Assembly legislation. Therefore, we have a template to find alternative solutions to achieve the same outcome.

I fully accept that those proposed solutions are complex, inelegant and much less straightforward than what the TRC is seeking. Nevertheless, they are a genuine attempt to achieve the same outcome by a different route, because the route that the TRC would prefer is simply not open to me.

**Mr B McCrea:** I understand your constraints. However, we are in a political environment, and if, heaven forbid, you should find yourself on 'The Stephen Nolan Show' having to try to explain to the people out there that this is what the Catholic Church gets, and this is what the Protestant Churches gets, and the Protestant Churches say that they are unhappy, and we are trying to move on with a shared future and equality and all the rest, it is just not sellable.

We have to go on and do that. I understand your argument, and I appreciate your clarification. However, if the Executive make a decision with the support of the Secretary of State — and I am sure that he will not withhold his support — and we get that fixed, we will not have a technical problem. Everyone should be much happier.

I note the Chairperson's remarks about an alternative method. He was quite eloquent, and I note where he is going in relation to that. That is a solution, and a solution must be found. It would not do this place a disservice if the Executive agreed to amend the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to get the situation changed. Then we could move this process on.

**Mr Stewart:** I shall await the outcome of any political engagements and hope that the invitation to does not appear in the meantime. *[Laughter.]* The 'Nolan Show'.

**Mr B McCrea:** I have his number.

**Mr D Bradley:** You seem to be giving comfort to the TRC through the representative body, and, as it were, steering it in that direction. I know that it is not your role as an official to set the steer for anyone. In any case, that was the flavour of what you were saying. For example, you said that they could have more input

into area planning, more sectoral functions and more influence over ethos. Nevertheless, such a representative body would have no statutory basis. Therefore the TRC, although it may have the opportunity to discuss such matters, has no guarantee that its advice or its proposals would be taken on board by the ESA or the Department.

**Mr Stewart:** That is correct; the same would be true of any sectoral body in any sector. One of the things that the Committee impressed upon us very strongly was its feeling that none of the sectoral bodies should be statutory or have any statutory functions.

**Mr D Bradley:** That is true, but you admitted in your paper that the arrangements for other sectors cannot be replicated in the controlled sector. To some extent, therefore, we are trying to redress the balance. One of your suggestions seemed to be that the representative body would go some way to doing that; however, if it has no power, there is no guarantee that it will redress the balance.

**Mr Stewart:** It cannot offer the guarantee that legislation would offer; that is correct, but that is the same for any sectoral body in any sector. Our TRC colleagues were asked what they needed or would like to see in the legislation about the links between an ownership body and a representative body — something beyond consultation, because there is no confidence that consultation would be sufficiently robust. I cannot offer a solution to that today, but it strikes me as an interesting question and one that I would want to pursue with the lawyers. Can we go beyond consultation in legislation but stop short of creating a statutory body with statutory functions? I do not know the answer and I do not whether we would find anything productive in it, but it is worth exploring.

**Mr D Bradley:** One of your possible solutions was to place a statutory obligation on the ownership body to consult. Is there more room for development there?

**Mr Stewart:** I would want to explore that to see whether there is. It would be reasonably straightforward to have a statutory duty to consult, but, as our TRC colleagues said, they did not place much confidence or faith in mere consultations. We would want to see whether we could strengthen that a little bit. I do not know whether we can, but it is definitely worth looking at.

**Mr D Bradley:** If section 6 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 were to be amended, would it be possible to do so in such a way as it applied to this particular situation only?

**Mr Stewart:** I would have to consult the lawyers on that, but I see no reason why not.

**Mr D Bradley:** The Chairperson mentioned another solution, which was to leave a cohort of education and



library boards in place. If that were to be the solution, what shape would it take?

**Mr Stewart:** In order to avoid the difficulty of section 6 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, it would have to be based on leaving the existing legislative provisions intact, or as many of them as necessary, to leave the boards in existence, but with only the functions of owning the physical assets of the controlled sector. All the remaining functions would transfer to the ESA.

As I said, the Minister is not convinced that that is an appropriate approach as it runs contrary to the thrust of the policy and what the Department is trying to achieve through the ESA. Of course, on a more practical level, it does mean leaving five organisations in place, albeit with much reduced responsibilities. However, even organisations with reduced responsibilities require chief executives and directors of finance and all the administrative paraphernalia that goes along with that. In the short term, it would make it extremely difficult to achieve the administrative savings and reprioritisation of resources that the Department wants to achieve in the review of public administration (RPA).

**Mr D Bradley:** Therefore, it would be a messy solution.

**Mr Stewart:** It would be messy, difficult and contrary to policy; however, it would avoid the difficulty of section 6.

**The Chairperson:** Has the Minister given any consideration to that in light of section 75?

**Mr Stewart:** I am sorry, but I am not quite with you on the link between that and section 75.

**The Chairperson:** Has the Minister made a judgement or assessed the possibility of doing so against other equality legislation?

**Mr Stewart:** Not specifically. Off the top of my head I do not see a particular conflict with section 75. Boards are public authorities; they are subject to section 75 and will continue to be so. The legislation that establishes boards and governs their membership would remain intact and would not be affected by section 75.

**Mr O'Dowd:** If it is appropriate, I would like to ask the Chairperson a question. I am trying to ensure that I am not listening to a debate based on the principle of "they have it; therefore we want it". We must avoid the common mistake of not considering what it is they have and why we want it.

The Chairperson said in his questioning of Chris Stewart that the Catholic Church has an advantage because it has an ownership body. What is that advantage or perceived advantage? What advantage does the Catholic Church receive from having an ownership body?

**The Chairperson:** The advantage is that the trustees become one and the same thing with respect to representation. The trustees are the body that represents

Catholic schools, as we saw in St Comgall's and other schools. It is they who make the decisions, and that gives them power and authority.

In their submission to the Committee the Catholic bishops said that ownership was secondary to ethos. The bishops were very concerned about the single employing authority, as they believe that it will affect ethos. By and large, it is the trustees who take the decisions in the day-to-day running of schools.

**Mr O'Dowd:** I am not sure that I agree with that analysis; however, I want to think it through.

The day-to-day operational procedures of any school are carried out by its board of governors. Therefore, as the transferors — quite rightly from their point of view — want to protect the Christian Protestant ethos of their schools, the key place for them to be is on the boards of governors, where that right has been protected. The Department is also trying to ensure the transferors' representation on the representative body, thus ensuring that the Protestant Christian ethos flows from that body into those schools.

The Committee may be getting itself into a tangle over the ownership body, and that may not be the right argument from anyone's point of view. It is ethos that should be protected in schools, whether in the Catholic or Protestant sectors or in the Governing Bodies Association (GBA). Boards of governors protect ethos, and we must ensure that it is protected on a statutory basis through the representative body.

I am sorry, Chris, I have no questions for you —  
[Laughter.]

Although the Committee criticises the Department for not working on the representative bodies for the controlled sector, it is worth noting that we spend only two hours a week considering the Bill, which is the most fundamental change to the education system in the past 35 years. We are lagging behind, too.

**Mr Stewart:** I try to do a couple of hours myself, John. I agree that we must ensure that we understand the importance of ownership. Colleagues from the Catholic education sector regard ownership of physical assets as important; however, they regard ownership and influence over the enterprise that takes place in the physical assets as much more important. That is about ethos and the day-to-day operation and management of schools; it is also about ensuring that schools can operate collectively and coherently in the family of Catholic education.

We have listened carefully to that argument, and we have listened to similar arguments from the TRC and others in the controlled sector. We feel that, as you rightly said, we should do that through the representative body and its role, particularly around ethos. It should not be a window-dressing role in any sense; it must

be real and practical and must give all those in the controlled sector a clear sense that it adds value and makes a difference. The Department feels that that can be achieved, but not necessarily through ownership. I was intrigued to hear TRC colleagues describe the controlled sector as weak; however, that body has a hand on ownership arrangements. Therefore ownership has not provided a solution to difficulties and problems in the controlled sector.

**Mr McCausland:** There is a big difference between having a hand on ownership and having it in your hands. The trustees have it in their hands and hold it; those in the controlled sector have a hand on it but do not have total influence. Ultimately, the transferors are a small element on the boards, and the direction that we intend to take could reduce that influence. John O'Dowd mentioned ownership. The trustees and the bishops made the point that several controlled schools have become integrated schools and ceased to be ordinary controlled schools: not a single maintained school has made such a move, and the Committee has been told that that will not happen. Therefore, the situations are different.

Ownership has an effect in several ways. Some years ago, a proposal was submitted to the education and library boards to enter a joint declaration of protection with the trades unions, and the boards were asked to sign up to it for all the people that we employed. At the time, I made the point that that we were signing up to this for the people that we employ as ancillary staff in maintained schools, yet we have no control over the building because it is owned by the trustees. Ownership is much more significant than one might imagine.

Chris will be glad to know that I have several questions for him. You said that section 6 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 is purely a technical difficulty and that there are perhaps more complex, less clear-cut ways of achieving the same end. However, even though the alternatives may go some way towards the same end, they do not achieve it. A complex and complicated change that does not deliver the necessary end is pointless; a simple amendment to section 6 would be much better. As was mentioned earlier, the Equality Commission is meant to be reflective of the community of Northern Ireland. Is there anything to prevent the membership of the ESA being required to be reflective of the community of Northern Ireland?

**Mr Stewart:** Not that I am aware of. I thought that you were referring to the Human Rights Commission rather than the Equality Commission. They might be similar.

**Mr McCausland:** It applies to both, but certainly to the Equality Commission.

**Mr Stewart:** That is, of course, Westminster rather than Assembly legislation. On the face of it — again with a caveat that I will consult the lawyers — such a requirement should not cause difficulties with section 6. However, it would not provide what the TRC wants.

**Mr McCausland:** I agree, but it is an important principle. Is there anything to prevent a statutory body from being set up whose membership reflects the community that it serves?

**Mr Stewart:** No; I do not think that there is.

**Mr McCausland:** Therefore you can have a body that is the ownership of the controlled schools that reflects the community that attends controlled schools.

**Mr Stewart:** I am sorry; I may have misunderstood the first part of your question. It would have to be representative of the community — the whole community in Northern Ireland.

**Mr McCausland:** Must any body that we set up reflect the whole community in Northern Ireland, even though it is for a special interest?

**Mr Stewart:** A requirement to be reflective of the entire community would not call into operation section 6. A requirement to reflect any particular section or sections —

**Mr McCausland:** We are not saying a particular section. We are saying that the composition of the community of children who attend controlled schools should be reflected in the body that owns those schools.

**Mr Stewart:** That suggestion would have to be considered by the lawyers. However, such an approach does not offer what the Transferor Representatives' Council is looking for.

**Mr McCausland:** I appreciate that, but it is important in itself. Would you look into that?

**Mr Stewart:** Yes. However, rather than speculate unhelpfully, I will test it with the lawyers.

**Mr McCausland:** I gather that the advertisement has been placed in the newspapers for a chairperson of the ESA. How can that be when we do not even know the composition of the board that he or she will chair? We do not know anything; we have no legislation. We do not even have agreement, yet we are advertising for a chairperson for a non-existent body, the composition of which is as yet undetermined — we debated that this morning. Why would that happen?

**Mr Stewart:** It is necessary and important for the Department to take the preparatory steps to meet the deadline that the Executive has agreed for the establishment of the ESA,

**Mr McCausland:** Which is?

**Mr Stewart:** The first of January 2010. We have to operate within the framework of policy and legislation

as agreed by the Executive. Things may change or be changed by the Assembly; if they do, we will respond, but at present officials are bound to accept the Executive's decision.

**Mr McCausland:** There has been a change; we have extended the period of consideration of the Committee Stage of the first Bill to the end of September, and, after that, we have to consider a second Bill. Is it not presumptuous to go ahead and ignore that?

**Mr Stewart:** It may be a matter of opinion whether it is presumptuous. The normal convention in these matters is that one does not take a step such as appointing a chairperson or members of an organisation in advance of the Second Stage of a Bill. However, having reached the Second Stage successfully, it is the settled will of the Assembly that there will be an ESA and that there will be legislation. It is not presumptuous or inappropriate for us to prepare for implementation on the basis of the decision that the Assembly has taken.

**Mr McCausland:** At what point will you start to advertise for members?

**Mr Stewart:** That could follow fairly quickly.

**Mr McCausland:** Even though there is still a great deal that we do not know about it?

The point that I am trying to make is that this sends out totally the wrong signal. It gives a sense of a Department that wants to ram everything through by force, come what may. As John O'Dowd said earlier, this is one of the biggest issues to face the Committee, the Assembly and our society for a very long time, because education is so fundamental. That is reflected in the strength of feeling and the passion of all the sectors that attend the Committee.

We used the word consensus and talked about trying to reach accommodation. Is rushing ahead pre-emptively the best way to go about it?

**Mr Stewart:** We do not see it as rushing ahead or as being pre-emptive.

**Mr McCausland:** Others might.

**Mr Stewart:** I accept that. However, I am sure that you accept that there will be an organisation and it ought to have a chairperson; therefore, it seems a reasonable step for us to take. When it comes to appointing members, we will have to make a judgement. If there was an emerging consensus that the number of members ought not to be as specified in the Bill — if that is the way the political wind is blowing — that might affect the Department's timing.

However, that is not the case at present. The Bill says what it says about the number of members, and until — or unless — the Assembly and the Executive tell us otherwise, we will proceed on that basis.

**Mr Elliott:** I wish to refer to your paper on ownership and representation, which states:

"In the case of Catholic education, the ownership and representative functions will both reside with the Catholic trustees. This cannot be replicated exactly for the controlled sector. However, the Department wishes the TRC to continue to be a leading voice in the controlled sector, and for the TRC's role, where possible, to reflect that of the trustees."

The problem is that it cannot do so under the provisions of the Bill. What is the difference between the Catholic role, as outlined in paragraph 10 and the second option in paragraph 19, where it states that the roles of submitting authority and the ownership body are basically the same? What is the difference between those roles? Why can you not find a way around putting the TRC on to that?

**Mr Stewart:** The way around it would be the oft-discussed potential for change to section 6 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. In response to your question, I will pick up on a point that Nelson made. I described it as merely a technical obstacle. That is all that it can be in respect of taking forward legislation or creating a mechanism. What I meant by that — and it is borne out by the parts of the paper that you quoted — is that there is no policy objection to the TRC's playing a significant role in the controlled sector — far from it. We value the role that they play, and we want to find a way for them to continue to play that role.

**Mr Elliott:** Do you accept that you cannot do that under the current proposals?

**Mr Stewart:** I accept that there is a technical obstruction to their doing so in the way that you and they wish. In describing it as merely a technical obstruction, I should make the important point that changing section 6 is merely a technical matter for me; however, it is a more significant political matter for Committee members and the Executive. I will leave that thought with you.

In respect of the differences between the roles, it is our contention that there would be little difference in the practical operation. However, there would be some difference, because in one sector two sets of functions would reside in one place, and in another sector they would be split into two places. However, in respect of how they would operate, we can get close to the point where there is no practical or real difference between them. Crucially, we can ensure that the TRC plays a leading role in the functions that it tells us are the most important.

**Mr Elliott:** How will they do that? They will not be on the body as of right.

**Mr Stewart:** They can be on the representative body as of right, because it will not be enshrined in legislation. It does not attract the restrictions of section



6, so there is no reason why the TRC cannot be given guaranteed membership of the representative body.

**Mr Elliott:** However, you cannot tie that up with the ownership body.

**Mr Stewart:** No.

**Mr Elliott:** According to your submission, Catholics have the right to be given guaranteed membership.

**Mr Stewart:** It is not that they have a right to that in legislation; it is that they are de facto the owners of Catholic schools. Therefore, it is not that we have ever passed legislation that has put them in a particular position; they simply own the schools.

**Mr Elliott:** Why is the representative body not in legislation? If the representative body was in legislation, they could not perform that role.

**Mr Stewart:** We would run into the same problem. The Committee encouraged the Minister to take a policy decision that none of the representative bodies should be statutory.

**Mr Elliott:** We need to resolve the issue. If it is not resolved, I will not put up my hand to support it.

**Mr Lunn:** Nelson made the point that the appointment of the chairperson could be made fairly soon, which, as you said, could be quickly followed by the advertisement for members of the ESA, even though we do not yet know, frankly, whether there will be an ESA or how many members it might have. You said that it will depend on how the political wind is blowing.

We will not know how many board members are required until the Bill comes before the House; it is not a matter of political wind. You might pick up a vibe that some of us would like to see a bigger board with a different composition; others might be content with it as it is. I can see the rationale for appointing a chairperson quickly, but not for appointing anyone beyond that.

**Mr Stewart:** It is an issue of risk management. You are right — I cannot predict what the Assembly might decide when the Bill receives its Consideration Stage. My reference to political wind meant that if there was a resolved Committee view to change the number of members, with which the Minister agreed, we would not ignore that; we would take it into account in our preparations to recruit members.

However, that is not the case. At present, we have to proceed with the timetable, policy and legislation that the Executive and Assembly have set for us. That means that we need to get certain things under way now.

**Mr Lunn:** Looking for a resolved Committee view followed by the agreement of the Minister is reaching for the stars.

**Mr Stewart:** You have to admire my faith. *[Laughter.]*

**Mr Lunn:** I want to go back to section 6 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, because I have never come across it before. Your submission states:

“Provisions giving the TRC membership rights are likely to be outside the legislative competence of the Assembly, as defined by section 6 of the N.I. Act 1998.”

Why does it not say “are outside”? Why does it say “likely”? Is there some doubt about it?

**Mr Stewart:** There is no doubt in my mind. It is typical Civil Service reticence and caution in using language. They are not formally outside the legislative competence of the Assembly until we attempt to introduce them, and the Speaker says no. At that point, they would be formally outside the legislative competence of the Assembly. I have no doubt that it would not be possible to take forward such a provision.

**Mr Lunn:** How does section 6 exclude our right to give the TRC membership rights but allow us to give local councillors automatic membership rights?

**Mr Stewart:** Section 6 does not permit legislation that discriminates on grounds of religious or political opinion. Specifying or reserving seats for local councillors might be described as discriminating on the grounds of political status, as opposed to political opinion. That is not unlawful.

**Mr Lunn:** The word “technical” has been used a great deal, and it is technical stuff.

**Mr Stewart:** It is. Section 6 is an extremely blunt instrument; it imposes a significant constraint on what one can do in legislation.

**Mr Lunn:** I am encouraged by the notion that it is purely technical and not a sinister doctrinal reason for excluding a certain body of people.

**Mr Stewart:** There is no policy intention to exclude the TRC. However, as a caveat, let me say that in describing it as a technical problem, I do not want to underestimate the political significance of any change to section 6, which could be profound.

**Mr Lunn:** The first few lines of your paper show that you would encourage the TRC to nominate individuals to the ESA.

**Mr Stewart:** That is correct. Everyone wants to see the TRC play a leading role, not only on the representative body but on the ownership body. The contribution that the TRC has made and continues to make, and its historical association and strong affinity with the controlled sector, makes its representatives ideal members of the ownership body.

**Mr Lunn:** There seems to be so much common ground that it would be amazing if we could not find a way round it. Tom and Basil have put down strong markers, and I completely agree with them. We have to sort it out. Legislators and lawyers will know more



about section 6 than I do, but it does not seem to be insuperable. We cannot blame section 6.

**Mr Stewart:** You say “blame”; I say recognise. There is a great deal of common ground in wanting to accommodate the role that the TRC wishes to play; however, we face difficulties in doing that. We were challenged to be creative. The Civil Service in general and the Department of Education in particular have not always enjoyed a reputation with the Committee for creativity, but we will do our best to come up with solutions to this difficulty.

**The Chairperson:** In conclusion, Chris, I thought that the Minister was considering the composition of the board; is that the case?

**Mr Stewart:** I have put members’ points to her, but, as yet, she has not indicated any change.

**The Chairperson:** During our exchanges you referred to the need for legal opinion. May I take it that the Department will come back to the Committee as soon as possible on those issues?

**The Chairperson:** Yes; it will.

**Miss McIlveen:** For members’ information, the appointment of the chair of the ESA is confirmed from September 2009. No academic qualification is required for the three-days-a-week, £33,000 a year plus travel and subsistence allowances post; therefore, it is pretty well paid.

**The Chairperson:** There will be resignations from the Education Committee and applications for that position.

**Mr O’Dowd:** The salary is £7,000 less than the Health Minister gave the head of his board.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you very much, Chris.



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# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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## COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

22 April 2009

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### FINANCIAL PROVISIONS BILL (NIA 6/08)

#### Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin (Chairperson)  
Mr Simon Hamilton (Deputy Chairperson)  
Dr Stephen Farry  
Mr Fra McCann  
Ms Jennifer McCann  
Mr Adrian McQuillan  
Mr Declan O'Loan  
Ms Dawn Purvis  
Mr Peter Weir

#### Witnesses:

Mr David Thomson	} Treasury Officer of Accounts
Mr Michael Daly	} Department of Finance and Personnel
Ms Brenda Shearer	

**The Chairperson (Mr McLaughlin):** We turn to the Committee Stage of the Financial Provisions Bill. We are joined by our colleagues from Hansard. Please ensure that all mobile phones are switched off, because they can interfere with the audio recording.

We are joined by David Thomson, Michael Daly and Brenda Shearer. I hope that you are all fit and well after the Easter break and that you are ready for action. I shall ask the Committee Clerk to introduce the briefing paper, which is quite short. Members should refer to their copies of the Financial Provisions Bill, and we will begin its clause-by-clause consideration in conjunction with the respective explanatory passages in the Committee secretariat's briefing paper.

**The Committee Clerk:** The Committee secretariat's paper highlights the fact that no issues were raised in respect of the clauses and provisions of the Bill as a result of the Committee's liaison with other relevant Committees — the Public Accounts Committee, the Audit Committee and the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment — or our recent public notice

and consultation. However, the paper indicates that, during the Bill's Second Stage, some issues were raised by individual Members.

In addition, the paper highlights the fact that if any issues cannot be resolved and remain outstanding after today's session, as a precaution, the Committee should seek an extension to the 13 May 2009 deadline. If an extension is required, today is the last opportunity for the Committee to agree such a motion. However, to date, the Committee's intention has been to complete the Committee Stage within the normal 30-working-day deadline, which expires on 13 May 2009.

**The Chairperson:** We shall begin the clause-by-clause consideration, and I invite members to ask questions or seek clarification. Department of Finance and Personnel officials are here to assist. If members are content, we will formally move and agree individual clauses.

#### *Clause 1 (Absolute privilege for reports of Comptroller and Auditor General)*

**The Chairperson:** No issues were raised in the evidence to the Committee. Neither the Audit Committee nor the Public Accounts Committee have any concerns with the provisions of the clause.

*Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.*

*Clause 1 agreed to.*

#### *Clause 2 (Expenditure for consumer purposes)*

**The Chairperson:** No issues were raised in the evidence to the Committee, and the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment has no concerns with the provisions of the clause.

*Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.*

*Clause 2 agreed to.*

#### *Clause 3 (Expenditure relating to social economy enterprises)*

**The Chairperson:** No issues were raised in the evidence to the Committee, and the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment has no concerns with the provisions of the clause.

*Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.*

*Clause 3 agreed to.*

*Clause 4 agreed to.*

#### *Clause 5 (Repeal of requirement to prepare Finance Accounts)*

**The Chairperson:** No issues were raised in the evidence to the Committee, and the Committee was content with the clarification provided by the Department of Finance and Personnel on the provisions in this clause.

*Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.*

*Clause 5 agreed to.*

*Clause 6 agreed to.*

*Schedule agreed to.*

**The Chairperson:** A draft report will be prepared for the consideration of the Committee at a forthcoming meeting. In accordance with the timetable for the Bill's Committee Stage, the Committee is required to report to the Assembly by 13 May 2009 at the latest — which is a short run-in.

No issues were raised today, so perhaps the contingency in relation to extension does not need to be considered further. The secretariat will prepare the response and the report on that basis.

That concludes this item of Committee business.



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# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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## COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION

29 April 2009

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### EDUCATION BILL (NIA 3/08)

#### Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Dominic Bradley (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mr Tom Elliott  
Mr Trevor Lunn  
Mr Nelson McCausland  
Mr Basil McCrea  
Miss Michelle McIlveen  
Mr John O'Dowd  
Mrs Michelle O'Neill  
Mr Edwin Poots

#### Witnesses:

Mr Eddie McArdle	} General Teaching Council Northern Ireland
Mr Barnaby Ball	
Mrs Sally McKee	
Ms Alison Millar	} Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance
Ms Heather McKinstry	
Ms Helena McSherry	
Mr Chris Stewart	} Department of Education
Mr John McGrath	

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr D Bradley):** Good morning; you are very welcome. We are joined by representatives of the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTC), who will give evidence. Sally McKee will lead the delegation. Sally, I will give you an opportunity to introduce your colleagues and to make your presentation.

**Mrs Sally McKee (General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland):** Thank you, Chairman. I am accompanied by Eddie McArdle, our registrar, and Barney Ball, our planning and corporate services manager. I will start our presentation, and they will make further comments.

The General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland appreciates the opportunity to discuss issues in the Education Bill that affect the teaching profession and, in particular, the council's work. Before I go into

detail, it is important that I explain the council's role, as it is already established in legislation, as well as its place in the education system.

First, the GTC's document entitled 'Teaching: the Reflective Profession', which we distributed at previous meetings with the Committee, has been endorsed by the Minister of Education and the Education and Training Inspectorate. It sets out, for the first time, the standards that are expected of teachers, both in competence and behaviour, so that all education partners have an agreed language with which to discuss education issues.

Secondly, the GTC decides what qualifications are approved for any teacher who wants to enter the profession in Northern Ireland. Thirdly, as an obvious reflection of approval, the GTC now accredits initial teacher education courses. Fourthly, the GTC has a statutory responsibility under the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 to offer advice to the Department of Education and employing authorities — from which the education and skills authority (ESA) will soon take over — on the following matters: training, career development and performance management of teachers; standards of teaching; and standards of conduct for teachers.

Fifthly, the Bill's most important provision, from our point of view, is that the GTC will have the role of independent regulator.

In addition, the GTC is the only body capable of tracking teachers' employment and the movement of teachers from other jurisdictions to Northern Ireland. The annual digest of statistics that is produced by the GTC, which, I am sure, the Committee finds useful, highlights issues of great significance with regard to manpower planning and the provision of professional development; two issues that are of particular concern to the council.

Many people welcomed the decision to establish a regional authority as a way of making savings in order that front line services could be augmented. Therefore, it is essential that the ESA, when it is established, does not duplicate the work of other bodies, such as the GTC. In any event, the council would not countenance any diminution of its role.

In essence, the GTC plays a significant role, along with other bodies, such as the Education and Training Inspectorate, in safeguarding standards in education. A key part of our role is to provide society at large with a degree of reassurance about the quality of education that pupils and students can expect in schools and colleges. The Bill will enhance that. Having set our concerns in context, I will hand over to the registrar, Eddie McArdle.

**Mr Eddie McArdle (General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland):** Chairman, you will have

noticed that our submission is brief. It is brief for a simple reason: many issues in the Bill are, we believe, outwith our professional responsibility. That does not mean that we do not have an interest in them; however, we are not prepared to comment on issues that do not fall within our remit. Therefore we focused our submission on our particular concerns.

The first issue to come up was clause 11. Unless the Department has had a Damascene conversion and is about to take salaries out of the local management of schools (LMS) formula, my understanding is that the entire clause is to be reworked. It was interesting to read, however.

I want to discuss our role as gatekeeper, because, in some senses, we are also the Committee's servants in a tangible way. Part of our responsibility is to ensure that you have some reassurance about the competence, conduct and commitment of teachers as professionals. Therefore, we also consider ourselves to be your servants. The Committee represents the democratic voice.

We believe that teachers are happy to embrace that professionalism and for us to manage it. Our concern is that whatever emerges from clause 13, which deals with the provision of training, will not reflect the reality of what is required to ensure that the profession can rise to the challenges and changes that will come along.

A significant body of research shows that schools begin to improve where they have communities of practice, shared values and understanding, and a shared commitment to a common goal. That cannot be imposed from without; it must grow organically from within. It can be brought about by offering schools the resources that are necessary to undertake such development themselves. In other words, there should not be a Curriculum Advisory and Support Service (CASS) mark II, which is the top-down approach that exists at present.

A mixed-economy approach, which has worked particularly well in Wales, is needed. In Wales, significant sums of money — sometimes, as much as £5 million — are available for which schools and individuals can bid. That is operated by the General Teaching Council for Wales. We do not suggest for a moment that we would necessarily want to take on such a role, although my mother always used to say, "Never turn down work."

A different approach is necessary. We do not expect clause 13 to address that; however, a mixed-economy approach should be taken in its outworkings. Interestingly, we conducted a survey of teachers — the only one of its kind to be conducted in the past 20 years — which found that more than 65% of them approve of the notion of individual bursaries and a mixed-economy approach. Every year, we run a system whereby we

offer £40,000. It is fascinating to see the number of people who are prepared to spend their own money on top of those bursaries.

As clause 13 comes into effect, we should consider an outworking along the lines of a mixed-economy approach.

We are concerned about clause 26, which relates to the ESA's responsibilities on issues such as the curriculum. Although notions of industry, commerce, the professions and inspection are all interesting, there has been a major gap in the publications that have emerged in Northern Ireland over the past couple of years. One gap is the absence of an overarching understanding of what the nature and purpose of education should be. The irony is that every political party, Church and trades union signed up to the GTC's charter for education; all parties in the room signed up to the principles in that document.

We need to examine the broader purposes in which education should engage, including utilitarian and economic considerations, which are vital; furthermore, we must consider issues of socialisation, building society and the development of social capital. For example, it is important to consider deprived areas in Northern Ireland, the sense of despair that often exists in them, and the work that must be done to repair people's self-image and self-concept. Some people may consider that fanciful philosophical froth, but one must remember that education does not merely serve society; it helps to create it. We must be mindful of that important point.

As far back as 2001, Alain Michel, the inspector general of education in France, speculated on the destructive impact of globalisation, and we are beginning to see similar effects here. It is vital that this body reflect on such issues. Civil servants will continue to manage the system, but it is important that such a group take on board where it is going. I will ask Mr Ball to discuss clause 29, which is in his bailiwick.

**Mr Barnaby Ball (General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland):** As the registrar said, I will briefly discuss the provisions in clause 29. The council welcomes the inclusion of clause 29 and schedule 6. Members are aware that the Bill will amend the 1998 Order, which contained deficiencies that prevented effective regulation. The Bill will address those issues and will allow the council to assume its regulatory responsibilities and, importantly, allow us to deliver our functions without the danger of acting *ultra vires*. It is important that we act within our powers.

We welcome the fact that our code of values and professional practice, which has been well received by the profession, is now placed on a statutory basis. That is important, because we can refer to the code for use with our regulatory and disciplinary processes, and

the commitments and values that are espoused in the code can influence decisions. As members are aware, the code outlines the underpinning values of teachers' practice and their commitments to learners, colleagues, and the profession itself.

Schedule 6 outlines the jurisdictions and scope of our regulatory function. As members are aware, our function relates to registered teachers. We receive and consider allegations against registered teachers who may be guilty of unacceptable professional conduct, serious professional incompetence or who have been convicted of a relevant offence.

That will be in keeping with other regulators in the rest of the UK and Ireland, and will take us into line with what they have. We will be able to receive allegations from employers, so an important interface will have to be established with the ESA. Those referrals will be for issues of competence or conduct where an employer would have dismissed a teacher. We will also be able to receive allegations from the general public about teacher conduct. The Bill sets out our powers in that matter, which is very welcome.

It also outlines how we will investigate allegations in a two-stage process in which we set up an investigating committee to establish whether there is a case to answer. If there is a case to answer, we will establish a hearing committee, which will be a public hearing at which the teacher will appear to answer the charge brought by the council. That clarifies our powers on the matter.

Once the Bill has been passed, there will be a need to make regulations. The council will eagerly await the making of regulations, because that will give effect to the provisions in the Bill. We are keen — as I am sure you are — that the Bill be made in a timely fashion. We hope that we will be able to regulate from 1 January 2010.

**The Deputy Chairperson:** You said that you wished to raise issues pertaining to the making of associated regulations and the processes of referral. Can you clarify what those issues are, and are you suggesting that an amendment is needed to clause 29?

**Mr Ball:** We mentioned it because it is my understanding that the deficiencies in the 1998 Order came to light when regulations came to be made. On further advice taken by the Department, it was discovered that it did not have the power to make meaningful regulations, so no powers were in place for us to hold proper tribunals, and a range of disciplinary orders was not available to the council.

We have scrutinised schedule 6, and over the past few months we raised issues with the Department about possible omissions; however, those have all been resolved. Therefore, we are confident that all the required powers are available and that they can be reflected in regulations.

I want the Committee to note that it is essential for us that the regulations are not only made to be effective but that they are made in a timely way. I understand that there is some uncertainty about when the Bill will be passed. There will be a short period after the Bill has been passed before the regulations can be made, but I am seeking reassurance the Committee that those draft regulations are ready to go as soon as the Bill becomes law so that we can regulate from 1 January 2010. Bearing in mind that it was a considerable disappointment to the council that we were not able to regulate before now, we are keen for that to happen as soon as possible.

**Mr McArdle:** When we raised the issue, we were awaiting clarification from the Department's solicitors. We have received that, and are now content in a way that we were not previously. We wish to use this forum to signal that.

**The Deputy Chairperson:** You suggest the inclusion of a reference in clause 13(2) that the ESA should seek advice from the GTC. That suggestion has been considered by the Department, which said that that merely duplicates an existing provision and is not necessary. What are your views on the Department's response?

**Mr McArdle:** It is not for us to second-guess the legislation. The main issue is the extent to which consultation is sought and is meaningful. We were seeking to ensure that, as the independent voice for the profession, GTCNI has a responsibility in that area and that that responsibility is understood. If the Department assures us that that is the case, that is fine. Like most people in Northern Ireland, we will wait to see what the ESA does before we make a final judgement on whether consultation has been meaningful. I know that there can be consultation followed by inaction, but we hope that that will not be the case.

We are simply making the point that there is a statutory responsibility on an organisation to offer advice to the ESA; that is what we are seeking to do. I welcome the response; perhaps that is the best way of putting it.

**The Deputy Chairperson:** In their submissions on the Education Bill, some of the education and library boards referred to the need for clear guidance on how GTC disciplinary powers are to be co-ordinated with those of the ESA and individual boards of governors. Has that been drawn to your attention? What are its implications?

**Mr Ball:** You are right. There will be an important relationship to be built between ourselves and the ESA and with boards of governors. In discussions with boards and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) we stressed the importance of being aware that the role of a professional body is not to replace or supplement employer processes with regard to conduct and



competence; those are matters of contract between teachers and their employers.

A professional body would operate in that sphere by providing a wider scrutiny of professional activity by the profession itself; that is the heart of self-regulation. Determinations would be made by employers, because that would be directly relevant, and we would look at the implication of the conduct or the incompetence on the wider profession and the professional issues that may arise. Our processes will sit above and outside employer processes, but employer processes are important sources of evidence for the GTC in making determinations. We make determinations in cases of unacceptable professional conduct or serious professional incompetence. The benchmark or hurdle that we envisage in the regulation is that we would consider only those matters regarding the dismissal of a teacher by an employer for one of those reasons.

**Mr McArdle:** We have opened discussions with Gavin Boyd, and we will follow that issue up. We will be issuing guidance to governors and, more importantly, to the profession, because it needs to understand the processes — as do the public — if we are to have a transparent independent process. A plethora of materials will be issued. There needs to be reference to the regulations, as without them we have been unable to issue guidance. However, now that things are moving on apace, we will be able to issue appropriate guidance, and we will do so. That is vital.

**Mr Poots:** Where does the GTC come in the discipline process? I assume that, initially, disciplinary cases will be heard by a board of governors and that that will remain the case. Are you saying that the GTC gets involved only when a teacher is dismissed?

**Mr Ball:** Yes; that is how the profession relates to those employer processes.

**Mr Poots:** Will the GTC get involved in an advisory capacity or in a decision-making capacity?

**Mr Ball:** All registered teachers are governed by the codes that we have produced, which feed into practice and are available to employers.

Interplay is equally important because, as a professional body, we cannot seek to replace the employers' processes. Contractually, they are the arbiters of what constitutes acceptable conduct and acceptable levels of competence.

However, members will recognise that there is a further professional consideration of whether such conduct or competence reflects on the reputation of the profession, and that must be a matter for the council. However, we would not seek to review or appeal an employer process, but to build on it and consider its wider professional implications.

**Mr McArdle:** The two elements involved are the set of competences and the code, which will set out for governors what can legitimately be expected of a teacher. If a teacher falls short of what is set out in the code, a board of governors has a legitimate reason to take that into account. However, the council cannot become involved at that stage. If the employer had initiated the issue, our involvement would compromise the integrity of the first stage. When that stage is complete and if an employer has, or would have, disciplined a teacher — unless that teacher has resigned — that is reported directly to us and becomes a case for us to consider. We would then measure the board's processes against ours, which are independent of, but informed by, the evidence, and we may call on staff from the school concerned to give evidence.

**Mr Poots:** Who makes the final decision?

**Mr McArdle:** The final decision on an individual's employment at a school is taken by the board of governors. As the independent regulator, we take the final decision on whether that teacher can remain registered.

**Mr B McCrea:** I am interested in the council as the independent voice of the profession. Have you sought teachers' views on whether they approve of the ESA, given its potential effect on their contracts of employment?

**Mr McArdle:** No; other than being the source of the employing contract, there will be no change to the broad terms and conditions of teachers. That is an issue for the trades unions. As a regulatory body, we must make it clear that we do not duplicate the work of our colleagues in the trades unions, which is exactly the appropriate line that we have taken.

**Mr B McCrea:** I am not sure whether to resile from that. The thoughts of an independent professional body are of interest to the Committee. Although trades unions play a valuable role, the profession also has a role. Perhaps your approach is somewhat narrow. It is not for me to tell you what you should be doing. Barney is nodding slightly, so perhaps there is some difference in views. It would be useful to hear from you what people in the profession are thinking.

**Mrs McKee:** The difference between us and the unions is that a union exists to serve its members, whereas we exist to serve all the interests of the profession. Our council includes 19 teachers, 14 of whom are elected by their colleagues, and representatives from all other education bodies, such as the boards, the Irish-medium sector, the CCMS, the integrated sector, and four individuals nominated by the Department. Ours is a broad church of opinion.

The council must ensure that it represents not only the teacher in the classroom but the wider education body in Northern Ireland. For that reason, we cannot become involved in the political aspects of education.



We determine what is fit for purpose in maintaining and enhancing standards in schools.

**Mr B McCrea:** I am told by officials that the ESA Bill is the most fundamental review of education, and the most fundamental legislation, that the Assembly will ever bring forward. I would have thought that issues for the profession would have included the change in the employment contract and establishing who the employer is, and so on, because those issues have certainly concerned other bodies. I would have thought that those issues would have been worthy of some discussion.

**Mr McArdle:** Interestingly, they have never surfaced in the discussions or deliberations of the council's 33 members. I think that there is a broad commitment to the notion that there needs to be some sort of rationalisation and reduction in numbers because we are over-administered. That consensus has emerged, but the specificity that the member mentions has not featured.

**The Deputy Chairperson:** Surely it should have featured, because the Department is now telling us that one of the major aims of the ESA is to raise standards, and one of your major aims is to raise and maintain standards. Thus, there is a very important interaction.

**Mr McArdle:** Very much so, but the issues that are likely to lead to that are those to which we have already alluded: the sense of purpose about what education is about and the fact that there is no real measure of that; and how we will train, develop and re-professionalise or re-intellectualise the profession. Therefore, we have looked at the specific issues that we thought particularly related to how we, as a profession, would contribute to the raising of standards.

I do not think that where one's employment contract lies makes that much difference to how a teacher will perform in school, or how children will benefit from the pedagogy that they experience or the curriculum that they are taught. I do not think that that matters in one sense or the other. Around 1974, my contract of employment moved from one body to another, but that did not alter how I perceived my role or how I undertook my responsibilities.

That is the essence of where we are coming from. The issues that we think are important are: the extent to which the autonomy of the profession is recognised in the classroom; the extent to which the curriculum is relevant and pertinent; the extent to which the curriculum is not utilitarian but will, in fact, allow people to grow and develop in their commitment to it; and the extent to which we empower teachers. Those are the issues to which we tend to commit ourselves, but I understand the perspective that is being brought to us.

**The Deputy Chairperson:** The ESA will also have responsibility for the curriculum.

**Mrs McKee:** Of course, we are all — the ESA, ourselves and all education bodies — concerned with maintaining and raising standards. The ESA — and all research — has accepted that standards can be maintained and raised only by the recognising the professionalism of teachers. As Eddie said, we hope that a mixed-economy approach will emerge from the new ESA professional-development issues. Such an approach would give teachers an opportunity not only to develop their school-development plan and curriculum initiatives, and so on, but to develop their personal interests, such as special needs education or an innovative way of teaching science. They would have a resourced opportunity to pursue their own professional development.

We will be calling for a mixed-economy approach that would offer flexibility in resourcing and would allow teachers to have some responsibility for their own development. For too long, teachers have felt that a lot of what is happening in the schools has been done to them, as it were, and that they have not had the opportunity to take ownership of initiatives. As I said, it is only by recognising the professionalism of teachers, and by allowing them to develop continually that professionalism, that standards can be maintained and developed. That is what we mean when we talk about maintaining and raising standards.

**Mr McArdle:** We have not been silent on the issue of the curriculum. We have raised our concerns about clause 26, we have made reference to other issues, and we have drawn up a charter for education, which we have made available to the Committee. You are right: we are conscious of the issues involved. We have raised them with the Department, and will continue to do so. Therefore, we have not been silent on the issue.

**The Deputy Chairperson:** The ESA told us that its main mechanism for raising standards will be the Department's Every School a Good School policy. One of the main criticisms of that policy is that it does not respect sufficiently the professionalism of teachers. Therefore, I would have thought that you would have wanted to get involved in that area to ensure that the professionalism of teachers is respected.

**Mr McArdle:** We made a very robust response to the initial document. You are right. We have been privy to some subsequent consultations and are quite clear that the Department has moved quite considerably in that regard.

We also had a robust discussion with the then civil servants who were responsible for drawing up the document. It was a difficult meeting, because we thought that there had been some dismissiveness. We made that case, and we think that it has been heard. We made the point that it is a nonsense to mention the Every School a Good School policy without recognising the fact that there is a now an agreed set of competences.

The bottom line is that, for the first time, everyone in this room now has a clear understanding of what the profession is expected to produce as regards competence, commitment and conduct. We had a robust exchange with the Department. I am pleased to say that, as far as I am concerned, it responded positively. However, we will have to wait until the final document emerges before we can be completely sure of that. I can assure you that if it does not take our points on board, we will raise our voices again, and appropriately so.

**The Deputy Chairperson:** Thank you for that. You confirmed the point that I made earlier about the need for the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland to engage with the ESA on the issue of raising standards, particularly when that impacts on the respect for the professionalism of teachers. I am glad that you have had that engagement, and I am sure that it will enhance the policy.

**Mr B McCrea:** I hesitate to criticise such an august body —

**Mr McArdle:** But you are going to anyway.

**Mr B McCrea:** I am. I think that you might do more. It is a mistake to lie back and wait and see what they do to you. Sally made the point that, for quite some time, teachers have been concerned about what others will do to them, rather than feeling that their professionalism has been recognised. That concern should be brought to the fore.

I am interested in the profession's view on what is the most fundamental change in education. For example, some people say that our school system is failing. Some people in this room will argue that we have a world-class education system, while other people will argue that we do not. Some people say that our teachers are great, and others say that if there is a failing, it must be the teachers. You are in a unique position because you are able to inform the debate. I am disappointed that you are not able to help us more.

**Mr McArdle:** I am sorry to disappoint you.

**Mr B McCrea:** I am frequently disappointed, Eddie, so do not worry about that. I do not mean that badly. I am just trying to encourage you.

**Mr McArdle:** It is an experience that we share.

We have effectively established the professional competences for teachers, which now inform initial teacher education. We have had initial discussions with Curriculum Advisory Support Services (CASS), and we will continue to make the point that the competences must underpin performance review and staff development (PRSD). They will also underpin elements of the support service.

In many senses, the profession is making inroads and is making its voice heard clearly, and when we

become a regulatory body, our voice will be even further amplified. The GTCNI also approves the qualifications to teach in Northern Ireland, so people cannot teach in Northern Ireland without passing through the portal of GTCNI. The body accredits courses. All of those duties are our responsibility.

**Mr B McCrea:** Where is the education system in Northern Ireland failing, and what would you like to see done to fix it?

**Mr McArdle:** The education system in Northern Ireland is not so much failing in the traditional sense that it is a failed entity; however, significant changes need to be made in respect of how we operate selection, which is an issue, and how we deal with the tail of underachievement. There needs to be an understanding that the entire education system does not operate as a system. That is an unfortunate by-product of the situation that we are in at the moment.

Therefore, there must be a clear focus on whether the system post-11-plus is fit for purpose in relation to vocational education and children who have experienced social disadvantage, social capital disadvantage or emotional difficulties. Is it fit for purpose for our brightest children, because we are increasingly preparing people for professions for which there will be no employment?

A whole series of issues has not been addressed but must be addressed if we are to establish what the education sector needs to do. Once we decide what it needs to do in relation to the knowledge economy, etc, it becomes a matter of structure following function. A range of issues is involved. In some senses, we are failing both the economy and society as a whole.

**Mr B McCrea:** I will conclude by saying that you have set yourself a task of work, and it has all been recorded by Hansard. I would welcome a submission or a paper from GTCNI on those very issues. You should lead on the debate, and I would like to hear from you on those issues and others.

**The Deputy Chairperson:** John, have you a question?

**Mr O'Dowd:** My point has been adequately covered.

**The Deputy Chairperson:** Thank you very much for attending today, for making your submission and for taking questions. We will expect that paper from you in due course.

**Mr McArdle:** We are always happy to do our homework.

**Mrs McKee:** We welcome the opportunity to come before the Committee. When the Bill comes into effect, we would like to come back and discuss the specifics of the regulations so that we all have an understanding of where we are going.

**The Deputy Chairperson:** Officials will be responding to some of the points raised during the session, so you are welcome to stay.

**Mr McArdle:** We have brought you some homework, which you will find intriguing. It is a charter for education, and it would be wonderful if all parties signed up to it and there was a document in this room on which you all agree.

**The Deputy Chairperson:** The next item on the agenda is an evidence session with representatives from the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA): Alison Millar, who is the assistant secretary; Heather McKinstry, who is the chairperson of NIPSA's education panel, and Helena McSherry, who is the vice-chairperson of the education panel. You are all welcome. I invite you make your presentation.

**Ms Alison Millar (Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance):** Thank you for seeking to take evidence from NIPSA on the Education Bill. You will appreciate that there are many challenges facing education today, but it would be remiss of me not to point out the very low morale among staff in the education sector, particularly in the area of administration, because of the many factors that have impacted on staff over the years.

It is important that the Committee and the Assembly recognise and appreciate the dedication of the staff who work in the sector. Contrary to their portrayal in the media, which has been blatantly untrue, the staff are hard-working and do not waste resources. Over the past few years, they have worked against a backdrop of ever-increasing pressure and with much reduced resources, and the squeezing of those resources must stop.

NIPSA is in a unique position to give its view on the Education Bill, as it is the only teaching union that represents staff from across the entire education sector. We represent all organisations affected by the review of public administration (RPA): the boards, the Youth Council, small and large bodies, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, the Civil Service, and so forth. The views contained in our submission are, therefore, representative of members from all those areas.

NIPSA is deeply concerned that the establishment of the ESA is being regarded purely as a cost-saving exercise. Given some of the developments, to which I will refer later, it is clear that the RPA is not aimed at improving the education service, diverting sources to the front line or ensuring that children receive the best education, which they deserve. According to the facts that we have, resources are being, and have been, cut. As members said earlier, special education and children's services are also being reduced, and jobs are being cut. NIPSA is extremely concerned about the projected loss of 463 jobs, particularly against the backdrop of the failure of the Department of Education

and the Minister to commit to no compulsory redundancies as part of the implementation of the RPA.

However, when the job cuts were announced to the Assembly, there was not as much as a blink. Why was that announcement simply accepted? Over the past few months, every political party has sought to support teachers and criticised the private sector for cutting jobs during the current economic crisis, yet they tacitly accepted the announcement of the loss of 463 jobs in education. I ask the Committee and parties to reflect on that.

NIPSA is opposed to the division of the legislation into two Bills. Given the extension to the timeline for the establishment of the ESA, there is no justification for such a division, and NIPSA is deeply suspicious of it. Is it because of the voluntary grammar sector? Will it be included? Will the integrated and maintained sectors be included? We have heard various representations to the Committee on the subject. Although we welcome detailed discussion of the issues, the longer the debate goes on, the more likely it is that the outcome could be simply a merger of the existing education and library boards with a few add-ons, and that would be unacceptable.

One of NIPSA's major concerns relates to employment schemes. We are extremely concerned about the provision of employment schemes in clauses 4, 5, 6 and 7. If it is deemed that an employment scheme is required, that need should be addressed through the collective negotiating machinery and subsequently disseminated to schools as a model scheme. At best, the legislation, as currently drafted, puts the cart before the horse. If a board of governors wants to deviate from the model scheme, it should have to agree any amendments, but with the ESA and through the collective negotiating machinery. That would ensure equality and commonality across and between schools, and it would guarantee the fair and equal treatment of all staff in relation to pay and terms and conditions of employment, which is not the case across all schools and employers at present. We would welcome the same issues being addressed in all schools.

In clause 9, NIPSA endorses fully the transfer of staff employed by boards of governors from the voluntary grammar and grant-maintained integrated sectors to a single employing authority. However, we suggest that clause 11 be removed in its entirety, as we see no reason for individual schools to continue to pay salaries. If the ESA is intended purely to streamline services, surely no reasoned argument exists for the retention of clause 11, other than to satisfy a particular lobby group or sector. The Committee should reject and remove clause 11, solely because it creates unnecessary bureaucracy. Its removal would streamline the payment of salaries.



NIPSA is concerned about how the school library service, which is a very small service with approximately 50 staff, will be able to develop the necessary skills to improve and provide a first-class service. Historically, there has been movement of staff between the school library service and the public library service under one employer. However, under the education and skills authority, there will be only about 50 staff. Will those staff have the right skills and competencies at all the appropriate levels required for that service?

NIPSA believes that the appropriate level of service can be achieved, and successfully maintained, only through formal links and the sharing of expertise with the public library service through the Northern Ireland Library Authority. The matter should be legislated for, not left to happen by chance through some service-level agreement or other similar arrangement. We have had tentative discussions with the ESA on that issue, but we believe that it needs to be provided for in legislation, otherwise the service may, given the totality of the exercise, be left to wither on the vine. That service is very important.

Some clauses refer to public-private partnerships (PPP) and private finance initiatives (PFI); it will come as no surprise to the Committee to hear that NIPSA is totally opposed to the building of schools and the education estate through PPPs. All the evidence that we have shows that that route does not deliver, in a timely fashion, the rebuilding of schools and the youth estate. I will not go through the litany of failed schools, but there have been situations in which children have left primary school thinking that a new secondary school was to be built in their area. Contracts that last 20 to 25 years tie the Department, the public purse and the ESA into paying for something over the long term. NIPSA urges the Committee to ensure that PPPs and PFIs are eliminated as a methodology for delivering and maintaining the schools estate. The traditional design-and-build model has proved to be much more cost-effective and responsive to need. We need new schools to be ready for children within a very short timescale, not in the five, 10 or 15 years that it has taken under a number of PFI contracts — indeed, sometimes contracts are not even carried forward.

Another issue that we raised in our submission concerns the size of the ESA board. We believe that a board with seven to 11 members would be totally inadequate, particularly given the number of functions that the board would have to fulfil: audit, education, finance, etc.

NIPSA is concerned about representation on the board, as well as about its size. The ESA will be an employer of 60,000 staff. We believe that the appropriate way to reflect that on the board, whatever its final size — although it needs to be larger than

currently suggested — is for one third of the board to be made up of elected representatives; one third to be made up of community representatives and one third to be made up of employee representatives. On the board of the Labour Relations Agency, the trade unions and employee representatives have an automatic right to seats, which are appointed through the public-appointments process. I ask the Committee to reflect on that

NIPSA seeks absolute assurance that the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations, and all its vagaries, will apply to the transfer of staff to the new organisation, and that staff will be fully protected.

Those are our main issues as regards the Bill. However, there are two other imminent staffing issues concerning the ESA that we want to flag up to the Committee, and they are included in the briefing. With the Committee's indulgence, I will mention them now.

The first relates to the methodology for the filling of director posts. NIPSA has grave concerns about the process by which staff have been identified throughout the small and larger employers, and about who is eligible to apply for what director post and what grade staff have to be at to apply, and so on. We submitted detailed comments on the recruitment, redeployment and voluntary severance (RRVS) strategy to the consultation, which closes next week. NIPSA, along with the other non-teaching unions, wants to ensure that there is a serious and meaningful engagement on that issue and that the public service guidelines, etc, are fully adhered to.

The second issue relates to the vacancy control policy, which was introduced in October 2006, at a time when it was expected that there would be a short timeline for the establishment of the ESA. It was put in place purely to try to realise the expectation that the unions had about no compulsory redundancies. However, the deferment, on at least two occasions, of the establishment of the ESA has led to large numbers of staff acting up one, two or three grades, and staff who had been brought in on temporary contracts that were supposed to last for six to eight months being in post for over four years.

We received some figures about three weeks ago and are seeking further detailed data from all the employers. However, the Committee should be aware that, in one education and library board, more than 70% of the staff are not in what some would determine to be their substantive posts. Unions can no longer sign up to that arrangement; we have formally withdrawn from it and will be pressing for posts to be advertised on a permanent basis because of the staff detriment involved in transferring to the new organisation. That issue has been raised directly with the Department,



and I was extremely disappointed by the Department's reaction, which was to say that people will have benefited from additional money for a few years and give a shrug of the shoulders. That response will not be accepted, and we will take all necessary action. We hope that we will have the Committee's support for our efforts to ensure that staff are treated properly in the transfer to the new organisation.

**The Deputy Chairperson:** Thank you very much. You said that it is not clear whether the savings that will accrue from the establishment of ESA will be directed to front line services. Have you any evidence to back up that claim?

**Ms Millar:** We have looked at the comprehensive spending review figures for the three-year period, including staff costs, maintenance costs and all the additional costs in the Budget. It is our view that the 3.3%, 5.9% and 4.4% increases will be gobbled up in a standstill process, rather than be diverted to the front line. The mantra is that the money will go from administration into schools. However, if we look at the situation with health, we see that there is no evidence that the savings have been diverted to hospitals and front line services.

**The Deputy Chairperson:** You said that you have an issue with the methodology involved in filling director posts. Will you elaborate on that?

**Ms Millar:** NIPSA has had discussion with the ESA implementation team about how the posts at director level should be filled, taking on board the Public Service Commission's view about the need to protect staff. An issue arose because there was an identification of staff down to what would be third-tier equivalents across all the organisations. We believe that the outworkings of that, and how posts have been defined, will exclude some people from applying for posts that we believe would be at least equivalent to their posts, if not at a higher level. For example, some people in human resources posts in the smaller organisations would be eligible to apply for a director post. However, a human resources manager in an education and library board would be excluded from applying for a post at that level.

We have been in discussion since Christmas with the ESA implementation team. We are disappointed that the views that we expressed were not taken on board before the public consultation was launched and have reiterated that in the public-consultation process.

**The Deputy Chairperson:** You mentioned the procurement of new buildings through public-private partnerships (PPPs) and private finance initiatives (PFIs). I do not believe that the Bill specifies the use of those methodologies; has that been added?

**Ms Millar:** The Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) understands that the Bill allows for the use of PPPs. That is not specified; however, there is a reference to the fact that different procurement

methods can be used for the schools estate, which does not exclude PPPs.

**The Deputy Chairperson:** Recent events mean that the Department has had to return to direct contract procurement.

**Ms Millar:** Yes, but the economic system will rise and flow and the private sector will again become interested in the public sector.

**Mr Poots:** The Deputy Chairperson posed a question about the first paragraph of the submission to which the answer was that rises above inflation for each of the comprehensive spending review (CSR) years amounted to cuts.

That is not the case. Particularly in light of the existing retail price index, the rises happening in each of the CSR years are significant. Efficiency savings that should be achieved as a result of the review of public administration will be redistributed in the Northern Ireland block grant, which is for the public sector.

If the unions are against efficiency savings, they are against providing front line services, because we are seeking to remove unnecessary administration and move the resources that are saved to front line services. We want professionals who can assess children with special needs, and we want sufficient teacher-pupil ratios and more classroom assistants. Will the trades unions block that by adopting the attitude that they have demonstrated today?

**The Deputy Chairperson:** That probably falls outside the remit of the Bill.

**Mr Poots:** Paragraph 2 of NIPSA's briefing paper specifically refers to jobs that may no longer be required and the consequences of their loss.

**The Deputy Chairperson:** Alison, do you want to respond?

**Ms Millar:** In relation to my response about the three CSR periods, it is not just about the retail price index.

Employers' pension scheme costs are due to rise by another 2% this year. The cost of maintenance in schools has fallen over the years as education and library boards have had to cut back drastically, leaving the schools estate in a pretty dire state. If the schools estate is to be dragged back up to where it should be, money must be spent in those areas.

The provision of special education in schools was referred to earlier. It is clear to NIPSA that it is an indictment of our society and the current employers for people to wait three, four, five or eight years, as we heard on the radio this morning, to have a child statemented. It is a question of resources.

I do not believe that any education and library board is saying that it will deliberately not statement children

for that period — it is purely down to a lack of staff. Additional staff must be allocated to some areas to allow employers to deliver that service. The ESA will realise that once it has all those staff under its remit.

**Mr Poots:** It is not exclusively a matter of resources; it is as much a question of the management of resources as resources per se.

If Departments have a multiplicity of silos with middle managers and a tier of staff below them, competing with one another and giving one another unnecessary work, resources are not being properly managed. Consequently, front line services are starved of resources that they need.

I want to know whether the trades union is prepared to co-operate with others in ensuring that resources are best placed in front line services.

**Ms Millar:** I can speak only for NIPSA, not for other unions. We believe that the 463 jobs that were mentioned in the outline business case have been more than saved. The data that we received from most employers is that less staff now work in the sector than are required to be saved under the outline business case. During the period of vacancy control, a black hole emerged into which 500 or 600 jobs have disappeared.

**The Deputy Chairperson:** Departmental officials told us that the savings from the establishment of the ESA will not necessarily go into front line services. They said that such savings may help to protect front-line services but, because of deficiencies in budgets in the present economic climate, funding for additional front line services would not be available, as had been originally intended.

**Mr Poots:** Northern Ireland receives a block budget; it does not receive any more than that. Therefore, if additional resources are not made available, there is no point in harping on about the requirement for more resources. If more resources are made available for education, it will mean that fewer resources are available for health; more resources for health will mean fewer resources for another area. There is a budget to work to, and we must decide how to make that work in the interests of everyone, not only those who work in the public service.

**The Deputy Chairperson:** That is true. However, my point is that the original predictions will not be fulfilled.

**Mr Lunn:** How are the 463 job losses represented as a proportion of the existing jobs?

**Ms Millar:** As you heard, there are about 60,000 staff, and, according to the Department's outline business case, some 4,180 are at risk of redundancy. Four hundred and sixty-three is about 15% or 16%.

**Mr Lunn:** I may disagree with the figure of 15%; it is about 12%. You said that many of those jobs have already been lost. Have they been lost through natural wastage or because education and library boards have been actively seeking to reduce the number of jobs?

**Ms Millar:** We are seeking data on that from all the employers. It is only when we got the figures from four of the five education and library boards that we found that they did not tally. We are gathering that data, and when we have them I will forward them to the Committee.

**Mr Lunn:** Your main reason for existence is to benefit your members. The process will merge five boards into one, and one of the main reasons for doing that is to achieve economy of scale. Is a reduction in jobs of 12% through natural wastage and voluntary redundancy achievable?

**Ms Millar:** As we have always said, our bottom line is to get a commitment to no compulsory redundancies. That would give a great deal of comfort to those staff who are feeling vulnerable and who are not sure whether they will have a job and where their job will be when the ESA is established and rolled out. You said that our role is to benefit our members, but our main role is to protect the existing terms and conditions of the staff who will transfer to the new organisations.

**Mr Lunn:** Have any of the 500 jobs that have gone been through compulsory redundancy?

**Ms Millar:** No.

**Mr Lunn:** Therefore, jobs have been lost already without any pain.

**Ms Millar:** I am not sure that you would say that if you worked in the education sector. There has been significant pain. As political representatives, you will criticise the education employers on many occasions and seek information from them about why certain things have not happened. That is primarily because of diminishing resources and the loss of expertise.

**Mr Lunn:** However, so far, no employee has been forced to go.

**Ms Millar:** No.

**Mr Lunn:** Your submission proposes yet another calculation for the membership of the ESA: one third elected representatives, one third community representatives and one third employee representatives. How do you respond to the Minister's view that to reserve a place for a trades union representative might give rise to a conflict of interest when union or management matters arise?

**Ms Millar:** Our statement refers to the board of the Labour Relations Agency, which includes employee representatives. By and large, boards do not deal with staffing matters. An employee representative would

not normally be involved in, for example, a disciplinary matter or any other staffing-related issue. They generally do not sit on staffing committees. There are many other ESA board matters to deal with apart from purely staffing issues. I do not believe that there would be conflicts of interest.

**Mr Lunn:** I did not ask that question because I disagree with you. The Minister seems adamant that of the 12 places on the ESA, seven will be local councillors and a chairperson, which leaves room for four other representatives.

**Ms Millar:** Having followed the Bill through this, its Committee Stage, I do not believe that the Minister has any support for that position. Most of the groups that have given evidence to the Committee have argued that the ESA should be much bigger. People would have to be employed on a full-time basis to service audit, staffing and other committees; I do not know how a board of seven or eight people could manage that.

**Mr Lunn:** What do you mean by “community representatives”?

**Ms Millar:** I mean representatives from business and the community sector. Apart from employee representatives, there would be elected members and business and community representatives.

**Mr O'Dowd:** Thank you for your presentation. I want to question you in more detail about staff members “acting up”. It was originally hoped that the ESA would have been in place this year, but its establishment has been put back until 2010; indeed, some people want it put back further. How is morale among staff? Your submission says that NIPSA has withdrawn from the vacancy control process; could you expand on that?

**Ms Millar:** The ESA was originally due to begin in April 2008; that is when vacancy control was first introduced. The unions agreed to that process and were engaged in it. From where we sat, the aim of that process was to avoid compulsory redundancies so that people could act up — be temporarily promoted — for short periods. However, because of the financial constraints that were placed on the education and library boards over the two to four years before vacancy control, there are staff members who have been acting up — in other words, not in their permanent post — for up to eight years. That is unfair and unsustainable. Those people are in that position because of decisions to defer the establishment of the ESA and decisions by previous education and library boards not to make permanent appointments.

A line has to be drawn in the sand, because the ESA implementation team, supported by the Department, said that the arrangement would continue until 31 August 2010. Our figures are based on January 2009; by the time that the ESA is established, some employers will

have no staff in a substantive post. The Department seems to be saying that those staff members have enjoyed three, four or eight years of additional money for the work that they carried out and that they can go back one, two or even three grades lower. That was never what vacancy control was intended for; it was a short-term measure, but it has been allowed to go on for so long that it has become a nightmare.

Over the past couple of weeks, we discussed the matter with our members in all employment areas. People have only just started to realise that the post that they have held for the past six years is perhaps not the grade that they will be guaranteed. Rightly or wrongly, people have got mortgages on what they thought was their salary at the time. Over the past six months, we raised concerns with the Department and the ESA implementation team, but we did not get anywhere. We see this process as trying to draw a line in the sand and getting people to talk to us in a meaningful way.

**Mr B McCrea:** There is much with which I agree. It is fundamentally unfair that people who have been acting up are not made permanent in that grade. That is on the record: it is an issue that must be sorted out. Low morale and stress are issues that responsible employers must address. We are failing people in that area.

There is also an issue on which I agree with you and Edwin, which will upset him greatly. I absolutely agree that there have been real cuts. There have been inflationary rises in fuel, in legitimate job evaluations or through agreed pay negotiations — but those factors have increased more than the increase in the budget. Given that that money has to come from somewhere, budgets for maintenance were slashed to make up the difference. The cuts may be hidden, but they exist. We should not avoid them; we should acknowledge that they are being made. Cuts are being made in the least noisy places, and the more vulnerable in our society suffer as a result.

That said, the block grant is unlikely to increase. There is a question about where we will find moneys, and the only way of doing that is by investment and by better co-operation with staff, employees and the unions. We have to find some way of doing that because, quite simply, there is a budget problem. I realise that that was a statement rather than a question, but is that a reasonable position or am I heading off over the hills?

**Ms Millar:** I agree with you about the budget: It is a bit like robbing Peter to pay Paul. In our response to the Education Bill and the financial memorandum that was attached to it, we clearly said that we believed that the £20 million would be found from savings in administration and would be redeployed to the front line in education — not into the wider Northern Ireland



block. That was the basis on which we made our submission.

**Mr B McCrea:** That is a fair point.

**The Deputy Chairperson:** I ask you to draw your remarks to a close because we have two sessions after this, and another event after that. Please finish on the point that you are making.

**Mr B McCrea:** I will talk afterwards. I have made my points, so I am OK.

**The Deputy Chairperson:** Thank you for your attendance today and for your valuable contribution; no doubt we will hear from you again in future.

**Ms Millar:** Thank you, Chairperson, and thanks to the Committee.

**The Deputy Chairperson:** We now move on to the response to the General Teaching Council and NIPSA from departmental officials. Present today are John McGrath, the deputy secretary, and Chris Stewart, the head of the review of public administration. Neither of those gentlemen requires any introduction, but I introduced them nonetheless. You are very welcome.

**Mr John McGrath (Department of Education):** I will respond to the evidence given in the two previous witness sessions, and Chris will deal with the detail of the Bill. We welcome the GTC's support for the Bill and the point was made that their comments were brief because there are not many substantive issues outstanding. With respect to the last point, I hope that the launch of 'Every School a Good School' tomorrow will alleviate some of their concerns on that score.

As to the points that NIPSA has made, it is important to reiterate some of them and react to some of the discussion. The ESA has a role in raising standards; that is clear. The main vehicle for that will be the 'Every School a Good School' policy and the continuing work and emphasis on standards in school improvement. It will also have a role in squeezing resources so that the maximum is invested in the front line.

I wish to echo the point that Edwin made: there is a budget settlement. The education service must manage within that settlement, whether there is an Education Bill or not. The job losses that have already taken place in the service have been taken into account in the cumulative 3% cut. One cannot make significant savings in a service that is predominantly people-dominated without job losses. However, we must ensure that the job losses are not in the front line and that they are managed as sensitively as possible. By rationalising seven organisations and centralising backup functions over time, the ESA will make the education service better equipped to deal with the efficiency savings that we already have and which have become sharper as a result of the public expenditure forecasts that have been evidenced since the Budget. Therefore,

in my Minister's view and in my partners' view, the case for the ESA has been reinforced by the increased financial stringency.

I note that 463 job losses are discussed in the outline business case. It is extremely unlikely that there will be any compulsory redundancies because there are almost more vacancies than that at the moment. It is a general principle of the review of public administration that compulsory redundancies should be avoided, and my Minister is keen to ensure that there are no compulsory redundancies if possible.

We have had discussions with NIPSA and other colleagues about vacancy control, which has gone on longer than was desirable, largely due to uncertainty outwith the Department about the timing of the ESA. Many staff have been acting up one, two or three grades above their substantive grades for a considerable time; that is not unknown in the public or private sectors. Nonetheless, NIPSA asked for a guarantee that the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations (TUPE) should apply, and the legislation says that TUPE will apply. However, TUPE applies to a person's substantive grade.

If people have been acting up for some time without the proper competition to make that a substantive post, there should be no understanding that, somehow, in the transfer to the ESA, that position will be regularised without competition. That would be entirely inappropriate and inconsistent with TUPE. We have made that point to trades union colleagues, but we are happy to continue to discuss the issue with them. However, we have reflected that where people have been acting up for a considerable time they have been paid the salary appropriate to those posts.

**Mr Chris Stewart (Department of Education):** If it meets with your approval, Chairman, I will pick up on some of the points made by GTC colleagues and then move on to those made by NIPSA.

We welcome the GTC's positive comments about the Bill; we worked and liaised closely with the council in developing the Bill and we welcome its valuable contribution.

Regarding the small number of specific points relating to clause 11 and the reference to the provisions on the payment of salaries, we note the council's comments carefully. The Committee is already aware that the Minister recognises the need to amend that clause substantively and that she intends to bring forward an amendment. The purpose of that amendment will be to ensure that all boards of governors in all grant-aided schools will have control over their schools' budgets for salaries.

On clause 13, which deals with the provision of training and advisory and support services for schools, we note the suggested amendment by the council



that the ESA should be required to seek advice from the General Teaching Council. However, the council points out correctly that there already is provision in legislation that gives the council the function of providing advice to employing authorities. Therefore, it is our view that, although we support entirely the suggestion that there should be advice from the GTC to the ESA, there is no need for an additional provision; that would merely duplicate the effect of the existing law. Therefore, we are not persuaded that the suggested amendment is necessary.

On the other point relating to clause 13, we are entirely in agreement with the GTC. It is the Minister's policy that there should be a mixed economy of provision of training and advisory and support services, including the ESA and other providers, and we are confident and satisfied that the Bill allows for such an approach.

In relation to clauses 25 and 26, which deal with the curriculum, examinations and assessment functions, we note the suggestion from the GTC that the clause ought to include a reference to civic and social well-being. However, although the intention behind the suggestion is laudable and we strongly support it, it is our view that it is more appropriately addressed in another part of the Bill, namely clauses 2 and 23, which have a broader focus and are focused on the general duties of the Department and the ESA, and which are the very thing that Mr McArdle referred to — the fundamental purpose of education. Those clauses already contain references along the lines suggested on the fundamental purpose of education and, therefore, we feel that the suggestion made by the council has already been accommodated in the Bill.

Finally, we welcome the support of the GTC for the important provisions in clause 29 and schedule 6. The Minister fully agrees that it is essential that the GTC have the full range of interventions — every tool in the box that it requires to discharge its role as effectively as possible.

I will move on to the points raised by NIPSA and begin with the membership of the ESA. The Minister and the Department note the views expressed by NIPSA and by many other stakeholders and members of the Committee about the number and composition of the membership of the ESA. The Committee is familiar with the Minister's view, which is that a membership of up to 12, including the chairperson, is sufficient for effective leadership and governance. The Minister also feels that the proposal for the majority of members to be district councillors is important in ensuring local democratic accountability. However, we are conscious that some stakeholders and Committee members have expressed views on that aspect of the legislation. If the Committee were minded to write to the Minister, she would welcome its views and give careful consideration to anything that it may recommend.

NIPSA also suggested that a proportion of the ESA membership should be reserved for trades union representatives. The Minister stresses that the appointment arrangements for ESA membership will be based primarily on the merit principle. Of course, trades unions' representatives, like anyone else, may apply for appointment; however, all members will be appointed on their competence and experience rather than in any formal representative capacity. As was mentioned earlier, the Minister feels that formally reserving a proportion of the membership for trades unions' representatives could give rise to significant conflict of interest issues for those members in management or trades union matters, which, of course, would be significant and frequent, given the role of the ESA as the employer of some 55,000 to 60,000 staff.

Moving on to employment schemes and the role of submitting authorities, the Minister does not agree with NIPSA that the requirement for schools to produce employment schemes is a bureaucratic burden.

In fact, we see the schemes as being an essential element of the employment arrangements in the Bill. They will ensure that there is clarity and certainty on the respective roles and responsibilities of the ESA and the boards of governors, and the Committee has stressed the importance of that issue on a number of occasions. We feel that that is in the best interests of staff.

The responsibility for preparing and submitting schemes will be given to schools, in keeping with the policy aim of allowing schools to determine the degree of autonomy that they wish to have over employment matters. However, the ESA will produce model schemes and must approve all schemes prepared by schools. If a school wishes to adopt a model scheme, it is free to do so, and that will, of course, minimise the administrative burden on the school.

We agree wholeheartedly with the sentiments expressed by NIPSA colleagues on the importance of having close links with, and a close working relationship between, the school library service and the public library service, which is administered by the Library Authority. However, we are not entirely clear about exactly what additional legislative provision NIPSA is looking for, and we would welcome further discussion with NIPSA on the matter. I must point out that clause 18 already contains provisions to allow the ESA to co-operate and enter into formal agreements with the Library Authority.

Clause 15 focuses on educational youth services and facilities. There appears to have been a misunderstanding about the focus of the clause. It is about early years services, which we refer to as educational services, and youth services — it is not about schools. The clause refers to acting together "with any other person" to allow for co-operation and partnership

between the ESA, voluntary service providers, and, perhaps, district councils. The clause is not related to the schools estate or procurement policy in any way.

On the issue of potential secondments from the ESA to the Department, the Minister agrees with NIPSA's suggestion that such an arrangement is desirable, and we want to consider the need for an amendment to the Bill to ensure that that is made explicit.

Finally, turning to schedule 5, which deals with the transfer arrangements for civil servants transferring to the ESA, NIPSA has sought assurances that the legislation will safeguard the employment rights of Civil Service staff. The Department is happy to offer that assurance, because it is entirely satisfied that schedule 5 does just that, thereby providing the assurance that NIPSA colleagues are looking for.

**The Deputy Chairperson:** Thank you very much. The Committee wrote to the Department on 19 March with some 10 pages of concerns. When might the Committee get a response?

**Mr Stewart:** As soon as possible; and I acknowledge that there are several pieces of correspondence to which we owe the Committee replies. It has taken longer than it should have to respond. We intend to send a very substantive reply, hopefully next week, which should wrap up all the outstanding correspondence. A number of issues has been raised during meetings, and we have picked up on those issues in some of the written and oral evidence that we provided to the Committee. However, as I said, we will wrap all that up in a single reply, which we hope will be a convenient way for members to see the Department's position on those matters.

**The Deputy Chairperson:** John, can you give us an indication of how much of the £20 million savings will be eaten up by efficiencies?

**Mr McGrath:** Do you mean the savings in the outline business case?

**The Deputy Chairperson:** Yes.

**Mr McGrath:** Some of those savings will already have been counted into the current Budget period and redirected back to front line services. As has been said, efficiency savings are required of each Department, and they generate the additional funds that the Executive have allocated for priority areas. That has already happened with a number of developments that the Minister announced last year and this year. You reiterated the point that I made earlier: ideally, people would like efficiency savings to go into front line services, but as the overall budget constraints get tighter —and Basil elaborated on some of the reasons for that, such as pay awards in excess of provision and job evaluations — so individual budgets get tighter.

Our view is that we increasingly need to ensure that efficiency savings do not come out of front line services and that those services are protected as much as possible. It is not quite the same as guaranteeing that every efficiency saving will automatically go into front line services, but that is a product of the wider budgetary constraints that we face, which will get worse in the short to medium term.

**The Deputy Chairperson:** Is it possible to say how much of the £20 million is going into front line services?

**Mr McGrath:** I am happy to come back to you with a specific figure. I do not want to quote a figure now in case I get it wrong. If Catherine Daly was with me, we could find that out. If the figure was generated within the current three-year Budget period, it will already have been counted in and will have been part of the package of improvements that Caitriona Ruane announced for last year and at the advent of this year.

**The Deputy Chairperson:** We look forward to getting a figure.

**Mr B McCrea:** I want to deal with GTCNI and then with NIPSA. I may be wrong about this, but I did not take the same sense that you did from the comments made by the GTCNI representatives, which you welcomed as being very positive. I took from their comments that, although they had views on many issues, they thought that some of them were outside their competency, and so they restricted their comments to issues that they thought that they should be talking about.

**Mr McGrath:** We are talking about a third party who is still in the room. Perhaps it would be best for us both to offer views on that.

**Mr B McCrea:** Although I asked them for more detail, it was not forthcoming, but my view is that some concerns were raised and that it is not appropriate for us to say that they are overwhelmingly supportive of things. I put that on the record as a counter to what you said. Obviously, it is a matter for GTCNI to clarify and deal with, but I put that on the record. The representatives are still listening, so you can see what I mean.

Turning to NIPSA's concerns, I stated for the record that I think that it is fundamentally unfair to ask people to step up to the mark and act up several grades above their current grade for a prolonged period of time, and then, at a later stage, say to them, "Regrettably, you are not the best person for the job". We are in a situation whereby we really need people to stay and keep the machine together. Whatever arrangements you come up with for which people should go forward for those jobs — and I am in no way tying your hands on that — we must recognise the contribution of those people. It is about more than just being paid.

**Mr McGrath:** On that point, I agree entirely. People have made a significant contribution and are currently going the extra mile, and many vacant posts have had to be filled. That point is well made. Equally, nobody is saying to those people that they are not the right person for the substantive post. We are saying that one cannot wave a wand and put them into the substantive post. I agree entirely: those changes need to be managed. When people move to the ESA, they will still keep their substantive grade, which is the grade that they will transfer under as part of TUPE. On day one, and for a period, they may still be acting up, but then arrangements will have to be made for the filling of those substantive posts in line with proper employment practice. None of that amounts to telling people that they are not necessarily the right person for the job.

**Mr B McCrea:** I understand the administrative and legal points that you are making. However, we have agreed on the moral point, and we need to address it. I am not sure how we can do it, but simply asking folk to trust us because we are the Government will not work. We need to find a way of addressing that very serious issue, and, as you well know — or at least I will put it to you — the vacancies in the education and library boards and elsewhere are now causing severe problems. People are not able to get the service that they need.

**Mr McGrath:** There is no difference between us here. The situation has to be managed. Those staff are primary assets of the new organisation, and they need to be looked after.

**Mr B McCrea:** My position on the composition of the ESA board is known; there is no point in me regurgitating it. However, I will say that there is a fundamental flaw in what we are all trying to do. GTCNI made the point, as did NIPSA, that we need to understand what it is that we are trying to do with education and with the ESA, because, once you have decided what you are trying to do, then the form will follow function. Debate is ongoing about that.

**Mr McGrath:** Governance is important. The ESA will employ 50,000 people, oversee a spend of £2 billion and be the custodian of a lot of public assets, so it will require proper governance. Over time, policies will change, and they will come from the Department and the Executive — and we have talked about that already. The ESA's job will be to implement those policies. We will have to establish a model of governance that will last over time rather than one that will have to be tweaked to suit the policies of the day.

**Mr B McCrea:** Mr McGrath, at the risk of agreeing with you again, I accept that. However, the problem is that many people think that the ESA will be a policy-making organisation.

**Mr McGrath:** The ESA will be an operational delivery vehicle to implement the policies that are set by the Minister and Executive of the day.

**Mr B McCrea:** Many people feel, rightly or wrongly, that they are being excluded. You can say that that is the way in which democracy works, but some people would like a forum in which their interests will be at least heard. That is why we are having this debate.

**Mr McGrath:** That is for the political process to deal with.

**Mr B McCrea:** I will finish soon, Deputy Chairperson. Those people's concerns are at the centre of why we are going round in circles in some of these debates. Many stakeholders are concerned that they have a legitimate input to make but that there is no effective forum in which to do so. At the minute, everyone believes that the ESA is the place where they can air those views, and that is why they want to be part of it.

**The Deputy Chairperson:** Eddie McArdle from the GTCNI said that education in Northern Ireland lacked an overarching vision. Do you think that the Bill fulfils that need?

**Mr McGrath:** That is not the purpose of the Bill. The Bill is designed to reform a lot of the arrangements for the delivery and administration of education. I will not argue that there is a need for a vision.

**The Deputy Chairperson:** Clause 2 provides a sort of vision, incomplete though it may be.

**Mr McGrath:** There is an architecture for a vision, but a vision is part of the policy that the Minister of the day sets down for educationalists.

**The Deputy Chairperson:** Surely the vision should determine the policy. The policy is not the vision; the policy is merely a reflection of the vision.

**Mr McGrath:** The vision of the Department of Education is to ensure that every learner fulfils his or her full potential at each stage of his or her development.

**The Deputy Chairperson:** That is narrow; it could be one aspect of a vision.

**Mr McGrath:** That is the vision. I disagree with you, because I think that it is a broad vision. However, some meat has to be put on it to create a policy. We are doing that by making school improvements, enhancing provision for children with special needs and focusing on the workforce, and through the introduction of the entitlement framework and the revised curriculum. The Minister has identified five main pillars to carry forward the delivery of that vision. They relate to raising standards; closing the gap; investing in the workforce, because standards of education will not be improved if teaching standards are not improved; investing in the infrastructure in which children and youth learn; and transforming administration. The Department needs a vision, and,



subsequently, a strategy is required. ESA's role will be to deliver that.

**The Deputy Chairperson:** Will you undertake to read Mr McArdle's words and to determine whether they can further inform the direction of the Education Bill?

**Mr Stewart:** Deputy Chairperson, you got the links of the chain in the right order. Vision drives policy, and, in turn, legislation is the vehicle that delivers policy. You are right that some elements of the Bill, particularly clause 2, create, as John said, the architecture or infrastructure on which the vision sits or through which it will be delivered.

I spent many hours arguing and discussing with legislative counsel which words we might put into clause 2. The view of the author of all the education legislation, and much other legislation over the past 20 years, is that vision or mission statements have no place in legislation. He believes that they are very important in policy and to the work of Departments, but legislation is different. Legislation must be clear, precise and unambiguous; therefore, it is not an easy vehicle in which to place vision or mission statements. The extent to which we have included those visionary words in clause 2 is about as far as we think that we can go.

**The Deputy Chairperson:** Time is running out, so I ask members to keep their questions as brief as possible.

**Mr Lunn:** That comment should have been made earlier, Deputy Chairperson.

**The Deputy Chairperson:** I did make it earlier.

**Mr Lunn:** That always seems to happen.

I have two short, succinct points to make. Concern over the projected loss of 463 jobs appears to have gone, because they were secured without the need for compulsory redundancies. Is there any reason why the Department cannot give the guarantee that is being sought by NIPSA about future redundancies?

**Mr McGrath:** It is a general principle of the RPA, which was endorsed by the Executive after direct rule, that, ideally, there should be no compulsory redundancies as a result of the RPA. My Minister is also very keen that there should be no compulsory redundancies. The Department doubts whether there will be any, but one never knows what may happen.

I do not see any evidence of the need for compulsory redundancies. There are more vacancies, and there will be funding for severance packages. It is extremely unlikely that there will be any compulsory redundancies, and Mr Lunn made the point that, to date, there have been very few compulsory redundancies ahead of the RPA changes. Therefore, that is a spectre that may not appear.

**Mr Lunn:** Mr Stewart talked about the composition of the ESA board. Did I detect a heavy hint that the Minister may be disposed to consider seriously a consensus view from the Committee, if it could arrive at such a view?

**Mr McGrath:** We made the point that that issue has been brought up seriatim, not least through the Committee, and, interestingly, Basil McCrea has made the point that people believe that there is no effective forum other than the ESA board; therefore, they all want to get on it. That represents a misunderstanding of the role of the board and policy formulation. Our point is that the make-up of the board is clearly an issue for people here today, and for other people who have given evidence, so the Minister would welcome getting a clear and substantive view on that from the Committee.

**Mr Lunn:** I have not heard any organisation, body or individual member express a view that coincides with the Minister's that a 12-person board is the correct size. However, I thought that I detected a willingness of the Minister to think again.

**Mr Stewart:** The Minister would expect me to say that she takes very seriously the Committee's view on any issue that it raises with her, but specifically that one. It has not gone unnoticed by the Department that the two sets of issues commented upon most frequently by Committee members and stakeholders relate to the membership of ESA and the various aspects of employment arrangements, particularly the need for clarity, certainty and a challenge mechanism around the respective roles of boards of governors and the ESA.

The Department has noted that and has advised the Minister that those issues are raised frequently, and by a very broad range of stakeholders. Therefore, on those matters in particular, and on any other aspect of the Bill, the Minister would welcome and take seriously any view from the Committee.

**Mr O'Dowd:** Will the model schemes produced by ESA, which boards of governors may adopt, if they so wish, be produced in consultation with the trade unions?

**Mr Stewart:** Yes, we want to consult the trade union movement on those schemes, and it is very important that the Department does so. One of NIPSA's concerns was that, through this mechanism, we would somehow disassemble the central negotiating arrangements that have been in place for years and that ensure consistency and equality of terms and conditions for staff across education. The Department absolutely would not want to do that.

The model schemes and the guidance produced by ESA will reflect the outcome of central negotiations and agreements between the employer — the ESA — and trade unions. We expect and require schools



to give effect to those agreements in their schemes of employment and management, and we would certainly do so in the model schemes.

**The Deputy Chairperson:** Gentlemen, thank you again for appearing before us. No doubt we will see you again in the near future.



# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

## COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION

6 May 2009

## EDUCATION BILL (NIA 3/08)

### Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Dominic Bradley (Deputy Chairperson)

Mr Tom Elliott

Mr Trevor Lunn

Mr Nelson McCausland

Mr Basil McCrea

Miss Michelle McIlveen

Mr John O'Dowd

Mrs Michelle O'Neill

Mr Edwin Poots

### Witnesses:

Ms Frances Donnelly	} Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education
Ms Lorna McAlpine	
Mr Michael Wardlow	

Mr Liam Mac Giolla Mheana	} Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta
Mr Seán Ó Coinn	
Mr Caoimhín Ó Peatáin	

Mr Chris Stewart	} Department of Education
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**The Chairperson (Mr Storey):** Michael, Frances and Lorna; from the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIF) you are very welcome. I invite you to make a presentation and members will ask questions about it. Papers on this topic are in members' packs.

**Mr Michael Wardlow (Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education):** I have attended the Committee several times. However, I am not sure whether, as we work through this, you want us to stop when a question arises, or whether you want us to run straight through our presentation and answer questions at the end. What is easiest for you?

**The Chairperson:** The practice to date has been that witnesses make a presentation and members ask their questions afterwards.

**Mr Wardlow:** Members have received our short written presentation. We propose to elaborate on a few points in the ten minutes available. My two colleagues will speak on two specific areas. Some of our points are reports or comments, but there are one or two areas on which we would like to focus. As we understand it, there will be a second Education Bill. We have some questions that may be dealt with in greater detail as that second Bill is brought forward. We will raise those issues as headlines.

Since the start of this process, we have welcomed the opportunity for educational reform. Whatever we think about the education and skills authority (ESA) and its duties, the fact that there will be one body to co-ordinate and supervise the long overdue review of education is to be welcomed. We also welcome the fact that there will be a number of sectoral support bodies. Parental choice is at the core of the education system, and it is important that the schools that represent the sectors have support bodies to work alongside them, particularly as much of what is represented in those schools falls under the term "ethos". We are glad that the council will be one of those sectoral support bodies, and we look forward to seeing what the business case is and how it will work out for the 60 schools involved.

It is good that the process is being dealt with equitably. We thank the civil servants, Chris Stewart and others, who have worked with us to ensure that everything is done equitably. We do not want people to feel that some are better off and some worse off in this process.

As to general observations, we are supportive of the concept of an education and skills authority. We welcome that it will act as a single employing and administrative body to carry out the policy implications of education. That said, we have one or two concerns about its functions and will raise them as we work through the process. However, in broad principle, we welcome it.

At the outset, I must point out that the Government have a duty under the Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 to encourage and facilitate integrated schools and, latterly, Irish-medium schools. We want that duty to be made clearer, and we will come back to that issue later. At present, it is taken for granted that the 1989 Order will not change and that the duty to encourage and facilitate will continue to fall on the Department. We will return to how we would like to see that evidenced by the ESA.

We also like the idea of an education advisory forum with equal representation that is presented in a number of papers, particularly policy paper 19. Our organisation, in common with others, is driven by parental demand. The very fact that we are engaging

with a broader constituency and helping to advise on policy is important.

I must flag up that a third of a million people in our education system are under the age of 18, so young people should have some level of representation on that forum. I can advocate for young people, but I cannot speak on their behalf. The best people to represent young people and to voice their needs are young people themselves. As the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) shows, that can be done. However that forum is structured, the questioning voice of young people must not be lost. They have a right to be consulted on everything that affects them under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), and that must not be just lip service. I want to see those rights at the core of education policy.

It is unfortunate that the duty to transform — in other words, for schools to opt to change their status — is, at present, often only one-way. We accepted in earlier discussions that schools can transform to become integrated but cannot transform from being controlled to Catholic maintained, which seems bizarre when there is a number of controlled schools of a majority-Catholic nature. If they wanted to become Catholic maintained schools, for whatever reason, they cannot do it by law.

I believe that the Bill presents a good opportunity to review the legislation around transformation. We are not sure what that will look like, but we guess is that it will be included in the second Bill. When the education boards go, the legislation that was introduced to allow transformation to take place must be amended. We will be interested to see how that will work, because we envisage that most growth in the integrated sector will come about through transforming schools and more sharing.

Those are my straightforward, specific comments. Lorna will speak about the employing authority, and Frances will then discuss the training function.

**Ms Lorna McAlpine (Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education):** We are very pleased that there will be a single employing authority and that all teaching and non-teaching staff will have the same terms and conditions. Roughly a third of our schools are controlled integrated schools and two-thirds are grant-maintained integrated schools. In their role as employers, those grant-maintained integrated schools have always set their own terms and conditions, which have generally mirrored those in the controlled and maintained sectors. However, money has not always been made readily available to deal with matters such as job evaluation. Consequently, some schools may have slightly different terms and conditions.

We look forward to trying to ensure that finance is available for job evaluation and harmonisation. Thought must be given to how best to roll out that process in order to treat all staff equally under a single employing authority. It is also important to have an employment scheme in the sector, because we want the freedom to ensure that staff who are recruited maintain and support the ethos of integrated education.

**Mr Wardlow:** I was disappointed by the suggestion in some of the earlier papers that ethos is something that is specific to schools, and that there is no higher understanding of ethos. Organisations that regard themselves as ethos driven, such as ours, believe that there is an integrated ethos. That ethos may be applied differently in our 62 schools, but there is a core need to have it supported centrally. The appointment to a school of someone with a nodding acquaintance of ethos is wrong and should not happen.

In the past, the Department has nominated to boards of governors people who have had very little understanding of, let alone a belief in, integration. It does not help when people without a commitment to the integrated ethos are appointed to boards of governors. Although I speak for the integrated sector, the principle can be applied right across all sectors. If we are to protect, maintain and develop ethos, it is important that the stakeholders and the people who hold that in trust at least understand what that ethos is.

**Ms Frances Donnelly (Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education):** I will discuss ethos in relation to training and delivery. The ESA will be responsible for training and advisory functions for all schools. The Committee may be aware that ethos is a central element of the Every School a Good School policy. Moreover, it is considered critical to school improvement. Therefore, we want the ESA to identify how it will support schools in their development of ethos.

There should be an acceptance that sectoral support bodies have many years' expertise in, and experience of, dealing with efficiency and effectiveness, particularly in developing ethos and supporting staff. In the future, the ESA should have regard to that fact in order to avoid duplication across the agencies. There are 60 integrated schools, and we will continue to work with them to develop specific training. Furthermore, it provides an opportunity for increased partnership, because, as schools collaborate more and move into partnerships, the idea of ethos and developing support for delivering education in a more diverse environment will be significant. We must ensure that the sectoral support bodies do not carry out functions that are part of the ESA's obligations.

**Mr Wardlow:** I will make some concluding comments, including a couple of observations, and I will outline two areas about which we are concerned.



We welcome the fact that, under clause 36, part-time teachers will now be eligible to be on governing bodies. That is reasonable progress. Clause 16 mentions that the ESA will manage schools' capital expenditure — however that is routed through the Strategic Investment Board and the Assembly, it is important to maintain principles of equity. The integrated sector has existed since 1981 only, and 40 of the 60 schools had to prove their viability before the Department approved them. That has meant that a charity has taken a loan of £20 million a year for the past 10 years. That has placed a charitable body in a precarious situation.

We have been told that that is the price that we must pay for front-loading integration. In fact, the problem is that there is no integrated choice, because 5,000 people have been turned away in the past seven years. NICIE contends that there is now an opportunity to consider the capital estate on an equitable basis and, rather than make integrated schools take a different route to Irish-language schools, controlled schools and maintained schools, we should be treated the same. That will not happen unless real area-based planning, as recommended by George Bain, is placed at the core of the proposals.

At the minute, I am involved in area-based planning that considers curriculum entitlement for children after the age of 14, but that is not the same thing. We believe that there is an opportunity to not only reinforce the vision or to tinker around the edges, but to give significant consideration to the educational estate, which has too many schools and 50,000 spare places. It should not simply be a knee-jerk reaction; we must look ahead and consider what the school estate should be in the context of future parental demand.

Clause 23 lists the duties of the Department for Employment and Learning and the Department of Education. The duty to encourage and facilitate integrated education, which is outlined in the 1989 Order, is not included. I want to ensure that the Department still has such a duty and a process to confirm that it delivers on it. That duty may be changed in the future. However, two statutory duties exist — one to promote the Irish language and one to promote integration. NICIE wants to ensure that the Department's duty remains and that it is audited.

We are concerned that there is no mention of a duty on either Department to promote community or good relations — as we would have referred to in the past — or a shared future. I was a member of the Towards a Culture of Tolerance: Integrating Education working group, through which all education parties signed up to placing a culture of tolerance at the core of education. I do not accept that that should be displaced by an equality agenda, because equality and community relations and cohesion sit together. Unless equity and diversity are viewed as being interdependent in

schools, division is simply being reinforced. We reflect the fact that the duty to encourage shared education — not necessarily through integration but through the possibility of a more fluid system and the promotion of good community relations with equality — is not there.

We are concerned by the fact that politicians will make up the majority of the board of the ESA. Such a situation is not part of our operating principle. Partly because of our history, and partly because of where education sits, the ESA should not have a majority of politicians on its board. Even the fact that the education advisory forum is, in a sense, non-political does not take away from the fact that the people who will govern the ESA will come from political backgrounds.

If the ESA board members react in a similar way to the way in which the Committee has done, that would be a different situation. I have never seen an orange or a green card being played at this Committee. I do not say that simply as a compliment; I think that things have moved on. However, there is still a huge stasis in education that must be dealt with outside party politics. We do not support the ESA starting out with politicians being a majority on its board, and we want that to be addressed.

We welcome the fact that the board members will be paid. Our organisation has 62 schools, each of which has between 12 and 16 board members who do the job voluntarily, as does every member of every one of the boards of the 1,300 schools here. That is unseen money that goes into the system, and we think that people should be paid to sit on the board.

In conclusion, we are not clear about some aspects of the Bill. We are not clear on how a school will transform to integrated status in the future, how boards of governors will be constituted in the future now that the Transferor Representatives' Council (TRC) will have the right to nominate once again and how the capital estate will be developed and planned. Currently, we are positively disposed to the ESA, and, apart from the reservations that we have raised, we support the Bill.

**The Chairperson:** I thank Michael, Lorna and Frances.

Given that the aim of the Minister and the Department is to have equality across the education sector and that Northern Ireland has a diverse education provision, is it any longer sustainable to have two elements of that educational provision protected and promoted to the disadvantage of the rest? You referred to the 1989 Order, and the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 also makes reference to those sectors. Every time that this Committee has met since we began to consider the Bill, it has been said that we are seeking equality and that we will achieve that. It is good that your organisation is giving evidence,

followed by Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (GnaG). How do you explain the position to the other sectors that feel that they are not treated equitably in the way that, under legislation, the integrated sector and the Irish-medium sector are? The process is about sharing, moving on and not playing orange and green cards. It is about everyone aspiring to treat everyone equally. Unfortunately, an 'Animal Farm' situation exists, because when it comes down to the nitty-gritty, people are not really being open about how equal they want everyone to be treated.

**Mr Wardlow:** I shall answer for the integrated education sector. Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG) will give evidence later, and there is an issue over the Irish language being tied into the Good Friday/ Belfast Agreement, albeit under the 1998 Education Order as well. Our position is slightly different.

The process is about equality of outcome. We need to see how that can be achieved. It may be that, as was the case with employment for a time, some legislative framework is necessary — in that instance, positive discrimination was needed to enhance women's employment opportunities. Without legislation, women would not now be in the place that they are now. Unfortunately, a legislative framework is required to achieve equality of outcome for parents who want Irish-language or integrated schools. I hope that, one day, the need for that will go, and I hope that, one day, parents will have the right to choose the type of education that they want.

The difference for integrated schools is that, since the establishment of the existing system in 1921 and its division in the 1930s and 1940s, there is now a system that divides seven ways. One third of a million children are divided seven ways: Protestant and Catholic, selective and non-selective, boys and girls, and everybody else. That is bizarre. I would not have started from this position, but that is the position that we are in.

The problem is that the option of attending integrated schools has been available only since 1981, not 1921. We have had to catch up on those 60 years. I would love to see the day when the legislation is no longer required, but there must be equality of outcome and of access, which is not the case at the moment. Despite the fact that there are declining rolls, and 50,000 spare places, the numbers of pupils at integrated schools have increased every year since 1981. We have turned 5,000 children away in the last seven years, and almost 1,000 last year. At the moment, there are not enough places for parents who wish to send their children to integrated schools.

Until we develop a system of area-based planning that will allow us to carry out community audits, our suggestion is that we go to communities and ask them what they want. That has been done in Omagh, and it

has been proven that if one does a bit of polling and one works with people and explains to them what can be, it is possible to create the future. If area-based planning were undertaken, with areas being asked to consider what type of school they want, and if we were able to consider how to reach the situation in the next 10 years whereby parents who want Irish-language schools or integrated schools have that choice, then perhaps we would not need the legislation any more. However, I fear that, until there is equality of outcome, that will not be the case.

**The Chairperson:** How do you square that with the fact that, having had that provision available to parents, one sector is still being treated differently from another? I want to link that with your view that there is a need for amendments to the transformation legislation. Since the creation of integrated schools, there has been transformation in one way only — from controlled to integrated. There has never been a transformation from a maintained school to an integrated school, despite the fact that there has been provision and opportunity for that.

There was a campaign to transform one particular school — I will not name it — and when the transformation took place the people who had led that transformation sent their children to a controlled school. That school went through turmoil, and both the school and the community were divided. That is not good for education. There comes a time when one has to say that although one is supportive of parental choice, one is also supportive of parental responsibility. Why have schools in the maintained sector, for example, not been encouraged to move from maintained to controlled status? Lorna made reference to some figures earlier. Did you say that there are maintained integrated schools?

**Ms McAlpine:** There are grant-maintained integrated schools, such as the greenfield site integrated schools and Lagan College.

**The Chairperson:** Those are not maintained schools that have transformed; they are new schools.

**Ms McAlpine:** Yes, where transformation was not possible or was not seen as an option in the local area.

**Mr Wardlow:** Very simply, if we lack a strategic context we will not get strategic outcomes. There is no planning for provision of integrated schools. We do not actually know how many people want them. What has happened in the past is that a school faced with closure, or looking down the line at the possibility of the opening of a new integrated school, will often consider transformation. That is not the way in which transformation should be done. It has never been our declared intention. In fact, we have set our faces against transformation as a way to save closures. That is not the way to do it, but that will be the case until there is a proactive planning context in which we go into an area before schools start to look at their own future.

Several schools recently approached our organisation when closure notices were issued, expecting that they would somehow be welcome to transform. If those same schools had attempted to plan integration five years ago, we could have delivered integrated outcomes without community disharmony. There is a lot of evidence about schools that have gone down that route. I am asking that, when we are considering area-based planning, the wishes of the community be considered. For example, our experience in Omagh was that when parents were offered an option to consider, they often did not know that it was available to them. Parents are very creative.

In relation to the Catholic maintained sector, a policy paper was sent to the Towards a Culture of Tolerance: Integrating Education working group, which is probably still on record, stating that the nature of Catholic education is such that a Catholic school is held in trust by the trustees, in perpetuity, for the Catholic community in that parish. The parents, therefore, do not have the right to vote to change the nature of that school, because that school is held in trust as opposed to being in some way democratically owned by the parents.

The legislation exists for such changes to happen in the controlled integrated sector, and a controlled school can become a hybrid controlled integrated school. It does not have to jump to become a fully autonomous grant-maintained school. In the Catholic sector, as I understand it, for a Catholic maintained school to become an integrated school, the only route open to it would be to become a grant-maintained integrated school — and, by its nature, therefore, it would no longer be a Catholic school.

Therefore, one of the arguments is that the same legislation does not exist: there is not an in-between Catholic integrated school. However, the other issue, as I understand it, is that the trustees would say that it does not lie in a parent's gift to vote through a transformation process. That gift lies with the trustees.

That may or may not be the case. We have had requests from the parents of children at Catholic schools, and even from some teachers, who have talked to us about transformation. We would be willing to work with any school that comes to us — whether a selective or non-selective school, a boys' or girls' school, or a Catholic or Irish-language school — to see how we could creatively do something. However, the problem is that the system is piecemeal; it is a patchwork.

We have grant-maintained schools only because parents created them, and Brian Mawhinney approved them under the 1989 Order. It was not the Department's idea. We are constantly trying to create new methods, whether integrating education with 80 schools or developing a Kitemark for sharing, which we would

love the Department and the Education and Training Inspectorate to take forward.

In its shared future, Northern Ireland has to have a much more fluid education system. Integrated education is, we believe, an outcome as well as a school type, and as an outcome it can be delivered by other schools. Therefore, why do we not begin to look at the issue in a new and creative way, and to stop the, perhaps political, argument about a school saying that it cannot transform.

The council has one small school, which I will not name, in an area with a Protestant minority. That school felt that it could not transform, but wanted to embrace integration. It has now changed its board of governors and been accepted into membership of the council, although it is not a transformed school. We accept that what that school does is integrated education. That is the sort of creativity that can take place when people engage. However, we do not want schools coming to us as a last choice, because that delivers precisely the angst in the Protestant community, and among the transferors, that you have outlined.

**The Chairperson:** Before opening the discussion to members, I will ask one final question about the assurances that the council would need about the right of boards of governors to hire and fire. What would be the nature of those assurances?

**Ms McAlpine:** The issue is more about the right to recruit and so forth being retained in the particular board of governors rather than being overseen by the ESA, and being second-guessed, for want of a better expression, by the ESA. That is linked to the ability to recruit someone who is committed to the principles of integrated education, and who will, therefore, be working in that context with children in the classroom.

**Mr Wardlow:** It is like the situation with the teachers' appointment committee. We do not want to get into a situation of having three principals and saying, "Take your pick." We want to retain the autonomy of all boards of governors to hire and fire staff. If the ESA becomes the employing authority in the sense of holding the conditions of contract and ensuring that that contract is carried through and that equity and the legal requirements are maintained, we do not want it being able to oversee or second-guess whether a teacher is dismissed, moved or suspended. That right should be retained by the local school.

**Mr D Bradley:** Good morning. Mention was made of the lack of reference in the Bill to good relations or community relations, but clause 2 states:

"It shall be the duty of ESA (so far as its powers extend)—

(a) to contribute towards the spiritual, moral, cultural, social, intellectual and physical development of children".



Does that not imply that if children develop in that way, they would be well-disposed towards good relations with each other and with other communities?

**Mr Wardlow:** If I may reflect Duncan Morrow's words, we have shopped with each other for years and we still do not like each other. Simply because we are together does not necessarily guarantee any outcome.

It is important that the approach is holistic in body, mind and spirit, and we welcome that. Our fear is that the absence of a mention of good relations or community relations will mean that they will not be seen in the DNA.

I am reflecting reality. We fear that the shared and better future is being neglected. For instance, a report on the cost of division was produced by Deloitte, but it seems to have gone; 'A Shared Future' seems to have gone; the 30 recommendations in the Bain Report on sharing seem to have gone. I am no longer sure what our thinking on a shared and better future is.

I hear people say that if jobs are brought in, our problems might go away. That is trite. We must address the past and consider how good community relations can be built. It is not just about Protestants and Catholics; it is about people of mixed race and other faiths; and about the 14% of people in the North or Northern Ireland who, in the most recent census, said that they were not Christians. They do not want to be labelled Protestant or Catholic; we have a duty to ask what community cohesion looks like.

If it is not mentioned, Dominic, I am afraid that it will go subterranean.

**Mr D Bradley:** Would clause 2 be the appropriate place for its inclusion?

**Mr Wardlow:** A possible solution would be to include a provision such as "and to promote a culture of tolerance". There are ways of including a form of words; if you like, we will come back to you with a suggestion.

**Mr D Bradley:** Your submission states:

"In our view the support for schools cannot be fragmented and so we would ask that this area of ESA's work is carried out to the benefit of all schools of all sectors, in a way that uses existing expertise and experience to the best impact. This may be best facilitated through buying in of existing expertise."

How would that be facilitated? People usually buy in expertise if they are unhappy with the existing expertise. There seems to be a contradiction. For instance, one of the arguments that the voluntary grammar schools use in defence of the voluntary principle is that, through it, they can buy in better expertise, as they see it, than is available through the curriculum advisory and support services (CASS) if they are not happy with existing expertise — and they claim that they have not been in the past.

**Ms Donnelly:** I do not think that it is a case of their being dissatisfied; rather, it is a case of CASS not being geared to deliver the type of support necessary for ethos development in integrated schools. I can only speak for the expertise provided by NICIE, which is geared towards developing teacher skills for education for diversity, and I referred earlier to the opportunity to extend that to all teachers. If we continue down the road of greater collaboration and partnerships, teachers will find themselves in more diverse settings for which they are not prepared; they do not have the skills to deliver meaningful education in a diverse environment. We encounter many teachers who are enthusiastic about their work; they want to make a difference, but they do not have the skills to raise or manage sensitive or contentious issues or manage diversity in their classrooms because they do not have the required training.

That is what I think is meant by expertise; I do not think that it referred to a dissatisfaction with CASS. CASS does a good job in supporting curriculum development but not ethos development.

**Mr Wardlow:** The evidence from Frances's statement is not simply anecdotal. Interesting reflections arose from research that was carried out at Queen's University as part of the shared education project. Teachers said that they had not realised that collaboration was so hard; they were not prepared for it and had not been trained for it. It is an education to read the report from the teachers and governors of schools that engaged in collaboration. They had significant sums of money to help them, but, almost to a school, they said that they had not realised that getting together would be so hard.

Now is a good opportunity to stop fragmentation and to say that if expertise exists in other places, we should use it. For instance, we run validated training courses that are attended by Police Service officials, youth workers and teachers. They journey together over weekends in training, and they gain an Open College Network (OCN) qualification in diversity. We do not need to reinvent the wheel. We are not alone; many people do this. This is a good time to look at the available training and at how we can make best use of it rather than reinventing the wheel.

**Mr D Bradley:** If schools need that service, surely it should be provided by the support and back-up services of the ESA.

**Mr Wardlow:** The ESA could outsource that function. Why not do that rather than have the ESA duplicate the function? It is common for Departments to outsource. They can often outsource cheaply because it may be only for a limited period or because the salaries of the people delivering the service may be different from those of civil servants. Let us look at value for money, and let us explore how the ESA can provide the function without having everything at the



centre. One way of doing that may be to outsource our work collegiately or in partnership with other bodies.

**Mr D Bradley:** Are you not in danger of diluting the economies of scale that the ESA is supposed to achieve and through which savings are to be created?

**Mr Wardlow:** It depends on how it is done. There may be duplication if there is a centre from which spokes fly out all over the place. However, surely the ESA's entire purpose is not to do everything itself. Its purpose is partly to co-ordinate; otherwise, the ESA would provide ethos support. We are simply saying that there should be an assessment of how training can be done. On one hand, most of it could be done centrally by people being co-opted or seconded to the ESA; on the other, people who are already carrying out training may be outsourced to continue doing it.

**Mr Elliott:** Thank you for your presentation. It was good to hear your arguments, even though I may not necessarily agree with all of them. Michael, you talked about the different sectors and mentioned the Protestant and Catholic sectors. Do you classify one education sector as the Protestant sector?

**Mr Wardlow:** No; absolutely not. I will read the minutes of the meeting, but I am sure that I did not say that; if I did, I was wrong. I think that I said "controlled", but let me clarify. We understand that there is a Catholic maintained sector, a controlled sector that is majority Protestant, an integrated sector, an Irish-medium sector and other sectors such as freestanding Christian schools, special schools and so on. I apologise if that —

**Mr Elliott:** Thank you for that clarification. Ethos was mentioned a couple of times in your presentation. How is the ethos of integrated education different from that of the controlled sector? I have visited integrated schools, and I wonder how and where you see a difference from controlled schools.

**Mr Wardlow:** The first thing is the forensic side, which is the general understanding that any school that is moving towards sharing, whether it is controlled or grant-maintained, will embrace an integrated ethos; that is partly supported by the mechanisms in the school. The management board and the teaching staff will reflect the two traditions as much as they can, and the boards of governors will certainly do that. The student intake will include a minimum of 30% of the minority tradition; other schools do not have the ability or right to ensure that. The forensic element means that a pupil is unlikely to be in a classroom in which he or she is in a minority of less than 30%.

**Mr Elliott:** Just because boards of governors reflect the two traditions does not mean that the school and its teachers will reflect them.

**Mr Wardlow:** That is the forensic side or the skeleton. Being born in McDonald's does not make

you a hamburger. In the same way, something will not happen just because people of different traditions sit around a table.

The second element is how a school's policies reflect our respective traditions. In many integrated schools, young people are involved in the writing of policies on issues such as discipline, uniform, flags and emblems. Young people and parents have a right to be, and are, involved in helping to develop those policies. A school's ethos is, in many ways, set by the visual nature of the school, and parents and children from integrated schools have a huge democratic buy-in on the school's name, badge and other visual aspects.

The third thing is additional curricular activities. Children who have never played traditional British or Irish sports or studied the Ulster-Scots or Irish languages are open to new opportunities. Those activities are often contained in the hidden or added curriculum. The last thing is a wider promotion of integration. People ask about the difference between a maths class in an integrated school and one in a non-integrated school. It is not that a teacher says that one number is Catholic and another number is Protestant, although someone once made that joke to us; it is about respect, and that should be the same in every school. I do not disagree with you, but when those things are added together —

**Mr Elliott:** Are you saying that that is not the case in every school?

**Mr Wardlow:** No; not at all. It is not simply because we want people to love one another — that is not true — however, we are openly and avowedly anti-sectarian. Our teachers are trained to deal with contentious issues, not to hide them. It is our experience that, in some schools that have transformed to integrated status, that was not what they did before. Many teachers say that that is not the reason that they are in education, and there is an argument that that may be the case. However, we are saying that we will deal with hard issues openly. Those are not just Protestant/Catholic issues; there are issues about how language and identity are viewed.

It is the amalgam of how a school is constructed, its student intake, policies and hidden curriculum; its atmosphere is also a factor. Our ethos support will share models of good practice; how to teach in and construct a classroom and how to allow parents' and pupils' voices to be heard. It is all those things. I cannot write you an integrated formula, because I have 62 of them. However, at the core of our schools is a belief that difference should be out in the open and discussed.

**Mr Elliott:** Like most members, I am aware of controlled schools that have sizeable mixed religion and race cohorts. One controlled school in my

constituency now probably has a majority of non-locals; it manages and is developing extremely well. Therefore, could the ESA bring the integrated sector into the controlled sector?

**Mr Wardlow:** No. In 1921, Lord Londonderry made a suggestion that politicians and Church leaders did not accept. We cannot turn the clock back and say that there should be one form of school. Whether we like it or not, the majority on the boards of governors of controlled schools is from a Protestant tradition. That has a certain perception for non-Protestants, not just for Catholics but for other children.

**Mr Elliott:** It does not stop schools in many areas attracting many from the Roman Catholic tradition.

**Mr Wardlow:** Absolutely not — I do not disagree with you; I am simply saying that it is a question of perceptions. Some controlled schools that we work with say that they do not want to become controlled-integrated; they feel that there is a loss of Protestantism and, some have said, too much movement towards greenness. When we investigate it, part of it stems from a lack of a consistent, thoroughgoing Protestant ethos and identity — there is not one. There are 106 Protestant denominations in the North of Ireland or Northern Ireland and one Catholic one, so how do we say what a Protestant ethos is? The transferors struggle with that, and they have issued an ethos document. We are very comfortable to work with schools, such as the school I talked about earlier, which was a controlled school that wants to become integrated but which does not want to transform; it is delivering an integrated outcome.

Therefore, I agree with you. The more shared education we have, whether it is called integrated or not, the better. We are not here to make a pitch for forced integration; it did not work in America; we are for voluntarism. However, the problem is that there is not equality of outcome.

**Ms Donnelly:** Michael mentioned the Kitemark, or charter mark, on which we are working. It is notoriously difficult to describe what is meant by ethos: sometimes it is a feeling that a person gets when they go through a school's doors. The Kitemark is an attempt by our sector to define what an integrated school looks like and how it manifests its ethos. We have arrived at a Kitemark, which we are piloting. However, that is not exclusive to the integrated sector. As Michael said, if schools with mixed enrolments feel that they can achieve the Kitemark, they can do so without having to hang the title "integrated" on the school gates. We hope to work with many schools in future that can show that the high-quality education that they provide and which every child deserves is integrated.

**Mr O'Dowd:** Thank you for your presentation. You talked about the need for a shared future and a shared

society, but you said that it is not a good idea that elected politicians be the majority on the ESA. If this society is to move forward — and I think that it is moving forward — we politicians must learn to work together, and we have done that successfully and have shown leadership. Why should we not form the majority on a board that will direct the second-largest budget in our society?

**Mr Wardlow:** You asked a direct question, and I will answer you frankly. Four of the nine governors of the board of governors of a controlled school come from the Churches; churchmen may not have a majority, but that does not mean that they do not have influence. We would be happy for a large minority of politicians to be on the membership of the ESA, as we believe that that would send out the best message. However, politicians should not form the majority of members. I am responding frankly to you, John.

We have supported devolved government from day one. Even a few years ago, people would not have believed what is happening in Northern Ireland today; it is a privilege to be here in a joint group. However, perhaps it could create a certain suspicion among people about the new organisation if a majority of its members were politicians; people might question the democracy behind that decision.

A gesture by politicians to agree to take four of the nine seats would not be wasted. We do not want politicians to be absent; however, at the present time it could send out the wrong message if they were to dominate the new body; although we could be mistaken.

**Mr O'Dowd:** It could send out the wrong message to dismiss politicians in such a manner; it suggests that they are not to be trusted with education or health. Society elects or does not elect its politicians; therefore if we are to democratise society, they have to be involved in all sectors — although not, of course, to the exclusion of others. There is a question mark over the proposed number of people on the ESA; we must see whether the ESA can be broadened to include other sectors. We will agree to disagree on that.

I found your comment on the educational advisory forum and the participation of young people on it interesting. You said that NICIE has young people involved — I am sorry; have I misinterpreted you?

**Mr Wardlow:** It is not NICIE; it is the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People.

**Mr O'Dowd:** Have you thought through how young people will be involved in the forum? How will you work that out?

**Mr Wardlow:** My background is in youth work, and I have worked in several countries. Everywhere that I have worked, I have had to speak on behalf of

young people, even though I am no longer a young person. That might have passed you by, but it is the case. *[Laughter.]*

Young people have the right to be consulted on everything that affects them; they have a right not only to have their voice heard, but to have it demonstrated to them how their views are dealt with. It does not mean that you have to do what they say, but you have to tell them: this is what we heard you say; this is why we did it or why we did not do it, and we will continue to engage with you.

There are various ways of doing that. For example, one of our schools has two young people on its board of governors; they sit in on the first hour of meetings and take part in everything that happens. Young people are involved in the appointment of the Commissioner for Children and Young People; and they are involved now in the appointment of many youth workers across Northern Ireland. To claim to know what young people want and to speak on their behalf is not fair; the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child does not allow it. Tokenism is also wrong. To stick two young people on a board simply because you can tick a box is also wrong. That needs to be thought through.

More important is the process by which young people are consulted on policy matters. It is less important if they are on the board than that they are fully consulted and that their voice is not only heard but listened to and acted on in every policy imperative. That applies even to young children. Queens's University has shown that one can deal with children as young as four years of age to find out what they think and how they act. Talking to young people would help us to make progress in the debate on what should be done at 11 years of age. I have no simple answer for you, John, but we need a mechanism for doing that.

**Mrs M Bradley:** Your letter of 20 February refers to clause 16,:

"ESA to pay capital grants to voluntary and grant-maintained integrated schools".

You say:

"We would hope that by this transfer, all schools will now be treated equally in terms of capital build and estate provision."

Did you find that integrated schools were not treated in the same way as other schools?

**Mr Wardlow:** Absolutely. I say that because of the nature of the development of integrated schools, not that the Department acted inequitably towards us.

The Department has a statutory role to encourage and facilitate, and that is fulfilled by our working with parent groups or with transforming schools. A new integrated school is not allowed any capital development until it proves that it is viable; in other words, until it meets the criteria. That can take up to

five years. To get to that stage, we need to borrow money from the bank to buy the site and to put mobile classrooms on it; in any one year that can cost us £20 million. That is not Government money; we take the risk, as a charity, for that, and our sister organisation provides a guarantee. That does not happen anywhere else, and it is the nature of how integrated schools react and come out of the woodwork. I agree with Mervyn on that point. It is a patchwork approach, and it cannot continue.

If we were to consider the type of provision that we would like in Antrim, for example, we could do it through area-based planning and deliberation, which would involve a five- to 10-year plan during which time existing schools could be transformed. I am using that as a broad term to deal with the number of student places in response to what that local community would like available for it. It would remove the need to build ad hoc schools or to fill spaces with mobile classrooms. Unfortunately, that is where we are coming from, and it is more a criticism of the lack of planning for integration rather than the Government deliberately treating us unequally.

**The Chairperson:** Is club banking unfair and unequitable?

**Mr Wardlow:** Yes. The accounting officer of a small charity should never have had to carry £20 million of borrowing every year.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you very much for your presentations; they were very useful. You are welcome to stay for the Department's response; we can make it available to you before you leave.

**Mr Wardlow:** Thank you very much. All the best for the rest of the day.

**The Chairperson:** We will move on to the presentation from Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta. Good morning, gentlemen; you are very welcome. Please make your presentation to the Committee and then members will ask you questions on it.

**Mr Caoimhín Ó Peatáin (Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta):** I am the vice-chairman of Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta. On behalf of the comhairle, I thank the Committee for the invitation to make a submission. I introduce Liam Mac Giolla Mheana, who is one of our senior education officers; and Seán Ó Coinn, who is our chief executive. Seán will make our presentation this morning.

**Mr Seán Ó Coinn (Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta):** I want to offer apologies from Dr Mícheál Ó Duibh, who is our senior development officer. He is sick and is unable to be here today.

Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta is very supportive of the ESA; it is a very good idea and is a considerable opportunity for the education system in the North.



Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta seeks several amendments to the Bill to effect parity of treatment for the Irish-medium sector with other educational sectors. The changes primarily relate to elements of the Bill that we feel may weaken the linguistic ethos of Irish-medium schools. By ethos, we mean aspects of Irish-medium provision that encourage the use of Irish among pupils, thereby facilitating their acquisition of the language. More than 90% of children in Irish-medium schools come from non-Irish-speaking backgrounds.

We also seek to use the Education Bill to strengthen aspects of Irish-medium provision that, we feel, are poorly catered for in existing legislation.

In immersion education pupils are educated through a second or additional language; in our case that is Irish. Immersion education is an internationally recognised methodology and has been proven beyond doubt by respected educationalists to provide pupils with significant educational benefits in numeracy, science and literacy in their first and second languages, as well as offering them the opportunity to acquire their additional language. Those benefits are achieved through pupils being given access to a strong second-language ethos in their schools. A weakening of that linguistic ethos could have a negative effect on the educational benefits, including — although not exclusively so — the children's acquisition of Irish.

Our first proposed amendment is to include a reference to Irish-medium education in clause 2, as that clause deals with the functions and general duties of the ESA concerning its role in providing support for Irish-medium education. The Belfast Agreement refers specifically to the role of the Department of Education in respect of Irish-medium education, and it is important that that duty be reflected in the duties of the agencies of the Department of Education. In this case, we propose to bring most of the agencies of the Department under the umbrella of the ESA, and it is important that that duty be reflected there.

Our second proposed amendment relates to submitting authorities. We seek an amendment that will recognise the Irish-medium trustees as a submitting authority for the purposes of the submission of schemes of management and employment. According to that amendment, Irish-medium trustees would have a definitive role in approving schemes of management and employment in line with provisions in the Bill for the Catholic trustees.

The Bill acknowledges subsidiary roles to which the ESA must have regard in the discharge of its function, and it mentions areas such as the needs of industry, economy, society and the professions. We seek an amendment to require the ESA to have regard for the needs of Irish-medium pupils to be facilitated to use Irish in society beyond the confines of their schools.

We seek an amendment to the ESA's role in appointing governors. We propose that a requirement be placed on the ESA to have regard to the commitment of governor appointees to the maintenance of the Irish-medium ethos of Irish-medium schools and of Irish-medium units in English-medium schools. That provision already exists for the integrated sector and the controlled sector, whereby education and library boards are required to ensure that the people that they nominate to the boards of governors of those schools are committed to the schools' ethos. That is contained in the Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989, and such a rule relating to the Irish-medium sector should be included in the Education Bill.

We seek an amendment that will give a clear definition of what constitutes Irish-medium provision in a school and in part of a school. "Part of a school" is how an Irish-medium unit in an English-medium school is referred to in current legislation. The current definition of Irish-medium education is used for curricular purposes only and is ambiguous. We propose a definition in the Education Bill to allow for a designation of a school as an Irish-medium school or as a unit as part of a school by means of a scheme, for the purpose of education Orders, as well as for curricular purposes.

Representatives of the Irish-medium sector do not currently have a right to be consulted on development proposals that pertain to Irish-medium schools. However, those who represent, for example, the Catholic sector have a right to be consulted. We want an amendment that, in the interests of contributing to a strategic and effective approach to the future development of Irish-medium education, creates a right for representatives of the Irish-medium sector to be consulted on development proposals. Such a right would be similar to rights that Catholic trustees currently enjoy in existing legislation.

Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta is eager for its staff to be treated equally in relation to the likely impact of the review of public administration (RPA) on their employment. We are concerned that, because of the revised financial arrangements, staff will not have access to the same redeployment opportunities that arise from the development of the ESA that staff in other organisations will enjoy. Given that Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta is not a statutory body, we understand the significant difficulty in legislating for such provision in the Bill. However, we ask the Committee for its support to ensure that C na G staff are treated on a par with staff in other organisations in that regard.

**The Chairperson:** I will begin by asking the same question that I asked the representatives from the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education. Other sectors in the diverse educational provision in



Northern Ireland would consider the position of the Irish-medium and integrated sectors to be advantageous and privileged because of the duty to facilitate under the 1989 Order and the terms of the Belfast Agreement. Would a change that places all education providers on a par be detrimental to the promotion and protection of educating children in the Irish medium?

**Mr Ó Coinn:** One of the reasons that the Irish-medium sector is mentioned in the Belfast Agreement is because Irish-medium education is significantly underdeveloped in the North and parental access to it is limited. In large swathes of the North, parents have no access to any level of Irish-medium education. In most areas, they have no access to post-primary Irish-medium education. Therefore, it is important that an organisation such as ours is facilitated to encourage and assist parents to access Irish-medium education.

Apart from, perhaps, the integrated sector, that job is unnecessary in other sectors. It certainly is unnecessary in the controlled sector and the Catholic maintained sector, which have well-developed networks of provision throughout the North. For that reason, it is important that Irish-medium education is treated differently to other sectors so that we are allowed to continue to help parents to access Irish-medium education.

**The Chairperson:** I want to ask a question that does not specifically relate to the Bill, and you can provide one answer. This is the first time that you have visited the Committee when I have been present. The Education and Training Inspectorate's 'Chief Inspector's Report 2006-2008' highlighted the slowdown in growth in the sector in the past number of years. Has your organisation responded to the chief inspector's report, which raised several issues on standards and provisions that concerned people who have an interest in education? The chief inspector specifically mentioned the slowdown in growth, which he interpreted more as consolidation. That is not directly related to the Bill, but with regard to how the Committee looks at the future provision of education in Northern Ireland, it is important for us to have some understanding about whether you feel that that was an accurate reflection of the sector.

**Mr Ó Coinn:** We think that it was, and we are very encouraged by many of the comments in the chief inspector's report, particularly those about the achievements of young people. Recent statistics show that young people in Irish-medium education are achieving at least as well as, and in most cases better than, children in the English-medium sector in English and maths at level 5.

The consolidation is more by design rather than through a slowdown in demand in that a young sector such as ours recognises the importance of consolidation and of not running too far ahead of ourselves. It is

important that the system is allowed to keep pace with the need for development. The chief inspector's report mentioned the issue of leadership in our schools, and we recognise that. Most of the teachers in the Irish-medium sector who are available to become principals and vice-principals are very young, because it has been only a few years since people started to train to become teachers in the sector.

That is a growing pain of which we are conscious, and we will look to the ESA to support Irish-medium schools in those areas where we are experiencing growing pains as a result of the young age of our sector and our stage of development. We certainly hope and recognise that as our teachers get older and acquire more experience, those issues will gradually work their way out of the system.

**The Chairperson:** You refer to the ESA's duty to encourage and facilitate the development of Irish-medium education. What else do you feel needs to be in clause 2 to enhance what is being done in the sector, or to do more than is being done?

**Mr Ó Coinn:** We would like the clause to have the wording that there is a duty by proxy, so to speak, on the ESA to encourage and facilitate the development of Irish-medium education. The main reason for saying that is because, in the current system, there is no duty on agencies of the Department to encourage, facilitate or support Irish-medium education. Agencies such as the education and library boards do so through departmental funding that is earmarked for that purpose. That is an unhealthy situation to be in as we move to the introduction of the ESA.

We would like to see whatever funding is allocated to the ESA making provision for all the children in its care, and that would include the Irish-medium sector as an integral part of the whole education edifice. That sector is entitled, as of right, to provision from the ESA as part of its core functions, rather than to be set aside for earmarked funding from the Department.

**Mr D Bradley:** Maidin mhaith daoibh, agus tá fáilte romhaibh. Go raibh maith agaibh as an chur i láthair a rinne sibh. Tá cúpla ceist agam le cur oraibh. You are very welcome. I have a few questions, the first of which continues with the point that the Chairperson raised. Was it the experience of Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta in the past that as policies emerged from the Department and its agencies, cognisance was not being taken of Irish-medium education?

**Mr Ó Peatáin:** Some years ago, like yourself, I worked as a seconded teacher with the boards, at a time when Irish-medium education was at a very young stage. My experience was that certain board officers found that that form of education was something new to them — it had not been budgeted for and the boards did

not have specific personnel to deal with it. Consequently, they found it very difficult to cope with.

Schemes that the Department put in place were short term: a teacher was seconded for a year, perhaps two, to carry out a scheme. When the funding ran out and the scheme finished, the schools were left on their own. Sometimes the scheme was never properly wound up. Any work was very much carried out on an ad hoc basis. Our argument is that if that work were part of the ESA's duties from the outset, it would be a new start, and it would create a much happier situation than has existed in the past.

**Mr D Bradley:** One of your major concerns relates to promoting, maintaining and protecting the ethos of Irish-medium schools, and you have several proposals for doing that. One proposal is that the trustees of an Irish-medium school should be given the power to act as a submitting authority, comparable with the arrangement in the Catholic maintained sector. We put some of those ideas to the Department, and its officials said that such an amendment would have little effect, since, in most cases, the trustees and the boards of governors of Irish-medium schools are one and the same group.

**Mr Ó Coinn:** That is not the case in so far as Irish-medium trustees, as with trustees in other sectors, have nominating rights to boards of governors. We feel that the trustees of the Irish-medium sector, as with the trustees of any sector, are guardians of the type of education in their sector. They have a particular role to play, and that role does not involve interfering with the running of a school: that is the job of the board of governors and the staff in the school. The role of the trustee is to ensure the long-term welfare of the type of education that has been established and the long-term welfare of the school.

Like the Catholic sector, we feel that it is appropriate that important documents, such as schemes of management and employment, reflect the ethos of the school — whatever ethos means. To us it means the characteristics of a school that encourage and support young people in using their Irish language in school and choosing to use their Irish language when they are not in school. That is a lay definition, but it is that type of thing that we are concerned about. Although it is not an immediate concern, we feel that situations could arise whereby boards of governors or principals could make decisions regarding that aspect of an Irish-medium school because of the exigencies that might exist at a particular time — whether for funding reasons or because of external issues — and that those decisions might be detrimental to the environment in the Irish-medium school. It is the role of the trustee to ensure that that does not happen.

I will give an example of something that happened recently. Some parents were concerned about the

transfer issue and the fact that the new tests being developed by grammar schools would not be available in the Irish language, and they were placing pressure on Irish-medium principals to teach through English in year 7 so that the children would be familiar with answering questions in English. Thankfully, that has not happened, and both the Association for Quality Education and the Catholic Heads Association will be providing Irish-language versions of their tests.

However, principals and governors could be placed under a pressure that they are not able to sustain, and we feel that in such a scenario the role of the trustees is very significant and should therefore be recognised in our sector in the same way as it is recognised in the Catholic sector. It should also be recognised in the other sectors and with the transferors and controlled schools.

**Mr D Bradley:** To continue on the theme of ethos, in some of the Department's responses the Minister places great value on the ethos of all schools in all sectors. However, the departmental officials who have appeared before the Committee have told us that the ethos of a school or a sector cannot be precisely or easily defined and is therefore not appropriate for inclusion in legislation. They have said that the best vehicle for the protection, promotion and support of ethos is through the sectoral support bodies. Do you take issue with that, or do you see those bodies as being an appropriate means of protecting ethos?

**Mr Ó Coinn:** Although we recognise that it is virtually impossible to come up with a legal definition of a specific ethos, we feel that the concept of ethos is definable and can be legislated for. However, we feel that the way to support ethos in schools is through a sectoral support body, and that it is important that the ethos is agreed by schools and is not imposed on them. Ethos should be developed through a sectoral support body that has the support of its schools and that reflects that support back to schools in helping them to define what ethos means for them and how to give effect to it. That body must ensure that, as schools and boards of governors change, the ethos is maintained and protected in schools. We feel strongly that there is an important role for bodies to be able to do that for a specific ethos.

We do not believe that any single body can support ethos throughout all sectors, because no schools in other sectors will want to create an environment whereby use of the Irish language is encouraged and children are encouraged to choose to use the Irish language outside the school as their means of communication with one another. We would not expect other schools to have that type of ethos, so therefore who else would be able to support schools in developing such an ethos other than a sectoral support body?

**Mr Ó Peatáin:** The support mechanisms can be legislated for, and if they are in place, the chances are that the ethos will be in place. If they are not there, the ethos will not be there.

**Mr D Bradley:** So you believe that not only is a sectoral support body needed to underpin the ethos, but those other amendments must be made, too.

**Mr Ó Coinn:** The proposal is that the sectoral support bodies would be non-statutory bodies, just like Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta currently is. For that reason, our influence in Irish-medium schools is dependent on schools accepting that influence — they are not required to. However, people have rights in legislation, including the trustees of all schools. That is why we feel that as the bulwark against changes that might be detrimental to ethos, and so that ethos is not entirely dependent on the influence of a sectoral support body, other mechanisms must be built into the legislation to protect it. One such mechanism is the recognition of the Irish-medium trustees as having the same status as trustees in other sectors.

**Mr Lunn:** The amendments that you have asked for are generally fairly specific. Judging by the response that we have had from the Department, you will be given a listening ear by the Minister on some of them. You seek an amendment that requires ESA to have regard to the needs of Irish-medium pupils to be facilitated to use their Irish in society in general, beyond schools. Is it realistic for the Education Bill to try to dictate what happens beyond the school?

**Mr Ó Coinn:** The Bill already asks the ESA to have regard to a number of areas beyond the school in relation to industry, commerce and society in general. In that context, we also feel that the ESA should have regard to areas that are not specifically dealt with in the confines of school but that are well within the remit of education. Those include aspects such as youth provision, extended schools provision and areas in which schools have an interface with society and with the community. We seek an amendment for the ESA to have regard to the needs of Irish-medium children in society, which are different and additional to the needs of children who are being educated in the medium of English.

**Mr Lunn:** You made a couple of points that are not mentioned in your written presentation. The presentation mentions that the Bill will require the ESA to have regard to the needs of industry and the economy, but those needs do not depend on the language through which pupils are taught; they depend on the curriculum and what they are being taught. I do not quite understand the connection.

**Mr Ó Coinn:** The ESA will be required to have regard to certain needs other than its direct function, which is to support schools. Those needs include the

needs of society, industry and the economy, and we seek an amendment for it also to be required to have regard to the needs of young people in using their Irish outside the context of the school. That is as legitimate an issue for the ESA to have regard to as its having regard to industry, commerce and society in general.

**Mr Lunn:** I am not familiar with your medium, but do your pupils — particularly at primary level, where they seem to be more concentrated — use their Irish outside of school?

**Mr Ó Coinn:** They do, of course.

**Mr Lunn:** Do they use Irish in their normal play, conversation and social interaction?

**Mr Ó Coinn:** That develops as the children's proficiency develops and as they mature as young people. When young people have a choice between using the Irish language and the English language — for instance, when a number of Irish speakers are together — young people frequently use English. That is because of peer pressure or, perhaps, embarrassment. In addition to giving young people the skills to use Irish, Irish-medium education seeks to encourage young people to use their Irish so that it becomes part of their way of life. Ultimately, if they are lucky enough to marry and have children, those people will raise their children to speak Irish, and, in the longer term, that will contribute to the development of the number of people in society who speak the language.

**Mr Lunn:** I am not hostile to what you are trying to do; in fact, I am very supportive of it. However, I still cannot think of what the wording would be of the amendment that you seek.

**Mr Ó Coinn:** We have come up with a draft wording:

“and for the requirements of persons being educated through the medium of Irish.”

That amendment would be added to clause 26(1)(a), which contains two sub-paragraphs relating to the requirements that the ESA shall “have regard to”. We seek a third sub-paragraph, which would require the ESA to have regard to a person's education through the medium of Irish so that the ESA is facilitated to support, for instance, youth provision for young people and the development of an economic awareness of the Irish-language economy among young Irish-medium pupils. That would require the ESA to recognise that there is a growing group of young people in the sector with needs that are specific and different from the needs of young people in English-medium education. For example, there is a growing Irish-language economy, North and South, and the ESA should have regard to that when interacting with young people in the Irish-medium sector.



**Mr O'Dowd:** Fáilte romhaibh. The ethos issue has largely been covered, but some of your suggested amendments are avenues through which the concerns of the Catholic trustees, the Governing Bodies Association and the integrated sector can be answered, because many of the sectors that have appeared before the Committee are very concerned that their ethos is not protected in the Bill. It has already been commented on that it may be difficult to protect ethos in legislation, but the mechanisms to protect it may be easier sought out. Therefore, some of your suggestions would affect a number of sectors.

Will you outline your concerns about how staff who are employed by Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta will be protected in the transfer under the RPA?

**Mr Ó Coinn:** A number of matters has been agreed with the Department of Education, one of which is that staff in Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta and in NICIE who are involved in the discharge of direct services to schools will transfer to the new authority. That is fine, but our concern is for the employees who are left behind when that transfer has taken place. We may not have the financial capacity to retain all those remaining employees because of the new funding arrangements for sectoral support bodies.

Therefore, the question is: what will happen to them? Compulsory redundancy payments will be available to them, in the same way as they will be available for all the other organisations. However, as we understand it, staff in all the other organisations will be able to enjoy the opportunity of redeployment to the ESA, as such opportunities arise, but when our sector achieves its new funding provision, we will have to make compulsory redundancies immediately. In that instance, those staff members will not have access to redeployment opportunities in the ESA.

Therefore, on 1 January 2010, and thereafter, employees of the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment and the boards will have access to all the opportunities that are available in the ESA. Before the jobs go public, they will be advertised within the affected groups, as they are being called. However, employees in our sector will be made redundant. They will not have access to those jobs, unless they cannot be filled from within the affected groups. Therefore, employees will be treated just like any other member of the public who is seeking a job. They will have to wait until the jobs have been filled from within the pool before they can have access to them.

Our concern is that we are not being treated equally in that respect. We recognise that it is probably not something that can be covered in legislation. As far as we can gather, the matter is too complex. We are a non-statutory organisation, and this is about statutory

organisations. However, we ask that the Committee supports parity of treatment for our employees.

**Mr McCausland:** Thank you for your presentation. The Chairperson made a point earlier about the Belfast Agreement and the 1998 Order including a duty to encourage and facilitate the development of Irish-medium education. You then went on to explain that the outworking of that was the creation of your own organisation, which you see as a fulfilment of that.

In so far as there will be a support body, or whatever it may be called, for each of the sectors, that issue, in a sense, is resolved because there will be provision across the sectors. However, is the inclusion of a phrase that says that you encourage and facilitate the development of Irish-medium education in any way diminished and how would it be diminished? I was not clear on that point. If it were to say that it is the duty of the ESA to encourage and facilitate the development of all forms or all sectors of education, would that in any way take away from what you have?

**Mr Ó Coinn:** I had not thought about it. My initial reaction is that it probably would not.

**Mr McCausland:** It would address the issue of equality.

**Mr Ó Coinn:** I appreciate that. The issue that we seek to address — although being novices to legislation we are not entirely sure how one might address it — is if the ESA, because it does not have ear-marked funding to support children in Irish-medium schools, decided not to do certain things. We want to ensure that such a situation cannot arise and that the Irish-medium child has the same esteem, parity and rights in the education system as children in English-medium schools and that that is enshrined in legislation. I suspect that ensuring parity for all children — including children in Irish-medium education — should cover our concerns.

**Mr McCausland:** For many of us the issue is one of equality across sectors. Your point about something not being able to be done because money is not available happens in all sectors. If there were a form of words to create the same provisions for all sectors equally, that would be fine.

I was not clear on the point that Trevor Lunn made. Services outside the school were mentioned, including youth provision, which might or might not be outside the school; extended schools, which would be inside the schools; and awareness of the economy, although I would have thought that all schools would make children aware of economic opportunities. Apart from those three examples, which are probably provided for automatically, and certainly it is the responsibility of the school to make children aware of career opportunities — and you are right that there is an Irish-language



economy in parts of Northern Ireland — how would you address issues outside the school?

**Mr Ó Coinn:** It relates to the support and facilitation that the ESA would give to schools; for instance, to allow schools to make children aware of the economy and the needs of society. The ESA could do that without reference to the Irish-language economy, or perhaps in ignorance of the fact that there is an Irish-language economy; it would be appropriate to make such information available to children in Irish-medium schools. The ESA must have regard to issues other than the delivery of education — and we do not know why that was included in the Bill — therefore it should also have regard to the needs of Irish-medium children.

**Mr McCausland:** Children in other sectors see opportunities for economic advancement or economic potential in other fields. Why do we need to specify one sector?

**Mr Ó Coinn:** I presume that the default position would be that the ESA would have regard to the economy, commerce, employment and society in general through the medium of English. As the development of an Irish-language society and economy is relatively new and needs to be nurtured and supported, the danger is that the ESA might not have regard to it; and that its default position would be to have regard to those issues through the English language and that young people in the Irish-medium sector might be expected to benefit through English. However, they would not, because it would not be in the context of the available Irish-language opportunities.

**Mr McCausland:** I would have thought that the most natural thing would be for the Irish-language economy to work with Irish-medium schools and the children in them and vice versa.

**Mr Ó Coinn:** I agree with you. However, our difficulty is with the ESA. How would the ESA support that?

**Mr McCausland:** How could the ESA support that? Is that not an issue for the schools?

**Mr Ó Coinn:** I am not altogether sure what was envisaged when clause 26, which calls on the ESA in the discharge of its duties to have regard to the requirements of industry and commerce regarding education, was drafted. We felt that if the ESA is to have regard to society, commerce and the professions, it should also have regard to the needs of Irish-medium education and the children in it. I suppose that comes from experience, Nelson —

**Mr McCausland:** Belt and braces.

**Mr Ó Coinn:** It is not so much a question of belt and braces, but rather that we know what has happened in the past. Most of society and its agencies see education through the perspective of the English-medium sector — and why would they not? Most children are educated

in that sector. However, a group of young people is emerging with specific needs, and we would like to ensure that they are included when we have an opportunity to develop a new education dispensation. It is a question of inclusion and of not leaving those children behind. We do not want to have to struggle with the ESA five or 10 years down the line to get it to recognise the needs of a group of young people when that could have been done at the outset.

**Mr Ó Peatáin:** Youth and career services are often provided outside the school, and it is important that career advisers realise, for example, when working with an Irish-medium school that there is an Irish-medium economy. The careers services should be aware of that, and they would be more connected with the ESA than with individual schools.

**Mr Liam Mac Giolla Mheana (Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta):** I can think of two other examples: the Irish-language interface with libraries and the Irish-medium interface with health, which are significantly underdeveloped. We ask the ESA, in its interface with those agencies, to promote the needs of Irish-speaking children.

**Mr McCausland:** As the Library Authority is a separate body, is it really the role of the ESA, which is under one Department, to start lobbying another Department?

**Mr Mac Giolla Mheana:** Where the ESA interfaces with other public bodies —

**Mr McCausland:** Where would that interface occur?

**Mr Mac Giolla Mheana:** They would, I presume, meet the ESA about, for example, the deployment of speech and language therapists in schools. That comes under health, and the ESA would interact with the health services on that issue.

**Mr McCausland:** Do you mean where those bodies provide services in Irish-medium schools?

**Mr Mac Giolla Mheana:** Yes.

**Mr McCausland:** How would that work with libraries?

**Mr Mac Giolla Mheana:** Children in Irish-medium schools have specific needs and requirements, and the ESA should promote those needs and requirements with other agencies.

**Mr Ó Coinn:** The Library Authority will be responsible for libraries and library services in schools.

**Mr McCausland:** However, if another education sector, such as the Catholic maintained sector, has a Catholic ethos, would the job of the ESA be to promote a Catholic ethos with other bodies?

**Mr Mac Giolla Mheana:** I do not think that we are talking about an ethos in the Irish-medium sector; we

are talking about the ESA acting as a champion for services.

**Mr McCausland:** Yes. However, equally someone could say that if the ESA is going to promote a Catholic ethos in Catholic schools because that is what the Catholic-maintained sector does, surely, we should be lobbying the libraries to ensure that there are more books about Catholicism. The situation could become bizarre. It is turning the ESA into something that it is not meant to be.

**Mr Ó Coinn:** We are not asking for libraries, for instance, to have books about Irish-medium education and the promotion of Irish. However, we would ask that libraries have books in Irish about all aspects of society.

We do not want to use the ESA or libraries as a means of promoting Irish-medium education; we are happy that such Irish-language books are about any subject under the sun. However, we would like young people — particularly those whose parents perhaps cannot afford to buy books — to have access to books in Irish in community libraries and in Irish-medium schools.

**Mr McCausland:** I will not pursue the point, but there is an issue about libraries for the Irish-language community to deal with; it is not the role of the ESA to start telling another body what to do.

**Mr Ó Coinn:** I am not saying for a moment that the ESA should have such a role, but it should have regard to those issues. That is worded clearly in the legislation. The legislation does not say that that is a core duty and responsibility on the ESA; it is, however, something to which the ESA should have regard. The use of the phrase “have regard to” rather than “will have a duty to” or “is part of its functions” shows that it is of a subsidiary nature.

You are right; it will not be a core duty of the ESA, but we would like the ESA to discharge its duties with regard to the needs of children who are taught in the Irish-medium sector outside the confines of their classrooms and schools.

**Mr McCausland:** Apart from libraries and health and social services, what other services would be affected?

**Mr Ó Coinn:** We have already mentioned areas of work relating to youth and, in particular, career guidance.

**Mr McCausland:** Is that it?

**Mr Ó Coinn:** The point of the legislation is not to outline every detail of what will happen in the next five, 10 or 15 years. If, 15 or 20 years ago, teachers had been told that one of their pupils would be a web designer, they would have looked askance. My point is

that we do not know what society holds for our young people in the next 10, 15 or 20 years. In facilitating the development of the young people in Irish-medium schools and as those young people leave those schools to enter society as, we hope, productive members, the ESA should have regard to their needs through the Irish language.

**Mr Elliott:** Thank you for your presentation. I will not address you in Irish, because I do not know any. Forgive me for that. On one hand, it appears that you welcome the Education Bill and the idea of bringing all the education bodies under one umbrella organisation; yet you seek more independence in the ESA. For instance, you want an entitlement to delegate submitting authority to trustees as well as to boards of governors. Are you looking for the best of both worlds? There is no harm in that, but do you not think that such a request goes beyond the ideals of the ESA?

**Mr Ó Coinn:** The Irish-medium sector, more than any other, stands to benefit from the development of the ESA and the support structures that the ESA will bring to all schools; Irish-medium schools should be an integral part of the ESA. As far as I understand, the legislation already allows for submitting authority to be with boards of governors. Our concern is that boards of governors are in office for only four years; they do not take a long-term view. We would like to have that responsibility vested in somebody who takes the long view of a school's welfare.

**Mr Elliott:** Is it up to the Irish-medium sector to decide whether submitting authority lies with the board of governors or with the trustees?

**Mr Ó Coinn:** It should be up to the trustees to decide. They have been given a responsibility; they are the guardians of a school's long-term welfare.

By “school” I do not mean a school building; I mean the provision in a school. We are not interested in school buildings; it is what happens in schools that is important. The trustees are the guardians of what happens in their schools in the long term. We do not want our schools to be independent of the ESA; we want them to be part of the ESA and to be supported by it —

**Mr Elliott:** Do you seek independence of authority?

**Mr Ó Coinn:** The only area in which we seek an influence for trustees — not for ourselves — is in the submission of schemes of employment and schemes of management. In most cases, we expect that role to be delegated to schools' boards of governors; however, because of the involvement of trustees, certain aspects are common to all Irish-medium schools. Thereafter, those roles will be delegated to boards of governors, which will be responsible for the day-to-day management of a school in the context of those schemes. Therefore, the schemes will be concerned only with ensuring that

— as far as possible — children can acquire and use Irish in school. It will not extend beyond that.

**Mr B McCrea:** You said that you are novices in legislation; so am I — it is a learning experience. However, given the positive responses, you seem to have the ear of the Minister. Perhaps you can give the Committee some classes on that skill.

**Mr D Bradley:** Through the medium of Irish, no doubt.

**Mr B McCrea:** If that is what it takes, Dominic.

**Mr D Bradley:** I will give you a couple of ceachtanna.

**Mr B McCrea:** You said in your submission, Seán, that the ESA offers an opportunity. What problems with the current system will the ESA address?

**Mr Ó Coinn:** Caoimhín said earlier that the present system has evolved over many years and has certain structures and systems in place. When Irish-medium education is introduced, it is difficult to adapt those systems to the needs of the Irish-medium sector. Over the years, a system has evolved whereby provision for the Irish-medium sector is achieved through additional funding from the Department and through agencies such as the education and library boards, Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), and so on. That is an unhealthy situation.

**Mr Ó Peatáin:** It is an ad hoc system.

**Mr B McCrea:** Will the ESA provide an opportunity to mainstream?

**Mr Ó Peatáin:** Yes.

**Mr B McCrea:** I have two or three straightforward questions. In response to Nelson, you said that you thought that the Irish-medium system would benefit from the ESA more than other sectors. Why would that be the case?

**Mr Ó Peatáin:** It will bring Irish-medium education into the core of education provision and make it more mainstream.

**Mr Ó Coinn:** We can do that in a planned way. To date, the education and library boards and CCEA have had to plan on the hop to deal with new Irish-medium schools, and they consider the needs of those schools and whether there is sufficient expertise in their respective organisations; if they do not have the necessary expertise, they must ask themselves how they will cope. We now have an opportunity to establish an organisation to plan for the inclusion of the Irish-medium sector to the same degree as all other sectors. Of course, the Irish-medium sector should not be treated better than other sectors, but it should be included in the planning.

**Mr B McCrea:** What percentage of the school cohort — and you may tick whatever age group is convenient — do you anticipate will be educated in the Irish-

medium sector? Your paper estimates that attendance will grow to between 8,000 and 10,000 over the next 10 years. What percentage is that of the school cohort?

**Mr Ó Coinn:** Ideally, we feel that all children could benefit from being educated through the medium of Irish. It is hard to know what percentage, because in large areas of the North parents do not have access to Irish-medium education, and until parents have a mechanism for doing so we do not know whether they want Irish-medium education or not. However, it would be somewhere between 5% and 10% on the basis of those figures, depending on population trends over the next number of years.

**Mr B McCrea:** That is an interesting figure, because I reckon that, even at the upper level, it is about 3%. There are about 300,000 people in education. My concern is the so-called tyranny of the minorities: we try to do everything for everybody and end up doing nothing for anybody.

You should try to understand and address Nelson's point that what you say has implications elsewhere. Encouraging the use of Irish outside the school and expanding into youth services and libraries could place an obligation on the ESA to correspond with various bodies in Irish. Should the Health Service, for example, produce leaflets in Irish? That could cause concerns about costs. It would be helpful if you clarified the extent to which the state should engage in Irish. Nobody is saying that you should not have the opportunity, but it would be difficult if it were to become an obligation on the state. Do you understand my point?

**Mr Ó Coinn:** I do. We are not so much concerned about obligations on the ESA to do certain things for the Irish language; rather we are concerned about what the ESA does to support the education of young people in Irish-medium schools. That may mean in some cases spending extra money, but we think that that is justifiable; it has to be reasonable and there is a limit to what we can expect; nevertheless, we feel that it is legitimate. It is not our function to decide what the ESA should do in relation to the Irish language and in corresponding with other organisations; our job is to ensure the welfare of the young people in our sector and to ensure that in whatever new systems may be developed our young people are not left behind.

When we talk about health, for example, we mean speech therapists who know how to deal with young people in an Irish-medium school who have speech difficulties. That is not to say that every speech therapist who goes into an Irish-medium school must be a fluent Irish speaker; it has nothing to do with that. It has to do with ensuring that the professionals who support our schools and who assist our young people know what Irish-medium education is and what immersion



education — which is practised widely throughout the world — involves. It is about ensuring that they do not tell a parent or teacher that a child has speech difficulties because they are being educated through a second language. That has happened in the past, even though it has no foundation in any research or practice anywhere.

That is the purely anecdotal lay opinion of someone who does not understand the system. We are trying to ensure that such things do not happen when the ESA develops.

**Mr B McCrea:** Given that the Committee is still taking evidence, it would help if, at some stage, you wrote a paper to explain what you are trying to do. At the risk of labouring the point, Tom Elliott highlighted the fact that every set of witnesses said that it broadly supports the ESA but that it wants this, that and the other sorted out. You are not dissimilar from them. Every group said that it likes the concept of the ESA but that it wants to be an employing authority to ensure that the ethos is right in its school —

**Mr Ó Coinn:** No: we do not want to be an employing authority. We said that we want our trustees to be able to have certain things in the schemes of management and employment; however, that does not mean that we want our trustees to be an employing authority. Unlike other sectors, perhaps, we are happy that the ESA have the role of employing authority. We do not seek to ensure that curricular support, or any other support, for the Irish-medium sector sits outside the remit of the ESA; in fact, we have asked that curricular and teacher support be firmly located in the ESA. That is our wish, and we support the ESA in that context.

**Mr B McCrea:** That explanation is useful; however, you have a job of work to do to flesh out fully for those of us who are not involved in Irish-medium education what exactly the limits are and what you want. We will also try to engage on that.

There is an issue of parental choice. Some people want their children to be educated in Irish-medium schools — which is fine — others want their children to be educated in schools with a Catholic ethos, and others want their children to be educated in an academic environment.

A problem exists in that some sectors are happy to support some forms of parental choice but not others. I do not want to put you in the hot seat, but it would be helpful if all sectors reflected on that point maturely and tried to assist everybody. Ours is a diverse society, and we should be able to find a way of giving everyone what they want, within the bounds of reason, and you have a contribution to make to that. I have tried my best to understand and participate, but you must help us, too, by giving us a balanced approach.

**Mr Ó Coinn:** Perhaps we differ from the other sectors on the issue of new schools in that we are happy for Irish-medium provision to be developed in existing schools. We see no conflict between the Irish-medium ethos and the religious ethos — or whatever ethos a school may have.

We are working with the integrated sector to develop Irish-medium provision in one of its schools; we already have one controlled Irish-medium school and several Catholic maintained schools with Irish-medium units. We realise that we cannot build a new school in every town where parents want their children taught through the medium of Irish.

**Mr B McCrea:** You do not have to answer this question, as time is moving on. Given the relative newness of your proposition to mainstream Irish-medium education, it strikes me that an opportunity exists for sectors to get together to reach common ground, not just with their immediate neighbours but with others. Mature, responsible educationalists should be able to come to some sort of compromise and guide us through.

You have a useful role to play in that. I will not detain you any longer.

**The Chairperson:** Caoimhín, Seán and Liam, thank you very much for your presentation and for your submission. The Department has provided a response to your submission, which we will make available to you today to give you an idea of its thinking.

**Mr Ó Peatáin:** Thank you, Mr Chairman.

**The Chairperson:** I welcome Chris Stewart from the Department of Education to the Committee; members will have a copy of his submission. Perhaps Chris will give us a brief overview of the Department's response, and members will ask him questions on it.

**Mr Chris Stewart (Department of Education):** I am conscious of the pressure on the Committee's time, so I will keep my presentation short.

**Mr B McCrea:** You say that every week.

**Mr Stewart:** Yes, and every week I fail to deliver on it; I am conscious of that. I will begin with a few points on NICIE's submission and will move on to that of Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta. The Minister welcomes NICIE's support for the reform of education administration, including the establishment of the ESA and the policy of sectoral support.

NICIE sought an assurance that boards of governors would continue to take the key decisions on the recruitment and dismissal of staff, and the Committee has discussed that issue several times. The Committee is familiar with the Department's position, and I am happy to give NICIE the reassurance that it has sought on the role of boards of governors.



Clause 13 deals with training and advice and support, and NICIE referred to the potential role of sectoral bodies in providing those services to schools; they could perhaps be commissioned to do so by the ESA. The Committee is familiar with the Department's position on that issue, as it was discussed at some length last week. It is the Department's intention to have a mixed economy of services, involving the ESA and other providers. The aim of the policy is to ensure that it is a matter for the ESA, and particularly for schools, to determine how such services would best be procured.

NICIE called for the general duty on the Department to reflect more explicitly than at present the promotion of good relations. We understand and note NICIE's views. However — and this will answer one of Michael Wardlow's questions — existing duties, such as those in section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and the duty on the Department to encourage and facilitate integrated education, continue to apply, as they remain on the statute book.

We note NICIE's comments on the membership of the ESA; similar comments have been made by members and by other stakeholders. The Committee is familiar with the Department's position and with the Minister's willingness to consider the Committee's views.

Michael Wardlow asked about the legislative provisions on transformation, and I hope that my answer will provide him with some clarity and reassurance: no significant changes are planned to those provisions. The necessary technical amendments are in the first Bill rather than in the second one; they simply reflect the changes in organisation and administrative arrangements.

The Minister welcomes the support of Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta for the reform of education administration, including the establishment of the ESA and its role as the employer of staff in grant-aided schools, and for the retention of youth services in education.

The Minister agrees with Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta that the ESA should have a statutory duty to encourage and facilitate Irish-medium education, and the Department will wish to consider how best that might be reflected in legislation. It is examining the options suggested by Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta.

Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta raised several points and made suggestions under the general heading of the ethos of Irish-medium schools and how it should be safeguarded and fostered. It was suggested that the submitting authority for schemes of management and schemes of employment for Irish-medium schools should be the trustees of the schools; other stakeholders have suggested a similar change. The Minister welcomes that suggestion and is already considering, as members will be aware, a change to

the Bill that will produce the outcome sought by C na G. The Department has found the explanation and clarification of the role of trustees of Irish-medium schools helpful.

The suggestion was made that clause 26(2) should include a reference to the needs of persons being educated in the Irish language. The Minister agrees that there is a need for such a change, but she will wish to consider further how it might best be reflected in legislation. The Department understood C na G's suggested amendment to clause 26(2) to refer specifically to curriculum and examination functions. However, the description that Seán and his colleagues gave this morning was somewhat broader, and therefore clause 26(2) might not be the appropriate home for such a provision. That is something that the Department will need to consider further.

It was suggested that there ought to be a formal definition for Irish-medium schools and a designation scheme similar to the approach in legislation to Catholic maintained schools. However, although the Minister has indicated that she supports each sector's role in fostering and developing its ethos, we do not feel that the prescriptive legislative route is the appropriate vehicle for doing so. The definition of Catholic maintained school is not connected to ethos; it is merely a technical measure. It was originally needed to delineate the group of schools that were to be the responsibility of the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), and when CCMS is dissolved that definition will no longer be needed and will be removed from legislation.

However, two other aspects would provide the reassurance that C na G seeks. First, any significant change to the character of a school, such as ceasing to provide education through the medium of Irish, would need a development proposal, and any person making such a proposal must first consult the board of governors, the teachers, the parents and the trustees of a school.

Secondly, the Department envisages the scope for a school's scheme of management to include a requirement that a board of governors would not be permitted to make a significant change to the character of a school without the agreement of the submitting authority. That, taken with the possible amendment to the submitting authority provision, should provide the reassurance that C na G seeks.

C na G refers to provisions in existing legislation regarding the appointment and duties of governors of integrated schools. Those are referred to in the paper, and their focus is, by and large, on requiring governors to use their best endeavours to maintain the viability of schools as integrated schools. C na G suggests the need for a similar provision for Irish-medium schools,

and the Minister agrees that there is a strong case for doing so. We want to consider how best to take that forward.

C na G asked for provisions to protect the terms and conditions of staff who transfer to the ESA as well as those who do not transfer. The Minister emphasises that any staff who transfer from C na G to the ESA will have their terms and conditions of service and pension entitlement protected on the same basis as staff who transfer from statutory organisations. The Department understands why C na G has asked for those commitments to be included in the Education Bill; however, as we explained previously, a difficulty stems from the fact that C na G is a private, non-statutory organisation. The inclusion of the suggested provisions in the Bill could render it a hybrid Bill — a Bill that covers both private and public law matters.

The difficulty is that the Assembly does not yet have a separate procedure for dealing with hybrid Bills. There would therefore be a very high risk that the changes sought by C na G would delay the Bill significantly, which would, in turn, delay the implementation timetable for the RPA. In those circumstances, the Minister concluded that the change should not be made, as it would involve considerable risk of delay to the Bill and to the implementation timetable of the RPA, with no additional benefit to C na G staff.

Seán and his colleagues raised the issue of staff who might be at risk of redundancy. I want to reassure them that any staff in any RPA organisation at risk of redundancy would be regarded as part of the affected group, and therefore able to apply for jobs as they are brought forward for advertisement. We would, of course, want to work closely with C na G, as with any organisation, to avoid compulsory redundancy if possible — and we are confident that that is possible.

C na G has asked for provision to be made in the Bill to give the trustees of Irish-medium schools a statutory right to be consulted about development proposals in relation to Irish-medium education on a similar basis, as they put it, to Catholic trustees. C na G's paper suggests that, perhaps, it sees that as a collective role and gives a perception that the trustees of Catholic schools have such a collective role at present. However, the Education Bill does not, in fact, give such a collective role to Catholic trustees, nor indeed to trustees in any other sector.

Paragraph 9(4) of schedule 7 is the key provision in this respect, introducing as it does a new article 14 to the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 to deal with development proposals. Under proposed new article 14, the trustees of any school must be consulted about a development proposal that would affect the school. In those circumstances, the Department is satisfied that the Bill contains equitable

provisions that ensure that the trustees of all schools in all sectors will be consulted on development proposals that will affect their schools.

We also suggest that the collective role that C na G seeks might be more appropriately exercised in the area-based planning process. Proposals for the second education Bill, which we hope to bring before the Committee in a few weeks' time, will include provisions for sectoral interests — and other interests such as pupils, parents, staff and governors — to input collectively to the area-based planning process.

Chairman, that was a quick gallop over the ground. I will stop now for questions.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Chris. It is clear from your response to this morning's presentations that the Department is considering amendments to clauses 2, 3, 26 and 31. When will the Committee see those proposed amendments? Time is marching on. Yesterday, we received a sizeable document from the Department with information on the Committee's concerns; it also contained references to more information being presented shortly, and you mentioned earlier that we may have sight of the second Bill in a few weeks' time. Documentation on the Bill will continue to increase. After all, it will not be a simple matter of bringing amendments to the Committee to be agreed on the nod; there will be deliberations on whether such proposed amendments are appropriate or have adequately addressed the Committee's concerns.

Do you have an idea about the time frame for proposed amendments? We are marching through May, and summer recess will soon be upon us.

**Mr Stewart:** You are quite right, Chairman; there is much still to get through. May I start by dampening your expectations on the second Bill?

**The Chairperson:** Oh dear.

**Mr Stewart:** I do not think that I will be in a position to bring you a full second Bill as quickly as you might wish. However, I hope, within the next few weeks, to give the Committee a fairly full description, derived from the drafting instructions, of the content of the second Bill, particularly on area-based planning. I think that a presentation on the policy on area-based planning is scheduled in the Committee's work programme. We would like on the same day, if it is acceptable to the Committee, to give you a fairly full description of how the legislation on area-based planning might look. If possible, I would like to make draft clauses available to the Committee to give it as full a picture as possible.

We have what we hope is the definitive list of amendments to the first Bill, which the Department will put before the Minister for clearance; as soon as it has been cleared, we will make it available to the

Committee. If it possible to have that ready for next week, we will do so, but I will not make any promises. We should certainly be able to make that list available to you within the next two weeks.

**Mr McCausland:** I was interested that the representatives from the Irish-medium sector said that they had no difficulty with the duty to encourage and facilitate one particular sector or sectors being broadened to include all sectors. Are you currently looking at that issue?

*(The Deputy Chairperson [Mr D Bradley] in the Chair)*

**Mr Stewart:** We are not actively looking at it; however, I suspect that we ought to, because it raises a number of interesting questions.

**Mr McCausland:** What would those questions be?

**Mr Stewart:** The question that occurs to me at this stage — and there may be many more — is what exactly the scope or focus of such a duty might be. We all have an understanding of what is meant by “sectors of education”, but converting that into something that can be captured in statute represents a particular challenge.

One can define Irish-medium education and integrated education fairly simply. However, once one moves beyond those to look at other types of education and schools, it becomes more of a challenge to provide meaningful definitions or descriptions. I am not saying that those challenges are insurmountable, but they need to be worked through very carefully to ensure that such a provision would be sufficiently clear and meaningful in the legislation.

**Mr McCausland:** There was a concern that the folk running an Irish-medium school might attempt to change the ethos of the schools to something else. At present, schools can transform or change only from controlled status to integrated status. If we are going to reassure folk in the Irish-medium sector that their schools will not be changed into something else, and given that we already know that Catholic maintained schools cannot be changed because of their ownership arrangements, do you intend to include some provision in the Bill that will offer the same reassurance to schools in the controlled sector?

**Mr Stewart:** If the provisions are framed carefully, we can achieve that effect for all sectors. From what C na G and the Catholic trustees have said, it is clear that trustees, who take the longer-term view of the ethos of their particular schools or sectors, want to ensure that boards of governors, which by definition are more transient authorities, continue to have the proper regard for that ethos.

In an attempt to provide for that, we have suggested the concept of a submitting authority. If the legislation were suitably amended, such an arrangement would

give trustees the opportunity to exercise a measure of control — and I use that word advisedly — over boards of governors in particular schools. We feel that a submitting authority is the vehicle that would allow us to do that without diluting or departing from the core principles of the RPA by setting up additional layers of bureaucracy or additional statutory authorities.

Once again, that probably raises particular challenges and requires a degree of creativity for controlled schools. However, if that can be done, and if the core principle is the same — to give those who will foster or be the guardians of the ethos of a particular sector the means of ensuring that boards of governors and schools continue to respect and operate in accordance with that ethos — that principle can be reflected for all schools.

*(The Chairperson [Mr Storey] in the Chair)*

**Mr McCausland:** Would respect for the ethos of the school include not transferring it to a different ethos?

**Mr Stewart:** Yes, that is a reasonable suggestion.

**Mr McCausland:** Finally, the representatives of the Irish-medium sector raised an issue about the needs of Irish-medium pupils to be facilitated to use their Irish in society in general, beyond schools. What is your assessment of the propriety of that proposal, which some people might perceive as an intrusion into areas beyond the remit of the ESA?

**Mr Stewart:** That is a difficult question for me to answer. To do so, I would have to consult with my policy colleagues who are more directly involved in Irish-medium education policy. The matter is beyond my sphere of competence within the RPA. From an RPA perspective, I think that the description of the aim of the suggested change takes it beyond the focus of the particular clause in the Education Bill that it seeks to amend.

Therefore, we perhaps need to discuss further with C na G and, indeed, the Committee the intention behind the suggested amendment. If the amendment is more tightly focused around curriculum and examination matters, then, as the Minister has indicated, clause 26(2) may be the right place to do something and C na G's suggestion is along the right lines. If, however, the ambition is broader and intends to strengthen and underpin the role of the Irish language in society generally, clause 26(2) is not the right place for that proposal. Indeed, it may be that the Education Bill is not the right place for it.

**Mr D Bradley:** Good afternoon, Chris. In its submission, NICIE said that the Bill does not mention good relations or community relations. You heard the NICIE representatives being asked whether they felt it appropriate to include that aspect in clause 2, which outlines the ESA's duty:

“to contribute towards the spiritual, moral, cultural, social, intellectual and physical development of children”.

The Department’s response did not address that point. What is your view on that matter?

**Mr Stewart:** I thought that I had addressed that matter; perhaps I was not clear enough. The Department understands the sentiment behind NICIE’s proposal but does not think that such an additional duty or reference is necessary, because the Department and, in due course, the ESA will be subject to section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. People tend to remember the first half of section 75, which focuses on equality. However, it contains a second statutory duty that focuses specifically on good relations. That will apply to the Department and to the ESA. Therefore, the short answer is: such a duty already exists — or, in the case of the ESA, will apply to it soon.

**Mr D Bradley:** Mr Wardlow’s point was that other policies, such as A Shared Future, have fallen by the wayside and that the only way to guarantee a movement towards the improvement of good relations and community relations is to mention it in the legislation specifically.

**Mr Stewart:** Although policy documents such as A Shared Future — which I remember fondly from the days when I was involved in writing it — might evolve and change, the statutory duty in section 75, and, therefore, section 75 (2), will remain.

**Mr D Bradley:** Will the Department at least consider NICIE’s point?

**Mr Stewart:** At the Committee’s request, I am happy to ask the Minister again. However, our response today would be that we have considered the matter, and we politely disagree with NICIE.

**Mr D Bradley:** Will you consider the point further?

**Mr Stewart:** Yes.

**Mr D Bradley:** Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta said that the trustees of Irish-medium schools should have the power to act as submitting authority. In your initial response, you said that the trustees and boards of governors of Irish-medium schools are one and the same and, therefore, the amendment would have little effect. Does the Department still hold that view?

**Mr Stewart:** No; that was my understanding at the time. However, after subsequent conversations with Seán Ó Coinn — and he clarified the point today, helpfully — I appreciate that the trustees of Irish-medium schools, similar to those in Catholic schools, have a separate function and exist independently of boards of governors. Therefore, the suggested amendment is more valuable and could operate how C na G wants it to. The Minister was minded to do that anyway, but C na G’s helpful clarification means that it is more useful to the Irish-medium sector, too.

**Mr Elliott:** Your response says:

“However, whilst the Minister is committed to supporting each sector in fostering and developing ethos, we do not feel that legislation is the appropriate vehicle for doing so”.

What is the appropriate vehicle?

**Mr Stewart:** The appropriate vehicle is support for the sectoral bodies and their role. The Committee heard several times, particularly from the Governing Bodies Association and, to an extent, from the Catholic trustees, strong support for the voluntary concept in schools. What could be more voluntary than the ethos of a school or sector? Therefore, what could be more difficult to define, capture and underpin in legislation than ethos? We feel that the correct approach is to be indirect and to equip, encourage and facilitate sectoral bodies in their role in fostering and developing ethos, rather than have the Department prescribe it.

**Mr Elliott:** OK; that will do for now.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you for your attendance.



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# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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## COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION

13 May 2009

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### EDUCATION BILL (NIA 03/08)

#### Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Mervyn Storey (Chairperson)  
Mrs Mary Bradley  
Mr Trevor Lunn  
Mr Nelson McCausland  
Miss Michelle McIlveen  
Mr John O'Dowd  
Ms Michelle O'Neill  
Mr Edwin Poots  
Mr Tom Elliott

#### Witnesses:

Sir Kenneth Bloomfield	} Association for Quality Education
Mr Roy Lilley	
Mr William Young	
Mr Roy Beggs Snr	} Association of Northern Ireland Education and Library Boards
Mr Peter Duffy	
Mr Gary Haire	
Mrs Hilary Sloan	
Mr Chris Stewart	} Department of Education

**The Chairperson (Mr Storey):** Good morning. I welcome to the Committee for Education Sir Ken Bloomfield, Mr Roy Lilley and Mr William Young from the Association for Quality Education (AQE). We have received your written correspondence on the Education Bill. Sir Ken, I ask you to make your presentation, after which members will be free to ask questions.

**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield (Association for Quality Education):** Thank you for inviting us to give evidence to the Committee. We welcome the opportunity.

I will begin by explaining why the association has decided to submit evidence. Many of our members are members of the Governing Bodies Association (GBA) — although not all of them, because controlled schools are among our members. As you know, the GBA has

given extensive evidence to the Committee. Indeed, it has suggested amendments to the Bill that it believes are required to deal with its fears and reservations, which, I hope, have been useful to the Committee. We support the GBA line. We believe that the Committee ought to give its suggested amendments serious attention.

In addition, as you well know, individual schools have responded to the Bill; not just to the Committee, but directly to the Minister. For instance, my school sent observations to the Minister, and I received quite a detailed reply from her. Therefore, you might ask why we are here. Are we simply here to repeat what you have heard already from other interests? It is no secret whatsoever that we have been campaigning, essentially, on the issue of post-primary selection. I am sure that you do not want to go over all that again — as we have, numerous times. The reason that we fight that campaign is because we believe that it is necessary to preserve the essential ethos of our schools.

Frankly, through the work of the AQE and others on the issue of selection, we hope that we will still win that battle. However, on the other hand, the ethos of our schools, which we value and are trying desperately to protect, could be in real danger if boards of governors lose that degree of control, particularly over voluntary schools. Controlled schools will speak for themselves. To deprive the boards of governors of voluntary schools of the responsibility that they have always had for running their own schools, we believe will be both counterproductive and a threat to the ethos that we are trying to protect through the selection mechanism.

I want to comment on the education and skills authority (ESA) and on the wider issue of the review of public administration (RPA). As most of you will be aware, I spent a fair number of years toiling in the trenches of public administration here in Northern Ireland. It would be an idiot who would contest the notion that Northern Ireland would benefit from a rationalisation of its public sector. On an earlier occasion, I said that the mechanisms that operate here are those of a great nation state. Therefore, on the education front, the notion of amalgamating the pre-existing education boards and certain other bodies into a single organisation seems to us to be eminently sensible in many ways. It should result in financial savings. Unfortunately, it will probably result in the shedding of manpower. However, we are in no way antipathetic to that proposal.

On the other hand, we do not see how concentrating the powers that were previously exercised mainly, but not exclusively, by education and library boards in a single body should mean that the relationship of that single body to individual schools should be radically different in kind to the relationship that the several

education boards have, until now, enjoyed with those schools.

Like many other people, and I am sure that my colleagues at the table have had the same experience, I have gone to conferences about the forthcoming legislation at which people such as the chief executive designate of the ESA — a man for whom I have the greatest respect and regard — have been present. Interestingly, when people at those conferences expressed their reservations about the legislation, they were told that the ESA will be there to support, help and advise them. The words “direct”, “control” and “own” never occurred in that dialogue.

Schools, the AQE and the GBA have expressed concerns about some aspects of the legislation since it was first presented. However, the Minister has given personal assurances that the powers given to the ESA are only default powers, and that, in practice, the schools will be able to run themselves in much the same way in which they are run at the moment.

I am chairman of the Royal Belfast Academical Institution (RBAI) board of governors, and we provided the buildings. I pointed out to the Minister that the school does not get capital moneys, and that it is therefore a bit thick to get someone to go to the school in order to tell us in tremendous detail how we should run it. She responded by saying that there is no intention whatsoever to take over or nationalise schools. Imagine that a company runs an industry and owns the buildings, but all the people who work in the buildings are not its employees but the employees of some other organisation. It is, therefore, rather ridiculous to suggest that the system has not altered in some radical way.

We did not want to give the Committee an inordinately long briefing paper, so I hope that we have made our thoughts fairly clear.

One particular concern is the employment issue. We have had all sorts of assurances about the way in which the legislation is intended to operate. However, I am what American jurists would call a strict constructionist, in that I like to look at what the law actually says. If this Bill is passed into law, every person employed in every school in Northern Ireland, from the headmaster to the groundsman, will be an employee of the education and skills authority, rather than of the schools. That is a very radical change.

The Department seems to be saying that although we can devolve powers, in most practical respects, schools will be able to continue doing what they have been doing up until now. That does not reassure us. Assurances given at one time can be cancelled at another. People must look at what the law actually says about the matter. In this respect, the law unambiguously says that all teachers and other staff in schools will be

employees of the education and skills authority. That is a big issue.

The other issue is schemes of governance. We represent a wide range of schools, some of which have ancient schemes of governance that occasionally have been found in Acts of Parliament. The legislation, as currently drafted, seems to be saying that the education and skills authority is entitled to tell a school to change its scheme of governance if it thinks that it is not good enough. On the one hand, we are trying to preserve the ethos, tradition and character of our schools. On the other hand, it seems that the decision on a school's scheme of governance ultimately rests with the ESA.

We touched on other issues in the briefing paper, but the ones that I outlined today are the main concerns. I do not see much point in repeating what the GBA has already said about the need for the legislation to be amended to reflect its concerns; we basically share those concerns. We are not reassured by the Department's big guarantees that everything will be all right.

**Mr William Young (Association for Quality Education):** I have only a few comments to add. I agree with Sir Kenneth: one of the two main issues is governance. The policy paper uses words such as “maximized supported autonomy”. However, the law runs totally against that sort of thing. Control, governance and the change in employment of staff are all major issues, and the transfer of powers is a crucial aspect of the legislation. They say that things will be the same again, but I wonder. Elsewhere, in some of the policy papers, one reads about making redeployment and area planning easier. The fact that the ESA will employ staff means that it can do it likes with them. With respect to area planning and redeployment, as is stated in the policy papers, it can do as it wishes. Those are two very serious issues.

Sir Kenneth mentioned the two Education Bills. It makes no sense for one Bill to be passed and then a second Bill to be introduced containing details that we do not really know at present, one of which is probably area planning. If people are to agree to something, they must know what the consequences will be down the line. However, we do not know that. We are supposed to be living in a democracy and it is our right to see that.

The review of public administration refers to streamlining, realising economies of scale, delivering services and shifting resources to the front line. However, we are talking only about a chief executive and a board. We know no details beyond that. Is there a plan? How much money will be saved? Who will the intermediate officers be?

There are two other issues. I am uncomfortable with the whole idea of centralisation: centralisation does not bring freedom. The bottom line is that the voluntary principle works out as teachers giving up

their spare time for nothing on Saturdays because they are committed to a school and to the children in it. If centralisation is introduced, whereby staff are not loyal to one school but are employed by someone out there in the ether, the voluntary principle is eroded. The voluntary principle comes right down to the ordinary teacher. It is a very serious issue. I have seen it at work: I have watched staff give up acres of their time, Saturday after Saturday, for nothing because they are committed to the school.

Another thing that annoys me is duplicity in expression. As Sir Kenneth pointed out, on the one hand, the Bill says one thing, and on the other hand, the policy papers tell us: not to worry, we will look after it when the time comes. As the chairman of the AQE said, with what is down in print, we could well have a Minister who will not listen to what people say, and who will decide what he or she wants to do, and he or she may decide to stick to the letter of the law. Where will we be then? We will certainly not be in a democracy.

The two main issues are governance and employment. The others are important, but those are the main two.

**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** I will add a tiny footnote to that. It is interesting to look outside Northern Ireland to what is happening elsewhere. In England, there has been a growing sense that the education system has not been working well. An initiative taken some time ago set up the academies, which enjoy a good deal of autonomy in the education system. Recently, a letter appeared in a newspaper — I think it was published in 'The Times' — signed by people associated with umpteen of those academies, which said that all the time they were subject to a creeping process of control.

I entered education from the other end, in a sense. I chaired the Northern Ireland Higher Education Council for a number of years, which is the body that deals with the universities. Think of the uproar that there would be if the state were to decree that all university lecturers are essentially employees of a state organ. There would be outrage. Now we are saying, in effect, that all teaching staff throughout Northern Ireland will be the employees of a state organ. Voluntarism is a very important principle in a free society.

**Mr Roy Lilley (Association for Quality Education):** I will enlarge on one point that Sir Kenneth made in his opening remarks. One of our difficulties may be described as an issue of credibility.

That is where we contrast statements that have been made, in the public record, by the Minister and officials with the text of the draft Bill.

I will give an example. The Minister, in a letter to the chairman of the GBA, emphasised that it was important that the powers of governors would continue to touch on staff recruitment, staff complements and dismissals. At the end of the day, however, the

individual's contract of employment will not be with the board of governors but with the ESA. It is, therefore, difficult to rationalise how the power of dismissal will rest with the board of governors when the contract will be with the ESA.

The Department, as I understand it, in setting out the justification for creating the ESA mentions that a single employer will raise standards. The bases for that claim are that it would be easier for staff to be seconded between schools, professional development would be facilitated by the ability to give teachers placements in different schools, and better workforce planning would be easier to implement. All of those indicate a centralisation of control rather than a spread of authority. For all those reasons, the actuality seems to run contrary to the assertion.

**The Chairperson:** The more that those issues have been discussed in recent weeks and months, the more even members of the Committee become embroiled in what seems to be a legal minefield with regard to interpretation. We take the point that what is being said about the proposed outcome of the Bill does not seem to be reflected in the detail of the Bill. Therefore, people from a variety of education stakeholder groups are very concerned that the letter of the law does not represent how it will work in practice.

Let us relate that to the current legislation that governs schools. The scheme of management that is operated in voluntary grammar schools has to be submitted to the Department. Does the Department currently have the power to intervene and to amend that scheme of management?

**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** I have been chairman of the board of governors of the Royal Belfast Academical Institution for a number of years, and I cannot recall that occurring. I, too, would need legal advice to appreciate what powers the Department has. In practice, there has never been any attempt in my experience — and I have been a governor at my school for more years than I can remember — to alter, criticise or amend our scheme of management.

**Mr Young:** That is a legal issue, and it is hard to pin down. I do not have a particularly legal mind, but the terms of the Bill seem to suggest an earlier intervention than exists at present. Instead of working with people a bit longer to sort out a problem, the Bill seems to suggest that the authority will come in at a much earlier stage than should be the case. Like Sir Kenneth, I do not remember any intervention under the present system.

**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** I want to make a general point. I rest here on the letter that the Minister herself addressed to me on 10 March. It was, I may say, a very civil and helpful letter. However, it includes one revealing sentence. The Minister says that:



“I understand that the detail of how these arrangements will work in practice has still to be developed and articulated fully”.

We are talking about arrangements that could have a profound impact on the way in which our schools are run. However, we are being asked to give a blank cheque in a situation in which the Minister herself says:

“the detail of how these arrangements will work in practice has still to be developed and articulated fully”.

Needless to say, we would like it to be articulated fully before anybody makes a final judgement.

**The Chairperson:** We would be happy if that correspondence could be copied to the Committee. That would be helpful. Later in today's Committee meeting, we will begin a stocktake of all that has been said about the Education Bill up until now by people who have come before the Committee and by the Department. We will try to crystallise some of that today, because we are at a stage when we need to see the amendments that have been proposed by the Department and the Minister. Those amendments have been alluded to, but we have not seen them. The duty of the Committee is to scrutinise the Department, not to make policy on its behalf.

**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** The cardinal issue is the distinction between assurances of how the process will work in practice and what the law says. What will the law allow in a hypothetical circumstance in which one Minister may take a different view to another Minister? The law is the ultimate guideline. We are given temporary assurances about how the Department and the Minister foresee or do not foresee the process operating, and departmental officials tell us that the aim is maximum autonomy. However, on the face of it, the legislation is saying that the control of this, that and the other will, ultimately, rest with the ESA. That is not reassuring. The details of how the process will work are not available to us, and we are supposed to accept that and tell the Minister to go ahead with her plans.

**The Chairperson:** In your submission, you refer to the public schools in Edmonton in Canada as an example of good practice. How would the system of governance that exists there benefit the system in Northern Ireland?

**Mr Young:** I can speak about it generally. As I understand it, they go a bit further than we might want to go. They free up the curriculum considerably and leave the individual institutions with a choice to tailor and measure the curriculum according to their needs. Canada is a big country, and its problems are different to ours. We may not want to free up the curriculum totally, but that system gives schools more freedom. It seems that they have widened out what the voluntary grammar schools experience — they are given that wee bit more freedom. That is the sort of thing that we would not want to keep to ourselves; we would prefer it if that were shared with other schools.

I know that some small, rural primary schools may say that they do not have the governors and so on to take on board greater freedom such as that provided in Edmonton, but many schools would benefit from it. I have reservations about freeing up the curriculum completely, but freedom to act as voluntary schools do here is, in practice, existing in a much wider way.

**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** In all fairness, one must say that education and library boards are supportive and helpful to schools in areas in which they have expertise that is not always available in schools. For instance, particular expertise is required for difficult disciplinary cases. However, there is a distinction between a school opting in and availing itself of a body that says that it is on hand to provide help and advice if required, and having to accept decisions from a body when the school is perfectly capable of making those decisions itself.

**Mr Young:** Another concern that follows on from what Sir Kenneth said is what the education and library boards are delivering at present. The Bill does not say all that much about it, but I want to know the detail of what will happen at the levels below those of the chief executive and the board. What will happen there? How will services be delivered to rural areas? How far will centralisation be taken? What will people way beyond the centre get from the changes? Will support be close at hand for them, or must they rely on delivery from the centre? We all know that centralising or unifying of power in one area can disadvantage those who are at more of a distance. That sort of nitty-gritty detail must be worked out.

**The Chairperson:** The Department has given the Committee a response to your submission, and that will be made available to you.

**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** It is a pity that we do not have it now, is it not?

**The Chairperson:** Yes, some other stakeholders have expressed concern about that. However, the association will have the Department's response today, which states:

“The Department emphasises that the ESA will be a single organisation, but with a strong and significant local presence.”

We still do not know what that presence involves; the Committee has been making representations and asking questions on that.

In its submission, the association states that it should be possible to change or amend the appropriate clauses in order to allow schools to assume responsibility for their own employment matters, should they wish to do so. If amended, could the Bill provide for an organisation to act as paymaster general for Northern Ireland's education service yet at the same time allow schools to have maximised supported local autonomy? Is that possible?



**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** The wording of the present Bill does not provide for that. In order to move in that direction, the Bill must be amended.

Of course, it is sensible to have authorities that give general guidance on such issues. It is important to be able to consult specialised organisations that have an expertise that may be lacking elsewhere. I am very conscious that schools' boards of governors vary a great deal. Our school is lucky to have a board made up, mainly but not entirely, of former pupils. We have successful lawyers, businessmen and so on; I hesitate to say successful bankers, because that is a term that is no longer used. We have extraordinarily competent individuals on our board.

On the other hand, my wife sat on the board of an integrated primary school in Bangor for a spell, and, frankly, that board was not made up of a group of great experts. They struggled a bit with some of the issues with which they were confronted. Therefore, I am in favour of letting schools get on and do the things that they are competent to do, although it is a thoroughly good idea for them to have access to a genuinely supportive advisory organisation. The system needs that.

**Mr Young:** An example of one element of the freedom that voluntary grammars have that controlled schools do not is over the appointment of staff. The process is so much shorter in a voluntary grammar school; an interview is held and a decision is taken. I understand that with controlled or maintained schools, names are suggested and sent to the board and then, perhaps a month or six weeks later, a decision might be made, and possibly even changed. In times like these when high-quality staff are being sought, that puts some schools at a great disadvantage. Voluntary grammar schools have that freedom, and I would like to see it enjoyed elsewhere. A judgement by a board of governors should be accepted without having to be confirmed by anybody else.

If voluntary grammar schools can currently exist within the control of the paymaster — and if that approach seems to work well and the schools are accountable, and so on — why can that arrangement not work on a wider basis? In answer to your question, I think that it can be done. However, the Department's policy paper seven states:

"For voluntary grammar and grant-maintained integrated schools, the decision to separate the employing authority and the employer means, in effect, the transfer of the employing authority functions from Boards of Governors to the ESA."

That is what the Bill proposes to do. If that happens, there will not be the sort of arrangement that I described.

**Mr Elliott:** Thank you very much for your presentation. I want to pick up on something that the Chairperson said. I was going to leave it until the end but I will raise it now because he touched on it. He

mentioned that the Department's response to the AQE paper — and I am sorry that the witnesses do not have a copy — states:

"The Department emphasises that the ESA will be a single organisation, but with a strong and significant local presence."

It also states that front line support services:

"will continue to be provided locally, and this will be the major factor in determining the structure of the organisation at local level."

I have difficulty with the fact that that is not written into the Bill. If we could come up with some sort of arrangement, how would you see that written into the Bill? If that provision is to exist, it is vital that it is included in the Bill.

**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** I come back to the wording that the Minister used in her letter to me, and I will quote again:

"the detail of how these arrangements will work in practice has still to be developed and articulated fully."

In a longish life, one inevitably makes parallels between one situation and another. I was around when the Housing Executive was first set up. As the Committee will know, there had been numerous housing authorities, but the Housing Executive was established as Northern Ireland's single housing authority. The idea was to have a functional organisation with a director of development, a director of finance, and so on. As time went by, it became clear that there was not enough stress on localism. A matrix organisation had to develop, in which there were regional lines of responsibility as well as functional lines.

The Committee should consider — not just in relation to this Bill, but more generally — the different situations in which schools are placed. Even in the grammar sector, for instance, the situation that schools in greater Belfast face is completely different from the situation that grammar schools in provincial areas face.

The answer is that one would need to know a great deal more about the issue. It is almost as if one goes to an art gallery and El Greco has just given the outline but has not put in any of the pigment. It is very difficult to judge the picture until one has all the details. I am not suggesting that El Greco wrote this paper.

**Mr Young:** I do not have a legal mind, but the issue is how the matter is included in the Bill. The Bill refers to the chief executive, and so on. It may be possible to include something in that clause about the other layers.

**Mr Elliott:** Employment issues have been mentioned quite a bit by a number of delegations. Would it be useful if some local autonomy was given to some sort of regional board that operates outside of the ESA?

**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** We would find the idea of surrendering our powers to a regional board no more appealing than surrendering them to a provincial board.

**Mr Elliott:** I was talking about a regional board for areas but also in other spheres. For example, the Catholic Council for Maintained Schools (CCMS) could have a regional board of its own, as could the voluntary grammar schools.

**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** I come back to the fundamental point. The CCMS has a certain sort of relationship with its schools, and the education and library boards have a certain sort of relationship with their schools. A question arises as to whether, after amalgamation, the new single body will need to have a radically different relationship with its schools than the separate bodies had with them. Our answer is that it will not. Rationalising the system does not necessarily mean that power must be centralised. In fact, one must be even more careful when centralising authority. As a democrat, I am always worried about powerful centralised bodies. I do not like them very much.

**Mr Elliott:** The Department's response to the AQE paper states:

"the Association appears to have misunderstood the nature of the relationship between the ESA and boards of governors".

Personally, I do not think that that is the case. The Department must separate those matters in order to make them absolutely clear. I suppose that I am looking for suggestions from you that might help us in our deliberations on how to resolve the problem.

**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** Again, I beg you to look carefully at the specific amendments that were suggested by the GBA. The GBA represents a wide range of schools, and I know that it has taken serious, heavyweight legal advice, as, I might say, has the AQE, unsurprisingly. The GBA has made specific suggestions about how the Bill might be clarified in order to dismiss some of its fears. We support what it is saying, and that is why we have not brought forward our own amendments — there is no point in having two sets of lawyers suggesting various bits of wording. We are quite happy with the GBA's suggested wording.

**Mr Young:** We are also concerned about the emphasis that is being placed on having community-based governors who must live and work in the area. We consider that to be a very restrictive requirement. If a school wants to be blessed with a board of governors that has a variety of expertise, the board should not just be linked to the local community — its membership should be widened out. For example, a past pupil who is committed to a school might live a distance away from it but be prepared to give up their time to travel to that school to share their expertise. Therefore, we have some concerns about the community aspect.

**Mr Lunn:** Before asking about your concerns about the employing authority provision, I would like to find out a bit more about the system in Edmonton. I am not aware of the specific system there; is it different to the

one in Toronto, Montreal or Buffalo? Why did you point out Edmonton?

**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** Because it provides grounds for a visit by the Committee to the Dominion of Canada. *[Laughter.]*

**Mr Young:** The key difference is that schools there are given greater freedom.

**Mr Lunn:** Does that apply to the whole of Canada?

**Mr Young:** No, it is specific to that area.

**Mr Lunn:** Are you saying that the rest of Canada, about 95%, is wrong?

**Mr Young:** No, not at all; we think that that extra freedom is a good thing, and it seems to be working well. People respond to and enjoy it. Again, it comes down to the notion of the voluntary principle and to loyalty.

**Mr Lunn:** I understand why you advocate it — that is what you are about, and I respect that — but I wonder why the rest of Canada and the wider world have not adopted the same attitude.

**Mr Young:** It is working quite well there.

**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** The wider UK does not do all the sensible things that we in Northern Ireland do.

**Mr Lunn:** Your organisation is not the first to express concerns about the employer role, and some of those organisations would not necessarily agree with you on other matters. So, fair enough, it is a concern. However, the advice that we get from the Department is at odds with your view. When discussing clause 8(2), the Department always points out:

"The ESA may not lawfully refuse to put into effect any proper decision of a board of governors on employment matters."

To me, that is pretty clear. The Department emphasises that it will be entirely for the boards of governors to make decisions on staff complement, discipline, suspension and dismissal. Decision-making authority will be delegated to the boards of governors. What is your problem with that?

**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** Delegation is a quite an interesting word, because what is delegated can be "undelegated". That emphasises the wisdom of what I understand the Chairman to be saying, which is that the Committee will seek its own legal advice on some of those issues. You can explain the wording to your heart's content, but it must be established what, in the last resort, the wording in the Bill means. Setting aside the questions of what is intended or what will be delegated, what does the Bill actually say?

**Mr Lilley:** If the powers of the boards of governors are to be prescribed in the scheme of management, decisions would only be able to be taken in accordance with that scheme, which would be approved by the

ESA. Why, therefore, would the ESA, in any event, fail to agree to something that had been done within the rules that it prescribed?

**Mr Lunn:** That brings me back to the Department's line:

"The ESA may not lawfully refuse to put into effect any proper decision of a board of governors".

To me, that seems explicit.

**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** Who will decide whether the decision is proper?

**Mr Lunn:** I presume that it means "proper" in a legal sense.

**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** The ESA will decide on whether the decision is proper.

**Mr Lunn:** I do not think that that is the case.

I do have some problems with the Education Bill. One of those is that it constantly harks back to previous Orders, which I am not old enough to remember. However, the Department would say that the existing law, the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998, demonstrates that those principles are already part of education law and that nothing is being changed in that regard.

**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** All I can say is that many well-advised schools do not believe that to be the case. We are at an impasse. It would help all of us to have definitive legal advice on what the law says. It would be helpful if the lacunae in the detail of how the arrangements are to operate in practice were to be filled in and if we could be reassured that the legislation, including the further legislation that is not yet before us, represents a coherent scheme for education in Northern Ireland. We are not in that position.

**The Chairperson:** Over the past weeks and months, we have sought legal advice on the definition of the employer and of the employing authority. We also have the submission on the legal representation that was made when the GBA came before the Committee. There is always a risk of having different legal interpretations, and one can get into a legal minefield. We have endeavoured to ensure that the Committee has the information. Ultimately, we will reach the stage at which the Committee has to make decisions and agree on those issues.

We have taken legal opinion from the GBA, and we have sought and received our own legal advice. Today, we will put to the Department the gaps and the issues that were raised and ask about the amendments that it is considering. We will see whether, if all of that were brought together, it would marry up whether it would be capable of bridging the current gap that exists between the Department's view of there being

a misunderstanding and the view that there is a misinterpretation.

You can see the minefield in which we are. That is why the Committee took what I believe was the right decision not to rush our consideration of the Bill, as even the Department has proposed amendments to it. We cannot be more definitive, as we are still working our way through the process.

**Mr Lunn:** You expressed serious concerns about the Bill's provisions for the appointment of governors, although the Department tells the Committee that your concerns are unfounded and that the Bill will result in little if any change. You will, as the Chairperson said, get the Department's response shortly. Sir Ken spoke about an impasse, and there is a clear difference of opinion.

**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** We look forward to the Department's response with eager anticipation, but with a degree of scepticism.

**Mr Young:** Clarity is important. We have a wonderful opportunity to move into the future by taking advice from places whose systems work well and by introducing those systems here. Mr Lunn mentioned the phrase "the voluntary principle", but compare that phrase against so much else in the Bill. It is double language, and, as the Chairperson said, we do not know what it means. The thrust of the Bill seems to be to tighten and constrict, which is different from the Department's response.

**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** I want to echo what Billy said about the nature of boards of governors, because it reflects something about which I feel strongly: a school is an organism rather than a mechanism. Human relationships are very important — a family may have links with a school going back many years. Although a senior member of a family may live some miles from a school, he may feel that he owes much to it and may want to make a contribution to it. He may have professional skills that he could bring to the management of that school, and it would be a tragedy if we said to him that we are terribly sorry, but you are not as aware of the area as some others.

Schools are organisms that have adjusted over a heck of a long time, and most have stood the test of time pretty well.

**Mr Lunn:** Let me give you a flavour of what you will hear from the Department. It says that there are no powers in the Bill for the ESA to remove or restrain a board of governors. That is the direct opposite of what you are alleging.

**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** Except that ultimate authority over the scheme of governance seems to rest with the ESA; therefore, it can create boards of governors that will, ultimately, bow to what it wants them to do.



**Mr Lunn:** The Department also says that the composition of boards of governors will not change and that the proportion of appointments made by the ESA will be the same as those made by the education and library boards at present.

**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** It would be much easier for us in preparing our evidence if we were aware before we arrived what the Department had to say in response to our submission. It seems extraordinary that the Committee has advice from the Department before we appear and that after we appear departmental officials appear again and shoot down what we say. That is slightly rum.

**Mr Lunn:** I am giving you an opportunity to expand on what is in your submission paper and to refute what the Department says. The issue is about more than differences of emphasis.

**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** When we see the Department's paper we will scrutinise it with our usual care, and we will say what we feel we ought to say about it.

**The Chairperson:** May I clarify the issue, Sir Ken? The procedure has been that the Department's paper is not made available to other organisations until the Department has submitted it to the Committee and its officials have appeared before the Committee; it is then made available to those organisations, and, at that stage, you will have every right to respond. We used to call them rebuttals from the Department; however, we have since given them the courtesy of calling them responses.

**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** Friendly rebuttals.

**The Chairperson:** You can use your own discretion. You will be fully entitled to come back to the Committee with a written response on the issues that are raised in the paper that will be given to you.

**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** It is conceivable that may do that, Chairman.

**Mrs M Bradley:** In your submission you state:

"We believe that the principles underpinning the ESA are not based upon education but upon control. Rural areas may particularly suffer from this centralisation."

Would you elaborate on what you mean by control and on how rural areas will be worse off?

**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** Whatever one's reading of the Bill, it gives to a centralised and centralising authority more power over the whole system than has previously been exercised by the pre-existing bodies. It is a bad thing if government in any country has too fine and ultimate a grasp on the whole system of education. In principle, I am antipathetic to that.

There are guidelines, rules and procedures, and all of us must follow the law. The ESA will be the

employer; however, school governors who deal with employment practices in their school must have regard to all the provisions of the law relating to employment. There is no sense in which we are independent of the law; we all operate within it.

Our organisation is irritated to hear itself described as "breakaway schools": we do not want to break away from anything. We are part of the state system, and we think that Northern Ireland has a great advantage over England, where far too many schools are not part of the state system. We will conform to the law, whatever the law may be.

**Mr Young:** The Chairman quoted a phrase to the effect that the ESA, as a regional organisation, will have a strong local presence and will be able to focus on local delivery. If that were true, it would be a very good thing; however, it must be clearly defined. We are not talking just about rural areas; we also mean disadvantaged areas in the city. If the ESA is to be a regional organisation with a strong local presence and a focus on local delivery — and perhaps exactly what that means will be explained to us in detail — it would be good for rural schools that feel that no one cares about what happens to them. It would be tremendous if they had a mechanism to draw on advice from some source in their area.

Moreover, it would be good if schools in disadvantaged city areas — where, as you know, there are problems with standards of literacy and numeracy — were aware of something being done, of a local presence and local delivery, with smaller class sizes, greater support and more teachers. That is the sort of thing that we envisage; however, we would like to see the details written down somewhere so that we know exactly what is involved.

This is supposed to be streamlining by replacing five organisations with one. How will it be planned? Will it save money? Will it deliver a better local service? We have a glorious opportunity, and we do not want to be nailed to the past.

**Mrs M Bradley:** Have you confidence in the ESA to deliver an enhanced service?

**Mr Young:** I would need to see the details. I worry about centralisation. Centralising education has not worked in other places; it is usually more expensive and less efficient. It could deliver an enhanced service, but experience shows that it must be approached very carefully.

**Mr McCausland:** Thank you for your presentation. I want to make a general observation, followed by a specific question. You made the point that we need to know a good deal more. That is why we said that scrutiny of the first Bill would continue until September so that if the other Bill appears in June there will be an overlap of several months. We would be buying a pig



in a poke if we bought into the first Bill without knowing what is in the second.

It is a bad way of proceeding; nevertheless, we are lumbered with it. The best that we can do is to ensure that there is substantial overlap so that we know exactly what the second Bill contains before we make any decision on the first one.

**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** That is reassuring.

**Mr McCausland:** My question is on a specific matter about which I am not sure. Do education authorities in England employ the staff of city academies?

**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** The letter in the press said that local education authorities exert more and more control over city academies, which were set up with the understanding that they would be relatively free of such control.

There is obviously a political struggle in the Labour Party between new Labour — Blairite Labour — which wants to move in that direction, and the more traditional, union-powered Labour, which favours more control and is reluctant to see anything escape the power and control of the local education authority.

We are contemplating the creation of, arguably, the largest and most powerful single education body in western Europe; therefore, we must be extremely careful about its scope and functions.

**Mr Young:** A crucial aspect of its work will be to turn out high-quality teachers, and, across the board, Northern Ireland is doing much better than elsewhere in that regard. However, although, we are not doing too badly compared with elsewhere, physics is down yet again and chemistry is struggling.

When parents consider the future of their children they must see an education system that allows their children to develop. That is the crux of the matter. Northern Ireland's future depends on good teachers — particularly of the sciences. We must produce outstanding teachers in order to lift the Province from where it sits on the edge of Europe. Will we produce a system for the future about which people can be excited because of the freedom that being part of it gives them? That is the foundation of the voluntary principle.

**The Chairperson:** Are some elements that you want to retain not an administrative burden on the schools that you govern? Would a central organisation that took on much of the administration not leave you with more freedom to get on with providing education? Do you envisage any administrative arrangements that are undertaken by voluntary grammar schools being shelved off to the ESA?

**Mr Young:** I do not envisage schools' administrative arrangements being taken over by the ESA; I believe

that voluntary grammar schools are happy to continue with what they do at present.

I was thinking more about the freedom of teachers who want to get on with teaching and be rid of form-filling and such. Teaching should be an area in which teachers can express themselves and in which they can take their subject to the highest level. It is about a physics graduate who has a first-class or 2:1 honours degree going into a form-one classroom and being able to grab the children's attention and enthuse them.

I witnessed that in my previous life as a headmaster when I observed the school's head of maths teaching a form-one class. He had the children's wrapt attention. In order to teach them the basic elements of calculus, he had taken the lesson beyond the curriculum, and the children were captivated.

The future of education will be in having a system that will attract top-class graduates who will grab young people. It is not about grabbing the sixth form, particularly; it is about capturing young people's attention and exciting them from form one. That is what is required for the education system of the future; teachers should have the freedom to say, "Och, let the curriculum go; let me go out there and tell them what science is all about."

**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** The idea of opting in rather than opting out is appealing. I come back to the rubric that was regularly presented to us at conferences by Gavin Boyd and others like him who said that they were there to help. There is no objection to a school's representatives saying that the new process is a chore. They might say that, due to modest resources and an inexperienced board of governors that is not very skilled, they would like someone else to run the school for them. We are saying that there are people who are perfectly capable of doing it and that therefore they should be allowed to get on with it.

**The Chairperson:** If the Bill were amended to allow that to happen — which, if I remember correctly, was what the GBA wanted — would you see room for manoeuvre?

**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** That makes a great deal of sense. We talk about schools as if one school was like another; however, they are terrifically different. All schools, from the wee primary school in the countryside to a big city-centre voluntary grammar school, are different. Some are perfectly capable of looking after themselves. Individuals and societies should look after themselves wherever possible; if they cannot, however, there should be a safety net or a state mechanism to take away the burden when they want to shed it.

**Mrs O'Neill:** I want to return to employment arrangements and schemes and the points that Trevor Lunn raised. Clause 8(2) and 8(3) do not give the ESA the power to reject any properly taken decision of a

board of governors. Their purpose is to permit the ESA to ask the board of governors to reconsider a matter if — and only if — the board of governors has not followed its own procedures. That is clear.

One cannot take the Education Bill in isolation; it must be considered alongside existing law. Trevor referred to the powers that schedule 2 of the Education Order 1998 gives boards of governors in relation to staff complement, discipline, suspension and dismissal. They are all set out in that schedule.

William said that the Bill suggested an earlier intervention than before. Where do you see that in the Bill? I do not see that.

**Mr Young:** I do not have the Bill before me. I cannot remember the relevant clauses, but, when reading the Bill, I got the impression that the controlling authority would intervene earlier than it does now. I will try to find the relevant clause, but that was the tone of it.

I agree with you. It is worrying that, on one hand, the phrase that Mrs O'Neill mentioned suggests that schools will be allowed to opt out if they disagree with the ESA; other clauses suggest the opposite. One of the worrying aspects of the Bill is its duplicity of terms. That duplicity is evident not only when one compares the Bill with the policy papers, but when one reads the Bill. It is not quite doublespeak, but on one the hand it talks about control, and on the other it contains the phrase that you mentioned. Where does the truth lie? That is my worry.

I know that the Committee has struggled with the legal issues; I found them complex. I am giving you a honest answer. When I read that phrase against other phrases, I am not sure which will win the debate — the ESA or the board of governors. There is a duplicity of intent in the Bill. I cannot put my finger on it, but that is why it needs to be defined and made clearer.

**Mrs O'Neill:** I can only go on what I have read, and what I have read is clear. I do not think that clause 8(2) and 8(3) gives the ESA the powers that you feel it does.

**Mr O'Dowd:** I apologise for being late and for missing the first part of your presentation. I have read the briefing paper, and I will read the Hansard report of this session to catch up on any comments that I missed.

First, what exactly is the “voluntary principle”?

**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** It means that individuals and corporate bodies should look after themselves, in so far as that is possible without harming other people or being contrary to the public good; it is almost like the notion of subsidiarity in the European Community. If someone can do something that does not impinge on the public interest, he or she should be allowed to get on with it and not be subject to the governing authority of an organisation at a higher level.

**Mr O'Dowd:** I have no difficulty with that interpretation; however, when the principle has been debated in this context it has sounded more like independence. A group of schools wishes to have complete independence from the Department of Education and any overview body, and yet withal they are prepared to accept £250,000 a year in funds.

**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** I am sorry that that is your impression. Before you arrived, I said that I regret very much people describing us as rebel or breakaway schools: we are part of the state system, and most of our schools receive capital and current support. As it happens, the Royal Belfast Academical Institution receives only current support to see that children are educated. We must respond to the requirements of the curriculum as prescribed by the state, and we must also follow the salary-negotiating arrangements that apply to all schools.

The notion that we are independent of the state is not true. Nevertheless, there is a place in society for organisations that have a long history and a profound ethos of a different character that have contributed enormously to society over the years. We are antipathetic to the excessive centralisation of state power that governs every aspect of our lives. I find that objectionable.

**Mr O'Dowd:** I would not take offence at being called a rebel. *[Laughter.]*

**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** We will have to be very careful about the terms that we use.

**Mr O'Dowd:** Surely no board of governors could implement a ruling that was profoundly illegal.

**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** Absolutely not.

**Mr O'Dowd:** The Bill says that the ESA will take on the role of the CCMS in the maintained sector and the role of the boards in the controlled sector and that it will be duty-bound to inform a board if it goes outside the remit of the law.

**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** Consider employment: every teacher, groundsman, janitor and dinner lady in the Province will be employed by this extraordinarily powerful state-sponsored organisation. Political parties, above all, are keen to do their own thing and preserve their ethos, whatever that may be, and so are schools.

As I said earlier, this is rather a rum state of affairs, given that everyone who works for a school, such as the Royal Belfast Academical Institution, which still owns its buildings, will not be an employee of the school but of the education and skills authority. That is what the Bill will mean. That is not necessary and will not advance the public interest.

**Mr O'Dowd:** Is it not a case of he who pays the piper calling the tune?

**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** Are you arguing that everything that the state supports should be run by the state? Where would that end? Will the state nationalise the universities? Will all university lecturers and professors be employees of a state body? You would face a fair old hurroosh if you went that far.

**Mr O'Dowd:** There have been instances in which staff in the education sector have not been treated equitably with regard to their pay and conditions; that was highlighted most dramatically by the long and heated classroom assistants' dispute, after which a resolution was reached. Some people, particularly those in the grammar-school sector, were left outside that resolution. Several million pounds had to be taken from the public purse to ensure that staff in the grammar-school sector were correctly paid. A single employing authority would protect the employment terms and conditions of staff.

**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** I wish that I had some members of our staff with me. Staff terms and conditions are negotiated at the level above that of an individual school, and our school observes those negotiated agreements. The notion that we all go off into the wild blue yonder is very wide of the mark. We are caught up in negotiating arrangements, and we adhere to the state's prescription of curricular responsibilities, and our schools are inspected by the schools inspectorate. That is as it should be.

Of course we are conscious that our activities are largely funded by the state. The question is whether what we do with that funding is in the public interest, and we think that it is. Since China and India are turning out PhDs by the thousand, it is vital to have schools in whose ethos academic excellence features as a criterion. We are not talking about having a homogenous group of schools; we are talking about schools that are very different. Difference is a good thing. Let us not go for uniformity, for state control of everything and for everything being identical. That is the antithesis of freedom in society.

**Mr Young:** Earlier, I talked about how the voluntary principle goes right down to the individual member of staff and about loyalty to an institution. The voluntary principle gets so much more out of staff. For 37 years, I took games every Saturday morning, and I was not paid for it. During the cricket season, I was involved from 10.00 am until 4.00 pm or 5.00 pm on Saturdays. I did that for the love of the game, the love of the young people, and because of my love and loyalty to the school. I am no martyr for doing that; I enjoyed it. Many staff volunteer; they simply give of their time. That is what one gets from staff as a result of the voluntary principle.

Mrs O'Neill talked about clause 8(2), and it is true that that provision is in the Bill. However, clause 5(5) states that:

"An employment scheme for a school submitted to ESA under subsection (1)(b) shall not come into force until it has been approved by ESA or until such date as ESA may, in giving its approval, specify."

On the one hand, the ESA is to give effect to what a school will do in accordance with such an employment scheme; on the other, it will control what the scheme is. That is an illustration of how one part of the Bill looks OK while another part does not. I am sorry, Mr O'Dowd; I did not mean to cut across you.

**Mr O'Dowd:** No, it is fine.

**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** I wish to pursue the idea of the voluntary principle a bit further. I have been reading books that are set in the old Soviet Union, about which I am very interested. After the Bolshevik revolution, the Soviets decided that individual farms were a thoroughly bad idea and should be replaced with collective farms. It was decided that the state would run agriculture.

Production fell to the lowest imaginable level. People on state farms had no sense of belonging, no real identity and that approach eventually had to be abandoned. The loyalty of people in an understandable organisation of understandable dimensions is not to be underrated.

The people in my school work their guts out, not just to deliver the prescribed curriculum, but to give the kids the richest possible experience in all sorts of ways. Would they feel the same if they were the employees of some great amorphous organisation up there in the stratosphere? I do not know. That is a big risk to contemplate.

**Mr O'Dowd:** That issue has been teased out at previous Committee meetings. In my area, I am aware of schools under CCMS control in which staff spend their weekends and evenings, without pay, organising all sorts of activities with children. Those teachers' loyalty is, first and foremost, to their vocation, which is education, and they are loyal to their pupils and schools. That loyalty is not determined by whether they work for the voluntary sector. I have no doubt that similar work is going on in voluntary grammars. Whether in the voluntary, controlled or maintained sectors, teachers are loyal to their vocations. Therefore, I am not convinced by Sir Kenneth's argument.

I have read and re-read the reference in the association's presentation to governors' appointments — sometimes even politicians put themselves in other people's shoes to see where they are coming from. The submission states:

"The schools which AQE represents, have for years been "melting-pots", attracting pupils from wide areas, often across frontiers of division. Governors drawn from a local community will provide too parochial and narrow a view."



I may be narrow-minded, but that tells me that the AQE does not want governors from the New Lodge or the Shankill in its schools.

**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** That is your interpretation. We have rehearsed that issue. In my faltering way, I tried to say that good schools are organisms, not mechanisms. They rely very heavily on certain qualities. For instance, if four generations of a family have been involved with a school, it is an important part of their life. The senior member of that family may now live 20 or 30 miles away from the school. He has expertise that he could, and wants to, bring to the board. Are we to say to that man or woman, Sorry, we do not want you because you are from outside the area.?

The Committee probably knows that I speak for a school that draws its pupils from an incredibly wide area over greater Belfast and beyond. That enriches the school and society, because the more that we rub up against people other than those who live in our immediate area, the better we are in many respects. Therefore, I make no apology for that.

**Mr Young:** We are saying, yes, by all means support community governors, but do not limit us. As Sir Kenneth said, give the school the option to pick somebody a bit further afield if they have a gift that is needed on the board.

**Mr O'Dowd:** I have no objections to that in principle. However, I am concerned that a family living at the front gates of your school would not be able to belong to your board of governors.

**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** We are getting into the debate that we have been having for quite a long time about another issue. The notion that our school would not welcome people from, say, Sandy Row, is absolutely —

**Mr O'Dowd:** Is anybody on your board of governors from Sandy Row?

**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** Not as far as I know; however, there is nothing to bar somebody from Sandy Row becoming a member of the board of governors.

**Mr O'Dowd:** I have no objection to a board of governors being drawn from a wider geographical area, but I believe that the success of any school is based on the community with which it deals and in which it works. For a school to become part of a community, it must represent that community, both through its pupil intake and its board of governors.

**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** What is being advocated is a neighbourhood school. We are antipathetic to the idea of a neighbourhood school. We think that Northern Ireland is the last place in the world that should say, "This is your area; there you are and there you stay".

**Mr O'Dowd:** I know, perhaps, where you are coming from in that we should have an involvement in our community but not at the expense of turning our backs to surrounding communities. They may be from a different community. I am not arguing —

**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** Saying that we turned our back is a wonderful argument, but —

**Mr O'Dowd:** I am not saying that you did, but Mr Young was arguing that your school is inclusive because it is diverse and draws governors from a broad area. There is an argument that society is breaking down; people close their front doors and their wider family and the community outside are no longer important. I am arguing that including people in every function of society, including in schools, will help to rebuild society and give people back their community spirit.

**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** Let me tell you about the sort of people who sit on our board, and Billy may wish to say a few words about those who sit on his board. They largely went to public elementary schools, as they were called then, from all over Belfast, whether in the west or east. I would never have attended a grammar school if I had not been awarded a scholarship; my parents could not have afforded to send me to one. Those people went on to gather life experiences, which are useful to bring to the board table. Therefore, categorising people as elitist snobs simply because they have had a good education and done something with their lives seems a ridiculous view of the world. We are looking for people who are capable of running, in many cases, a big enterprise and who will be responsible for a multi-million-pound budget.

**Mr O'Dowd:** Someone who manages a family budget of £70 a week is as important to society as someone who manages a budget of £20 million a week. In fact, single parents who have a family budget of £70 a week can bring the sort of understanding to education that is, perhaps, currently required.

**The Chairperson:** I ask members to stick to asking questions rather than making statements, please, because what is being said about the voluntary principle can also be applied to the maintained sector. Bear in mind the presentations to the Committee from that sector, which said that it wants to act independently and to employ its own staff.

**Mr O'Dowd:** I was trying to tease the issue out.

**The Chairperson:** We must be fair and ensure that we do not pick on just one education sector.

**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** We do not in the least mind being picked on; we are well used to it by now.

**Mr Young:** The idea of community is interesting. The important issue is for schools to have governors who care about it. They do not have to live in the area,



but they must care and have the required expertise to appreciate what is going on.

I am immensely proud of the fact that the school in which I taught for 40 years was to the fore in having both sides of the community living and working together. When I left, between 25% and 30% of the school were from the Catholic tradition. Young people who come to school together leave aside questions of whether they are from a Protestant or a Catholic background. Some of those children were from the local area and some were from a much wider area. Presently, two form 2 children travel from Glenarm — one is Protestant and one is Catholic — because they see a community of which they want to be a part. That stems from the school's staff and the voluntary principle, and our school is not alone in that respect.

Do not get me wrong, I am not saying that that is what every school should be aiming for. I am saying that my experience was of a community that cared; pupils put on their blazers and left aside everything else from outside. Many of those pupils had to cross interfaces. I remember people crossing interfaces during very troubled times because of what the school community could offer.

Let us widen the matter beyond the idea of a community governor. We certainly need governors from the community, but they need not be from the local community. Give schools the chance to get people from a wider area than that. If they want to take people from the local community that is well and good, but let us not limit them to that. I agree that community involvement is important. However, I also agree with Sir Kenneth; the last thing Northern Ireland wants is a whole system of local schools. We want people to cross the barriers of the past and head into the future.

**Mr O'Dowd:** I have one more question. What is the difference between the AQE and the GBA? I ask because we have received several submissions from different societies and groups, and I read them to try to establish what weight to put on them. Is the AQE a constituted body?

**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** Initially, the AQE was a voluntary pressure group that represented governors, teachers and former pupils of schools. When 34 schools signed up to the idea of establishing a co-operative examination, we decided that we needed to create a corporate entity. AQE Limited is a company, of which I am chairman. It will be responsible for providing the examination. Of course, the examination is all that we will provide. The question of how the examination is used in relation to the admissions criteria will be a matter for the board of governors of each individual school.

**Mr O'Dowd:** Are you a separate entity from the GBA?

**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** At the start of the meeting I said that you may ask why we are here, given that many of our member schools are members of the GBA. I am on the executive committee of the GBA; I am aware of the evidence that the GBA submitted to the Committee, and I support it. The GBA recommended a number of amendments that it thinks will improve the Bill. We support the view that it expressed in those amendments.

Again, you may ask why we are here, particularly given that, like many others, our school submitted its own evidence. The answer is simply that the main campaign that we have been fighting to retain academic selection is, in our minds, an attempt to preserve the ethos of our schools and the voluntary principle. Any ground that we gained in that particular struggle will be forfeited if, at the end of the day, all schools become just the creatures of a Government body. That is why we are here.

**Mr Lunn:** I have some sympathy with the idea that the definition of a community governor as somebody who lives or works in the local community is too restrictive. If the definition made reference to catchment area, would it go some way towards satisfying you?

**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** No, I would be antipathetic to that. You are talking about neighbourhood schools, and I do not like the idea of neighbourhood schools at all — they are a thoroughly bad idea. Schools should be entitled to take in people who want to attend the school for whatever reason, and who have shown that they have what it takes to flourish and be happy in the school.

**Mr Lunn:** What is the local community in a place the size of Northern Ireland? Where does local community stop?

**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** The idea of the community as a ghetto with a fence around it is quite unreal. Let me be totally frank: Lisburn is very lucky because it has some excellent grammar schools of the highest-possible quality. In many ways, it is very convenient for Protestant parents to get their child into Wallace High School or Friends' School. However, they are not always able to do that, so another option could be our school. What is wrong with that? I think that there is nothing at all wrong with that. We are part of a melting pot of people who come from all sorts of different areas and circumstances. The last thing that we want to do is ghettoise Northern Ireland and pin people down to their locality and the schools there. That is a bad idea.

**Mr Lunn:** I went to Billy's school from Finaghy.

**Mr McCausland:** That school has a lot to answer for.

**The Chairperson:** OK, we do not want to start bringing out the school blazers.

**Mr Poots:** I support what Sir Kenneth just said about diversity. I was in that exact position. Two of my children attend grammar schools in Lisburn. One of my children had the option of going to the school of which Sir Kenneth is the chairman of the board of governors, and we took the option of sending him to a local secondary school. Those options were available to us as parents. For our family, we had the best choices and options available under the education system that we had.

**The Chairperson:** We do not want a restrictive process that closes down every option, but a process that provides options and variety, whether in the choice of governors or parental choice of school. Ken, Billy and Roy, thank you very much.

**Mr Young:** We have had a real sense that the Committee has been working very hard on this matter, and that you are doing your level best to find the right way ahead out of a very difficult situation. That has been obvious to people from the outside, and I am very grateful to you all for what you have been doing.

**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** I, too, would like to thank the Committee.

**The Chairperson:** I can assure you that the Committee will continue with that hard work.

**Mr Lilley:** In the context of this morning's discussion, my point is perhaps minor, but it is one that has, I understand, exercised the Committee. I am not a lawyer, but one of my legal friends told me that if the Bill is enacted on its present terms with the ESA as the employer, in the event of a dispute arising that has its genesis on the school campus, the school would not have an automatic right of appearing before any subsequent tribunal.

If that interpretation is legally correct — and under the specific industrial tribunals Act, I think that that is indeed the case — would it not improve the legislation if it was made perfectly clear that in such circumstances the school would automatically have a right of representation? One cannot conceivably envisage all the potential circumstances on which a dispute that ends up before a tribunal would be based. I think, therefore, it would be preferable for there to be clarity from the outset.

**The Chairperson:** Chris Stewart is here to represent the Department, and I think that he will answer that question. You are welcome to remain for that witness session.

**Mr Lilley:** Unfortunately, I have an appointment and am unable to stay. However, I will read the response in due course.

**The Chairperson:** The report will be in Hansard. Once again, thank you all for coming.

Members, I must leave as I have another appointment that I must keep, but I will return afterwards. As you know, the Deputy Chairperson is unable to be here because of a family bereavement. Members, with your indulgence, can I suggest that, as has happened in the past, Nelson takes the Chair until I return. Are members agreed?

*Members indicated assent.*

*(The Acting Chairperson [Mr McCausland] in the Chair)*

**The Acting Chairperson (Mr McCausland):** I welcome the representatives of the Association of Northern Ireland Education and Library Boards (ANIELB): Alderman Roy Beggs, chairperson of the North Eastern Education and Library Board; Peter Duffy, chairperson of the Western Education and Library Board; Gary Haire, chairperson of the South Eastern Education and Library Board; and Hilary Sloan, chairperson of the education committee of the Belfast Education and Library Board.

The association's written submission on the Education Bill and summary of key points are included in members' packs. It has also provided a response to the Department's policy paper 20, which deals with ownership and representation of publicly owned schools.

I invite the representatives of the association to give a short presentation outlining their key comments on the Education Bill. The Committee would appreciate it if you could keep that to 10 minutes. Members may then ask questions.

**Mr Gary Haire (Association of Northern Ireland Education and Library Boards):** We are delighted to join the Committee and to make our presentation. As you said, we have already submitted written evidence, so I will summarise our general views. My colleagues will respond on specific issues that cause the association some concern.

When the then Secretary of State, Peter Hain, announced in November 2005 that there would be a review of public administration, the association wrote to express, in broad, general terms, its support for the proposals to ensure better public service for local people through modern, accountable systems of administration that provide greater efficiency and effectiveness. Today, we find ourselves considering an Education Bill that has moved on and that bears little resemblance in character or substance to what was originally proposed or envisaged in the association's perspective and understanding.

Our support was based around the concept of an all-inclusive authority that could provide a world-class service for the benefit of the children and young people whom each of our respective boards serve on a daily basis. Through the comments we have read

reported in Hansard, the association is aware that the Committee has been scrutinising the Bill carefully. We believe that there must be a more open debate on proper area-based, democratic and accountable structures that deliver real efficiencies in the system and target resources on the basis of objectively measured need.

The association does not advocate maintenance of the status quo, but feels that any meaningful change should be predicated upon a rationale that is based on clear, concise and compelling evidence on educational best practice and economic robustness.

The association recognises that our children and young people need to have an education system that will enhance their capability of developing into adults and forming a society renowned for its world-class knowledge economy and a workforce that is well-trained, educated and motivated, thereby providing economic growth to drive stability in the future.

Already the system has seen significant improvement in educational outcomes over the years; those are not just due to our good education system, hard work and high-quality staff, but to external factors, too, not least what has happened in this House. Any proposed reform must not only continue to improve our educational outcomes but ensure a more coherent and holistic approach in the provision of children's services. We believe that those should not be arbitrarily subject to departmental boundaries; rather we should offer a fully resourced and integrated service provision to our children and young people so that they can gain the best educational experience that we can offer.

In considering the way forward, the association is of the view that it is important to understand any new structures in the context of the needs of the Northern Ireland community. We note that the Assembly has already committed to the overarching principles contained in the Bill by giving it a Second Stage, but we believe that the Committee can and must ensure that any new authority is all-inclusive and incorporates all sectors. That is not the situation at present, and the association has concerns that it appears that a number of the current bodies will be subsumed under the ESA while others will continue to exist, and, indeed, additional bodies are to be created. Hilary will respond to the Committee on that issue in a moment.

The prolonged time frame since the commencement of the RPA process has placed immeasurable stress and strain on staff employed in the current system. That, coupled with the ongoing uncertainty as to when or whether the new authority will come into being, is having an increasingly detrimental effect on staff morale. Peter will expand on that point.

We stress that it is vital to ensure that any proposed changes are right and proper, or, to quote the much-repeated phrase, "fit for purpose for the twenty-first

century". Ultimately, they must be beneficial to the children and young people whom we serve and the staff for whom we are responsible.

As we mentioned in our paper to the Committee, many of the clauses in the Bill are aspirational in nature and many questions still require clarification. Roy will speak of our concerns about boards of governors.

**Mr Roy Beggs Snr (Association of Northern Ireland Education and Library Boards):** The association feels that there is a need for clarity from the Assembly and the Department of Education regarding local governance arrangements for the future. At present, boards of governors are composed of members who represent the education and library boards, transferors or trustees, parents, teachers and the school principal. The boards of some schools also contain representatives from the Department of Education. The responsibilities of a board of governors include: finances; public funds; private funds raised by parents and friends of the school; delivery of the curriculum; setting targets; admissions to the school; suspension and expulsion of pupils; employment of teaching and non-teaching staff; and employers' functions, including staff discipline.

The board of governors of a controlled school can invite an officer from the relevant education and library board to give guidance, and a board of governors in a maintained school can invite an officer from the CCMS to give guidance. However, any guidance offered to boards of governors may not be followed because of the close relationship between members of the board of governors and employees.

Some members of a board of governors, through lack of confidence, insufficient knowledge of education and inadequate training, are reluctant to contribute in committee meetings. As a consequence, either a small number of members takes the lead in school management or the principal has the lead role. The association has concerns about how suitably qualified and skilled people will be recruited, retained and trained for the proposed new structures and responsibilities. Given that those positions are currently being advertised for the 2009-2013 period, will the people due to be appointed have been given a clear insight into what will be expected of them under any new authority in light of the legislation? Who will provide the necessary training and when?

We have heard an unconfirmed report that only about 200 governors have reapplied to serve on boards. That would be extremely serious, because tens of thousands of governors are needed to cover all the schools in Northern Ireland. We are concerned about what training and support will be given to governors to enable them to discharge their responsibility for



raising standards in their schools. Will the Department of Education, the Minister and the ESA endeavour to ensure that each board of governors contains the required mix of skills to perform its functions, take on its responsibilities and be accountable? Will the ESA provide model schemes of management prior to boards of governors assuming responsibility on 1 January 2010?

Recently, I discovered that the Department wanted a board member on an audit committee to have accountancy skills or financial expertise. However, as the Minister had not nominated anyone with that expertise, the board could not appoint such a member to either its audit or finance committees. If people with specific expertise are not appointed to boards of governors of schools, that same problem could arise.

Consideration must be given to remunerating people who serve as members on boards of governors, because we may not be able to continue to depend on volunteers. I trust that the Committee will be able to address some of those issues.

**Mr Haire:** We all recognise that today's economic climate is totally different to that which prevailed when the Bill commenced its passage. That is bound to have an effect on the proposals before the Assembly, particularly in light of the new Budget announcement from Westminster of a potential £122 million reduction in funding for the Northern Ireland economy.

If that amount is correct, how will the ESA make the substantial savings that have been outlined already, never mind the additional savings that will be required in this contracting market? Has the Committee seen evidence of how those savings will be made and how effective efficiencies will be realised?

Peter Duffy will speak to you about the governance of the ESA and the boards of governors and about the relationship between the employer and employing authority, which is a concern to us.

**Mr Peter Duffy (Association of Northern Ireland Education and Library Boards):** In a paper that was prepared in 2008 and sent to all MLAs, the association made specific reference to the size of the new education and skills authority. It compared the size of the new body with similar bodies in England, Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland. The average populations covered by the education bodies are 327,000 in England; 158,000 in Scotland; 134,000 in Wales; and, for each vocational educational committee in the Republic of Ireland, 140,000.

The existing average population in board areas in the North is 348,000. The new ESA will cover a population of approximately 1.8 million. That will be a massive education board; in fact, it will be the largest in these islands. Senior staff will spend a lot of their time criss-crossing Northern Ireland as they try to meet deadlines and, in the process, cause stress and anxiety

to themselves and others. If decisions have to be made in Fermanagh about the proper and adequate provision of education, senior staff will be required to be in Fermanagh to advise and direct boards of governors. Such meetings can be complex and time-consuming. It will not be acceptable for the ESA to issue a diktat from some central location. Local accountability will demand a local presence. As yet, no one knows where local offices will be located; we have been told that politicians have not yet decided where they will be.

To proceed with the recruitment of staff without confirmation of the location of posts would be unfair. Staff may find that the base for those posts could change to a location that is more accessible for them, and the reverse could also be true. A member of staff may secure a post in a particular location only to be based in a less accessible location at a later date.

It is important to identify the location of offices as a matter of urgency. For instance, what will be in Omagh, Armagh, Belfast or elsewhere? It seems that common sense has disappeared. Furthermore, staff morale in the offices of existing boards is going down, because of the perception of how the ESA jobs will be recruited and the difficulties entailed.

I can envisage a future with one super-board dealing with all of Northern Ireland, and senior staff criss-crossing the Province as they try to deal with urgent problems. One must remember that the problems of all schools, large or small, must be dealt with fairly and properly, and there are currently 1,250 schools and approximately 330,000 pupils.

Closing a school is not like closing a shop at a street corner or closing a branch of a bank that is not making money. As members know, schools are part of a community. The community considers that it owns the schools. In the maintained sector, that is partially true, because the community has contributed to the schools. Therefore, they feel a sense of ownership. Closing the schools will not be an easy matter, especially if local people are not talking to the boards of governors and dealing with parents.

The association has problems with the governance arrangements for the ESA. It is proposed that there will be a chairperson and between seven and 11 members, most of whom will need to have an educational background. The current arrangement allows for 35 members in each board area, comprising councillors and other stakeholders who have considerable expertise and experience in the education sector. The association is concerned that the skills and knowledge base of current boards will be lost, diminished or eroded. What about the democratic function and accountability of the new body in a situation in which the number of staff and pupils for whom the ESA will be responsible is



increasing dramatically, but in which governance and accountability seem to be significantly reduced?

The ANIELB welcomes the establishment of local committees to provide important regional governance within the ESA, but cannot find any mention of that in the Education Bill. Clarification is required on the composition and function of local committees. Will they be boards under another name?

Another matter that is related to local governance and that is giving us grave concern is the relationship between the employer, as the ESA sees itself — as alluded to in clause 3(1) — and the employing authority, as, it seems, the boards of governors will become in the new dispensation. Boards of governors are to have maximised supported autonomy, but, in the matter of employment of staff, they may become a subcommittee of the ESA. That issue has not been clarified in the Bill, and I can envisage some boards of governors disputing the authority of the ESA in matters involving employment legislation.

The Bill should, and must, clarify the relationship between the employer and the employing authority. Obviously, some boards of governors, especially boards of voluntary grammar schools, which have had maximised autonomy for a long time and appear to want to maintain it, will be loath to give up their traditional stance. In my experience, grammar school boards of governors have no difficulty in recruiting members of the legal profession to give advice and guidance. That is not the case with small schools. We all need clarity about the employer/employing authority relationship.

**Mr Haire:** Perhaps Hilary wishes to pick up on what I said about the concerns in the controlled sector.

**Mrs Hilary Sloan (The Association of Northern Ireland Education and Library Boards):** That has to do with the Department's policy paper 20. Chairman, would you like to discuss that paper after we have discussed the Education Bill?

**The Acting Chairperson:** It would be better to discuss it now.

**Mrs Sloan:** I am happy to do that. The Committee has our response to policy paper 20. The association believes that it is very important to establish a definition of the controlled sector. What do we mean when we talk about the controlled sector? We endorsed the definition that was given by the Southern Education and Library Board, which is set out in our response to policy paper 20.

That definition highlights four distinguishing points of the controlled sector. First, it has a community focus in that it is open to all in the community. Secondly, it has encompassing characteristics, excluding no one who could benefit from it. Thirdly, the sector is egalitarian

in nature, promoting equality among pupils and among staff. Fourthly, over the years, the controlled sector has been shaped by liberal thinking.

The association believes that the statutory right that the Protestant Churches have had since they transferred their schools in the 1950s and 1960s will now become an influence only, not a right. However, I will leave discussion on that to the Transferor Representatives' Council, from which the Committee may have heard or will hear in the future.

I reiterate what has already been said by other members of the association and by other people who have appeared before the Committee. There now appears to be a proliferation of bodies, but, the ESA to which we, as members of the education and library boards, originally signed up was to be one authority. That is certainly what I agreed to in the first instance. The different bodies appear not even to have the same or similar functions; some will be subsumed under the ESA, others will stay as they are and new bodies will be created. Policy paper 20 looks at the two new bodies that will be brought into being to represent the controlled sector: one to have an advocacy role and one to create an ownership structure for the sector.

The association worries that the ESA often appears to be more concerned with structures and buildings than with the education of children, important as structures and buildings are. However, because of the fact that there are bodies that represent all other sectors of education, we accept that the controlled sector needs an appropriate advocacy body to protect the interests of the sector in a manner that ensures parity of treatment with all other sectoral interests. As an association, we welcome the creation of such a body.

However, the education and library boards' members and staff wanted responsibility for the body concerned with ownership to pass to the ESA and to be discharged by the ESA, not by a distinct body. We gather that a statutory body will be artificially created to hold ownership rights. We wonder why arrangements in other parts of the UK should not apply to Northern Ireland. There have been suggestions that the ESA may show partiality to the controlled sector. The association believes that those comments show a lack of judgement.

The association is also concerned that, apart from the bureaucratic being that policy paper 20 presents as the ownership solution, there could be a financial drain in an already strained economic climate leading to less funding for front line services. Our paper concludes with a comment from the Western Education and Library Board, which we thought was apt: it says that paper 20 is confusing, contradictory and lacking in clarity regarding a range of issues pertaining to the future of the controlled sector.

**Mr Haire:** In conclusion, we in the association have a keen interest in children, young people and staff, and we bring a breadth of knowledge of the education system that has been garnered over a number of years. Our collective insight suggests that the creation of a regional authority could be commended; however, our eyes are still focused on the Strathclyde experience and what happened there. There are many complex legal issues, but the governance arrangements for the new authority need to be clarified.

If we may be so bold, we suggest that the Committee may want to pause to reflect on all the evidence that it has heard to date from a variety of witnesses, and, perhaps, be prepared to reconsider the path that has been embarked upon. At times, it feels as though a large tanker was launched around 2005 as part of the RPA and that it is moving in a direction in which we are not really convinced our education system needs to go. I suppose that this Committee is the only body that can alter its direction.

In light of the proposals before us, can we categorically guarantee that the new system of education being proposed will improve our children and young people's educational outcomes, or will our embarkation on this process cause yet another generation to experience the turmoil that change will inevitably bring, without ensuring any better educational outcome for them or our community?

The theory that has been presented in the Bill has many facts, and those facts need to be clarified. Let us not do what Einstein suggested when he said:

"If the facts don't fit the theory, change the facts."

Thank you very much for hearing our presentations today.

**The Acting Chairperson:** Thank you for your presentations. Can you elaborate on the nature of any potential conflict of interest that might arise from the ESA assuming the responsibilities of the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) and the need to ensure public confidence in the independence and rigour of public examinations? That issue has been raised.

**Mr Haire:** The concern expressed was that the central body will have an awarding body function as regards awarding qualifications. That does not seem to happen with any other authority in the rest of the United Kingdom. If that were to be the case, would there be a possibility of that being open to challenge from the Monopolies and Mergers Commission? That was our thinking on that point.

**The Acting Chairperson:** Is there a concern that the ESA would have a duty to promote high standards and yet be responsible for setting the examinations to determine whether high standards have been achieved?

**Mr Haire:** Yes.

**Mrs Sloan:** The association feels strongly, as do some boards — although some feel more strongly than others — that there could be a conflict of interest when a body tries to do two things at one time. It is concerned that there would be no body that sits outside that authority that could play a more independent role in both the setting and examining of standards.

**Mr O'Dowd:** Peter mentioned that he was deeply concerned that because the ESA will be a single body, its staff will have to travel back and forth across the North, which will cause all kinds of difficulties. That is understandable. However, Hilary, you then said that the association originally signed up to having a single body, and that you are now concerned that there are various layers underneath that. Is there not a contradiction there?

**Mrs Sloan:** No, I do not think so. The authority is, in some way, the body that will be in charge of education. We signed up to the establishment of one body. Part of Peter's concerns is how that will work itself out, and whether it will have local committees. We signed up to there being one education authority, but that now seems to be dividing into a lot of other bodies. I do not think that there was a contradiction in what we said. Following on from Peter's question, we need to work out what regional shape that one authority will have in providing education in different areas of Northern Ireland. We have not yet seen any evidence of that. However, we did not envisage a proliferation of sectoral bodies as part of that education provision.

**Mr Duffy:** My problem was with the operational side of the ESA. A small body in the centre would, obviously, determine policy. However, how will the operation of that policy happen at local level? Would local committees be subject to the ESA, perhaps subcommittees of the ESA? Leaving sectoral influence aside — because that is a different argument that Hilary is putting forward — as a unified body, the ESA will need local committees, if only to operate the system on even a human resources level.

If the ESA is to be the employer, and the employing authority is, perhaps, the school, how will the ESA ratify appointments and deal with all the paperwork that appointments generate? It will need a record of them, which might come through electronically. Nevertheless, if a board of governors is to appoint someone to a particular post, its members need the application forms in front of them, and they must ensure that the information in the forms meets the advertised criteria for the post.

Who will check whether that is done correctly, if not a local office or a central office? It would be a mammoth task to direct all that paperwork to Belfast and would multiply human resources exponentially.

Furthermore, employment litigation is increasing by the day and is quite a serious business. Therefore, those matters must be handled properly. That is my concern.

**Mr O'Dowd:** I appreciate the clarification. I think that the Department has told the Committee that there will be local support offices. I have not read anywhere that the headquarters will be in Belfast.

**Mr Duffy:** I am not saying that; if the headquarters were in Derry, there would be the same sorts of pressures.

**Mr O'Dowd:** I agree with you. There has to be some form of local support network.

**Mr Duffy:** This is a huge operation. We are creating one mammoth education body to deal with 1·8 million people, and it is increasing the problems.

**Mr O'Dowd:** There is no representative here from the Southern Education and Library Board. Is that significant?

**Mr Duffy:** Marie Donnell was not able to come, and she was quite happy that I represented the Southern Education and Library Board.

**Mr O'Dowd:** OK. Grand job.

**Mr Duffy:** Our boards are similar in nature, and we co-operate on the curriculum.

**Mrs Sloan:** We were told that we could have only four representatives.

**Mr O'Dowd:** That is OK.

**The Acting Chairperson:** I will put five into four.

**Mr Elliott:** Thank you for your presentation. It might have been Roy who spoke about possible difficulties in attracting new boards of governors. What is the real problem in the ESA with regard to that, and what will be the difficulty?

**Mr Beggs Snr:** There are real concerns about the new and additional responsibilities that members of boards of governors will have, and how they will be held accountable. People will be reluctant to become governors unless there is an assurance that adequate training will be given to enable them to carry out their duties and responsibilities. Those matters are unconfirmed, but that is what I have heard.

**Mr Elliott:** The difficulty with additional training is that it requires additional time, and governors act very much in a voluntary capacity. Would that in itself not lead to problems?

**Mr Beggs Snr:** Undoubtedly, it will. It will also bring about additional costs. However, people will not be confident about taking up responsibility unless they have had adequate training.

**Mr Elliott:** And adequate safeguards as well, I would have thought, with regard to legal responsibility.

It has been mentioned a couple of times that the original perception of the ESA has changed. In which areas do you believe that it has changed most? I noticed that your submission states that the association understood that employment would come under one structure. Now, you say that it seems that different moves have been made on that issue. What do you consider to be the main changes to the ESA as it was originally envisaged?

**Mr Duffy:** My understanding is that the ESA will be the employer, but I am not sure that that would work out operationally as it is envisaged. There is a lack of proper distinction between the employer and the employing authority. When we get down to the nitty-gritty, I do not believe that boards of governors will give up their authority.

The concept has been around since the 1989 Order and, subsequently, I think, the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1993. It was operational under CCMS and worked reasonably well because of goodwill. Boards of governors of grammar schools, which, traditionally, have many lawyers, are not going to give up authority too easily to a central body under the new arrangements.

**Mr Elliott:** To clarify, Chairman, the association's submission states:

"The association welcomes the fact that ESA is to be the single employing authority for all grant-aided schools. It was on this understanding that the association supported the establishment of ESA. However, the current vision of ESA is far removed from what the association originally envisaged."

**Mrs Sloan:** When we looked at the ESA when it was set up, we did not realise that all those other sectoral bodies would become major bodies in it. We knew that there would be an advisory forum and other parts of the ESA. We understood, and we hoped, that there would be local committees. That is the operational structure of the ESA.

However, at that time, we did not realise that various other sectoral interests would be represented by more concrete bodies. In many ways, the only part of the education sector that was left out initially was the controlled sector, which is why those two new bodies are to be set up.

**Mrs M Bradley:** You are all welcome. My concern, which I have raised in the Committee several times, is about the situation with the boards of governors. I also believe that the loss of the education and library boards will be damaging to schools. Schools' boards of governors were drawn mainly from the education and library boards. It worked well.

At present, I sit on one board of governors. I know that there are big concerns, and they must be given serious attention. People have been scared off; they have great concerns about legalities and about the size



of the ESA. They are not well enough informed to allow them to make up their minds. I can tell you that, for some time, governors have been talking about and considering stepping down altogether from boards. A school cannot operate without a good board of governors. It is the heart of a school. Therefore, it is right that we are concerned about the matter.

**Mr Poots:** I hear what has been said about training for boards of governors. I sit on three boards of governors. Usually, when training is mentioned, people roll their eyes. They are not particularly convinced about the training that is currently on offer. Therefore, if there is to be more of the same training, I would not recommend it.

What is the ethos of the schools that you represent?

**Mr Haire:** That is a good question. We all have our own, individual perspectives on ethos. The association does not necessarily have a theory that it has talked through. We represent children and people in the education authority.

**Mr Duffy:** I am from the Catholic sector. Therefore, I have a particular view on maintained schools. I am a trustee representative of the board and have a particular view on the ethos of Catholic schools. I cannot speak for other schools, but I know that some Protestant schools have a very definite ethos. I taught for seven years in a controlled school. That was many years ago, but I am sure that it has not changed. That school had a definite ethos, and I had absolute respect for it. Every school has its ethos, perhaps some more than others, but ethos is very important for a school. It is the underlying thread that holds the whole school together.

**Mr Poots:** Therein lies the Committee's problem, and perhaps even the Minister's problem. In the CCMS and the Catholic sector in general, there is a very clear ethos. I am a Protestant. I come from the Reformed faith, and I would like the ethos in the schools to which I send my children to be equally strong, but it is not. You boast of your diversity. Where I come from, that is not what we want. We do not want that degree of diversity to the point where everything is watered down. We want to be included and to bring in others, but there are many in the Protestant community who look enviously upon the Catholic sector because it has that strong ethos. When Catholics send their children to a Catholic school, they know the ethos is strong there. However, that strong ethos does not exist in the Protestant sector. That is something that will have to be dealt with, and I note what you say about the transferor representatives, and so on.

There has been a major change in the Protestant churches over the past 30 or 40 years. You speak of three main Protestant churches; however, the Baptist Church is probably equal in size to the Methodist

Church, for example, and that is not taken into account in any of this. We cannot continue to look at this matter in the way that we do now and expect to find a ready solution to what the public want.

**The Acting Chairperson:** That issue is one of the most difficult in all of this. It is simple to deconstruct what is there, but when we start to deconstruct all the issues that have been buried for years suddenly come out into the open. It will take time for those to be resolved. There is a strong view from many members that we must consider equality across the sectors. In my view, there was some institutionalised inequality in the past.

**Mr Lunn:** With respect to the recruitment of governors, Roy said that, anecdotally, there were only about 200 applications. However, am I right in saying that that process has only just begun? Have not invitations just been issued, or are they not about to be issued? It may be early days yet.

**Mr Beggs Snr:** The invitations have been issued and it is expected that the process will be completed by June. You are right: it is early days. However, my experience of speaking with governors in the schools in which I serve is that there is some apprehension about signing up again.

**Mr Lunn:** I am not surprised, and I share their apprehension. Fear of the unknown is a big factor, especially when the job is supposed to be voluntary. I have some sympathy with the view that there should be some remuneration.

In your paper, you discuss the make-up of the ESA and the proposal to have between seven and 11 members. Chris Stewart is laughing behind you. It is stipulated that a majority of those members must be local councillors. I think that 11 is nowhere near enough members, but without going into the question of the optimum number, do you consider it desirable that local councillors should dominate the body?

**Mr Beggs Snr:** As a local councillor with 25 years' teaching experience and considerable experience as a board member, I think that councillors who are selected to serve should have considerable educational experience.

**Mr Lunn:** That is not what I am asking.

**Mr Duffy:** Experience has shown that councillors find it hard to make up their minds on difficult questions. When it comes to closing a school or passing a budget, councillors generally do not want to know, especially if it means making cuts. The Western Education and Library Board had that problem, as did the South Eastern Education and Library Board. How can boards make difficult decisions if councillors are the majority? For that reason, some boards restricted their councillor membership to 40%, with the remainder comprising



other stakeholders. Nevertheless, councillors continue to have a big say.

When councillors take the floor, they can speak for as long as they like and get the press to cover it. There is no way that that would be encouraged at every board meeting. That said, councillors are placed in a difficult position when hard decisions have to be made; that is the nature of their profession. I am not saying that they are not important; local accountability is vital. In my submission I mentioned Fermanagh, where councillors take a keen interest. Tom Elliott has attended many meetings in Fermanagh on how schools are delivering the curriculum and on the need for proper decisions to be made. It is difficult for councillors.

**Mr Lunn:** Of course it is. Conflicts of interest often arise; it is a question of preserving a council seat versus a proper decision. There is plenty of room for representation by local councillors, but not a majority. I am encouraged by what Mr Duffy said, because the chief executives of the boards were a bit more reticent when we asked them the same question.

**Mr Duffy:** The vocational committees that were set up in the South of Ireland in the 1930s gave councillors the authority to make decisions, but that had to be withdrawn from them and given to the county manager or the chief executive, who could overrule the councillors in some instances, because of the nature of the difficulties in which they found themselves.

**Mr Beggs Snr:** I reiterate that 11 members is totally inadequate to provide proper representation for Northern Ireland. I agree with Peter: there is a need for significant elected representative membership in order to protect the democratic process. At the same time, the widest possible decision-making capability is also required.

**Mrs Sloan:** I wondered what number of councillors Mr Lunn was thinking of. Like my colleague, I think that the proposed number of members of the ESA is too small to represent the whole of Northern Ireland adequately, and I wonder how the ESA will do that. A majority of councillors may not be the best way of achieving the wide representation that the ESA board will need. On the other hand, a much larger board can have its problems as well. There is a happy medium to be struck between the proposed 11 members of the ESA and the 35 members that we may have on education and library boards now. I believe in democratic accountability, but not necessarily in having elected representatives form a majority on the proposed ESA board.

**The Acting Chairperson:** I was going to observe that in some instances local elected representatives are more ready to challenge the Department; that is sometimes overlooked. However, I can see that there are two views on the matter.

**Mrs Sloan:** Do you mean that elected representatives are more ready to challenge the Department than independent members might be?

**The Acting Chairperson:** I think so. I am just making a personal observation.

**Mrs M Bradley:** Moreover, there is no way of controlling who will be elected by the general public or of knowing whether those representatives will have any interest or background in education.

**Mr Haire:** That is a key factor. A guide to good governance was introduced in the UK in 2006 and was reissued in 2008. It outlined how committee structures should be built and how they should incorporate a skills mix, which is necessary for councillors and for independent members. By using that guidance we should get the best deal.

**The Acting Chairperson:** Roy Beggs made the point that the library boards would be looking for experience.

**Mrs M Bradley:** That is what I said.

**Mr O'Dowd:** The Department informed the Committee that councillors and other members will be appointed through a public appointments process. Therefore, they will require the skills that Roy Beggs Snr outlined.

**The Acting Chairperson:** The submission highlighted that there was no mention in the Bill of local committees. Would the library boards be happier if local committees' roles, representations and any appointments process adopted were made explicit?

**Mr Haire:** The association has considered that and believes that it would probably be better if it was in the legislation, as it would provide greater clarity for those in the system. From a statutory point of view, we would be able to judge whether we were measuring up to the outcomes expected from each board.

**The Acting Chairperson:** Has the association any views on the strength of the ESA's role, remit and representation?

**Mr Haire:** The association has not yet considered that; however, our members may have personal views that will be taken on board.

**Mrs Sloan:** Of course, we have not seen the second education Bill.

**The Acting Chairperson:** That is why the Committee is inviting comment.

**Mr Elliott:** That would really confuse matters.

**The Acting Chairperson:** Apparently, at present, that will not even be in the second Bill. Perhaps there is a third one that we do not know about coming down the road.

**Mr Haire:** That is part of the difficulty of looking at the first Education Bill in isolation; we do not know what the second one will hold. To some extent we, like the Committee, are feeling our way.

**The Acting Chairperson:** I thank the witnesses for their helpful and informative presentation; they are welcome to remain while the departmental representative is questioned. If, after that, the association has any comments, the Committee will be happy to receive them.

I thank Mr Chris Stewart for attending. Having heard and read the submissions, may the Committee have the Department's comments?

**Mr Chris Stewart (Department of Education):** Thank you, Mr Chairman, and good afternoon members. After the AQE presentation, I wonder whether my nameplate this afternoon should read "El Greco" or "Lenin". However, I am happy to go under my usual *nom de plume*.

I am conscious that the Committee has had a long meeting and still has a busy agenda. As ever, I will attempt to be brief and to leave time for members' questions. I will begin by picking up on the major points raised by the AQE and then move on to the points raised by the boards.

The Department welcomes the AQE's support for the overall reform of education administration, although, of course, we note and take very seriously its many concerns about specific proposals. Today, and on previous occasions, members have heard concerns that the ESA will be an overly centralised body. I assure you that that is not the case. It will be a single organisation, but with a strong and significant local presence. Back-office functions will be centralised in the interests of efficiency and effectiveness. However, the main role of the ESA is not back-office functions; it is to provide front line support services to schools and other education providers. Those services will continue to be provided locally, and that will be the major factor in determining the structure of the organisation.

The initial local footprint of the ESA is unlikely to differ significantly from that of the current organisations. In the time available to us between now and 2010, it would not be practical for it to be otherwise.

The AQE has significant concerns about whether the employment arrangements would provide a proper autonomous decision-making role for boards of governors. However, we note that even if we satisfied that concern, the AQE objects to the arrangements on principle, and we understand that.

We have covered the issue extensively in evidence to the Committee, but it is worth re-emphasising some key points. The Education Bill makes it clear

that boards of governors will make decisions, and the effect of the relevant clauses is that the ESA may not lawfully refuse to put into effect any proper decision of a board of governors on employment matters.

As was mentioned earlier, the ESA can ask a board of governors to reconsider a matter if — and only if — a board of governors has not followed its own procedures. The idea that the ESA will somehow have a charter or licence to interfere gratuitously in the day-to-day business of a board of governors is simply not borne out by scrutiny of the Bill.

We have also said before that the review of public administration employment arrangements closely resemble those that apply in Catholic maintained schools. I agree with Sir Kenneth that it is important to look at what the legislation says. It is worth looking at what the current legislation says about those arrangements, which we propose to apply to all schools. The legislation says that the determination of staff complement is a matter solely for boards of governors and that the employer does not have a role. The legislation also states that it is the boards of governors who draw up and implement the disciplinary rules and procedures and that the role of employer is limited to that of consultee.

Suspension is a matter for boards of governors and principals — not the employer. Most crucially of all, dismissal is a matter for boards of governors only.

Those are not aspirations; they are concrete features of the current legislation and of the arrangements that we propose to apply. They demonstrate clearly that boards of governors can, and do, have an autonomous decision-making role under such arrangements.

The Department notes the concerns that were raised about the requirement for all grant-aided schools to draw up schemes of management. We emphasise that grant-aided schools are publicly funded institutions that provide a public service, as was acknowledged by AQE. The boards of governors of grant-aided schools manage those organisations, which educate some 400,000 of our children and spend almost one quarter of the Northern Ireland public expenditure block. We do not think it unreasonable to ask organisations that have such significant responsibilities to have effective governance arrangements in place and to stick to them. That is the effect of the provisions of the Bill.

Those are not new requirements. Similar provisions have been in statute since 1989, and the only significant change proposed now is that the schemes of management will be approved by the ESA rather than by the Department.

Many of the concerns that were expressed about the appointment of governors might be resolved by a fuller explanation of the relevant provisions of the Bill, which, like many provisions, need to be read in

conjunction with existing legislation. As I said before, there is a great deal of existing legislation.

It is important to emphasise that there are no powers in the Education Bill for the ESA to remove or restrain a board of governors; the power to remove governors is already in legislation. Only the Department can remove an entire board of governors. The ESA, like education and library boards at present, could be given the power to remove some governors but only those whom it appoints. That does not include the principal, staff governors, parent governors or foundation governors who are appointed by the school itself.

Another concern was that community governors might outvote foundation governors, thereby significantly changing the character or ethos of a school. That concern, I have to say, is unfounded and perhaps reflects a misunderstanding of the detailed effect of the provisions. The Education Bill makes relatively minor changes to the governance of schools. The key change is that appointments currently made by education and library boards or by the Department will in future be made by the ESA.

The composition of boards of governors will not change, and the proportion of appointments made by the ESA will be the same as that currently made by the Department and by education and library boards. That means that, with the exception of controlled grammar schools, the ESA-appointed, or community, governors will be in a minority. There is, therefore, little prospect of foundation governors being outvoted by community governors, as is the case at present.

The Department heard significant concerns about the definition of community governor as someone “living or working in the local community”. The association felt that that definition may be overly restrictive, and we take that concern seriously. We regard a reasonable definition of the local community as being the community served, or potentially served, by a school. Given the broad catchment areas served by post-primary schools, and we heard evidence of that today, the Department does not regard that definition as overly restrictive.

I emphasise that the Department’s view is that having a minority proportion of governors drawn from the community served by a school could only strengthen the links between a school and that community. Such strong links are often the hallmark of a successful school, and we regard that as entirely consistent with the voluntary principle.

If members wish, I can pause or move on to the points raised by colleagues from the education and library boards.

**The Acting Chairperson:** Do members have any questions on the issues that Chris raised? I have a

question about local committees, but I will leave it for now.

**Mr Stewart:** You are anticipating my response to a question that you have not yet asked.

**The Acting Chairperson:** You are a prophet. Let us move on.

**Mr Elliott:** I have a question. Chris, are you saying that if a school in Belfast accepted pupils from Bangor and Donaghadee that that catchment area could also apply to governors?

**Mr Stewart:** I consider that entirely reasonable. The intention of the provision was never to restrict the potential pool of governors, as that would be unwise; its intention is to strengthen the links between schools and the communities that they serve. We must recognise that the community served by schools does not stop at the end of a street or the boundary of a town. As successful schools have broad catchment areas, it is logical for the composition of their boards of governors to reflect that. If it is felt that the clause does not support that definition or that it is unduly restrictive, the Minister will want to consider the Committee’s view on whether an amendment is required.

**Mr Lunn:** On the question of employment, have you any sympathy with the Association for Quality Education’s interpretation of the Queen’s English? As you say, the definition seems straightforward, yet the AQE managed to interpret it as having a darker intent.

**Mr Stewart:** I am struggling with the notion of a civil servant having sympathy with anyone about anything; I am not sure that we are allowed to be sympathetic.

We understand the concerns of the AQE and of other stakeholders. We understand the fundamental nature of their objections to the proposals in principle because they argued cogently and with great sincerity. Nevertheless, the Department must operate within the confines of the policy set by the Minister. Therefore, we recognise the concerns but consider that they are outweighed by the benefits that will be provided by the arrangements proposed in the Bill.

**Mr Lunn:** I do not understand when you say that you understand. They offer a different legal interpretation of what appears to be — although a Bill is never simple — fairly guidelines, rules, and legalities. Their view continues to differ from that of the Department. Is the Department re-scrutinising the wording of the Bill to consider whether the other interpretation has merit? By that I mean legal interpretation rather than their opposition to change.

**Mr Stewart:** We have not reconsidered the Bill on that basis. You are right; many legal minds have considered the matter — and I will utter my usual caveat that I am not one of them — and although I am



not privy to the legal advice that the Committee has received, I have seen the GBA's legal advice and that of others who have given evidence to the Committee. To date, no lawyer has been able to disagree with the statement that the ESA cannot lawfully refuse to put into effect any proper decision that is taken by a board of governors.

**Mr Lunn:** That is the key sentence.

**The Acting Chairperson:** Is it solely in the ESA's power to decide whether a board of governors has followed its own procedures or employment scheme? How is a dispute between the ESA and a board of governors resolved?

**Mr Stewart:** The short answer to your first question is yes. However, the burden of proof — which is, perhaps, an unwise phrase to use — would be on the ESA. Unless there is good reason to doubt that a board has followed its own procedures, the ESA ought not to interfere. The ESA should not second-guess every action of a board of governors. That is not the intention of the provisions, and even if the ESA sought to do so, it would not be a practicable proposition. The ESA will not have the resources to crawl over every administrative action of a board of governors, and there is no need for it to do so.

**Mr O'Dowd:** At the extreme of an argument over a fine point of law, I assume that a board of governors has the right to a judicial review of the ESA.

**Mr Stewart:** Yes.

**Mr O'Dowd:** Therefore, the ESA is not a legal entity that nobody can touch.

**Mr Stewart:** That is correct. The recourse to judicial review is available. However, who pays the cost of such legal action might be an interesting question, and whether it is desirable for one part of the education system to take legal action against another is another question. However, the Education Bill does not seek to restrict any party's recourse to law.

**The Acting Chairperson:** We should, perhaps, move to the second part of the session.

**Mr Stewart:** I will address several points that were made this morning. We welcome ANIELB's support for the RPA's general principles and direction. We note and take seriously its significant concerns, including its support for a single inclusive authority. However, the representatives suggested that, since the original proposals, we had somehow departed from that principle because some bodies would continue to exist or be brought into existence. The point is well made and understandable in relation to the ownership body for controlled schools, which did not feature in the original RPA proposals. Members are aware of the thinking behind and the reasons for that proposal.

It is worth clarifying the position of several other bodies, particularly some sectoral bodies such as the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education and Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochata. Under the current or previous administration, it was never proposed to dissolve either of those bodies. Indeed, the original RPA proposals did not include a decision to dissolve CCMS; that was added later by the current Minister. A recognition of the need for sectoral bodies has been a feature of the RPA from the outset and was underlined in the Bain Report, which emphasised the need for sectors to have the capacity to represent their needs.

The association correctly pointed out that the Department's earlier thinking had not given enough consideration or placed enough emphasis on the needs of the controlled sector in that environment. The Committee knows that we are working on proposals to catch up on that issue. However, we recognise that deficit, and we need to work hard to ensure that the controlled sector is in an equal position. I must emphasise that it was never proposed, at any stage in the RPA, to dissolve sectoral bodies.

Mr Beggs correctly drew attention to the weaknesses of some boards of governors and expressed concern about the need to ensure that boards of governors are adequately prepared, trained and supported to do a difficult and challenging job that we ask people to undertake in a voluntary capacity. We take training and support for boards of governors very seriously, which is why we proposed in the legislation to make it a statutory duty of the ESA to provide such training and support. Of course, putting something in legislation and making it happen are two different things, and we recognise that the Committee and other interested parties will be looking for clear evidence that the ESA is addressing the issue. With regard to the legislation, the Department feels that it has gone as far as it can in placing a statutory duty on the ESA to provide such advice, training and support.

Mr Beggs asked whether model schemes of management would be available for January 2010; they will. He also suggested that we might need to consider the remuneration of school governors, and I understand the arguments behind that. However, that is not a realistic prospect in the current financial climate, and we must continue to ask boards of governors to discharge their responsibilities in a voluntary capacity.

Reference was also made to the need for efficiency savings, and Committee members do not need me to tell them the difficulty of the financial climate in which we are operating. The Department and the ESA, like any other Department or public organisation, must respond to the requirements that the Budget places on us. The issue is whether we can find the necessary efficiency savings more easily under the new arrangements. It is essential that we move to the



new structures as quickly as possible to give ourselves the scope to make our education system as effective and efficient as possible.

Much concern was expressed about the size of the ESA, but there are examples to demonstrate that it is possible to have effective regional organisations that deliver local services. For example, the Housing Executive, to which Sir Kenneth referred, the CCMS in the education sector, and the Police Service are all regional organisations that deliver local services.

It was asked where local offices will be located. It will not surprise members that initially they will be in Belfast, Omagh, Dundonald, Armagh and Ballymena, because, as I said, the initial footprint of the ESA will reflect that of the existing organisations. We were asked what will be in those offices, and the answer is: what is in them at present. There is no intention to centralise front line support to schools; it would make no sense to centralise youth-service provision or the provision of educational psychology. If anything, we need to look for scope to move those services closer to schools and to other education providers.

Size is not, and never has been, a key criterion or reason for establishing the ESA. We are not taking this direction because we think that there is some critical mass that is necessary for us to achieve; it is not the size of the organisation that is the driver, but the number of organisations. We have separate, autonomous organisations that pursue their own policies and practice, and that has led to different outcomes and to inequality. That is the reason for having a single education and skills authority.

I smiled earlier because I was worried that the Acting Chairman might not ask the question that he has asked every week until now about the number of members on the ESA. I was relieved that he did ask it. Committee members are familiar with the Department's position on that, and I will not go over the same ground again today.

The response to the question from my colleagues from the Association of Northern Ireland Education and Library Boards about where committees would feature in the Bill is schedule 1(7) and 1(8).

Finally, I will address the issues of the employing authority and the respective roles of the ESA and boards of governors. We accept entirely the point made by stakeholders today, and by Committee members on other occasions, that there is a need for greater clarity: people need to see the detail of their respective roles in black and white. We recognise that the Department has a job to do on that issue, which we will address as quickly as possible.

Comments were made on paper 20 and on the ownership and representation of controlled schools. My colleagues from the association outlined what

they saw as four key features of the controlled sector: its community focus, its inclusivity, its egalitarianism and its liberalism. Those strike me as necessary components of the ethos of the controlled sector, and we feel that they should be reflected even more explicitly in that ethos.

We understand the association's concern about the proliferation of bodies. However, members are aware of the reasons for the proposal from the controlled schools' ownership body. Indeed, it is something that members encouraged us to do and argued was necessary because of the concerns that members expressed about the potential conflict of interest of the ESA, were it to own controlled schools. We welcome the support of association colleagues for a representative body for the controlled sector.

**The Acting Chairperson:** The ESA will have responsibility for setting and improving standards; however, it will also set the examinations that assess those standards. How do you address that conflict of interest?

**Mr Stewart:** That potential conflict of interest is addressed by the fact that the role of accrediting qualifications rests with the Department, not with the ESA; the Department decides whether a qualification meets the required standards.

**The Acting Chairperson:** Who will prepare the examination?

**Mr Stewart:** The ESA, but it is for the Department to decide, for example, whether the ESA's GCSEs or A levels are of the required standard. The Department will formally accredit the qualifications that are offered by the ESA.

**The Acting Chairperson:** There is a great deal of dispute about examinations, and even universities have expressed a lack of confidence in some of them; people want more rigour. Is confidence not undermined by the same organisation both setting and marking examinations? That may be a question of perceptions or confidence rather than anything else, but is that not a potential issue?

**Mr Stewart:** With respect, those are two separate issues. From time to time, higher-education establishments and employers express concern about the standard of qualifications that are provided by authorities here and in other jurisdictions. There are two safeguards, one of which is the fact that the Department has the formal accreditation role, and it will be very sensitive to any concerns that universities or employers may raise with us.

There are also liaison arrangements in place among all the examinations authorities and bodies in all the jurisdictions to ensure that there is consistency of standard among them and to ensure that there is portability of qualifications for our students and young people. If

there is a concern being expressed by universities, it is not a particular concern about Northern Ireland qualifications; it is a concern about qualifications in general, which is a different issue.

**The Acting Chairperson:** What would be the downside to separating the examinations body and the ESA? Is there not a possibility of having two separate entities that share some background resources and so save money?

**Mr Stewart:** In fact, the proposal in the original RPA consultation document was that there would be two bodies: one would be responsible for curriculum and examination matters and the other for the remainder of the functions. The view that the Minister of the day took, and which the current Minister shares, is that there would be no real benefit in such an arrangement and some additional cost, stemming from the fact that yet another public-sector body would be in existence.

**The Acting Chairperson:** I am sure that we will come back to that issue. Schedule 1(7)(1) states that the “ESA may establish committees.” We have talked about local committees, but when will there be more substance to that?

**Mr Stewart:** I have emphasised to colleagues in the Department and education and skills authority implementation team (ESAIT), who are working on the matter, that it is the Committee’s desire to see some detail on local committees as quickly as possible. I cannot remember the timescale that I gave in last week’s letter. We certainly need to bring something to the Committee within the next two or three weeks.

**Mrs M Bradley:** Did you say that there would be four support offices?

**Mr Stewart:** No formal decision has yet been taken on the number of local offices that will eventually be in place.

In the material that the Committee has seen previously, the Department had suggested that our initial thinking is perhaps six local offices in order to be as coterminous with local councils as possible. The local offices that exist on 1 January 2010 will be those that exist today. Even if we wished to do so, there is simply not the prospect of making wholesale change to the organisation of front line services in the few months that are available to us.

**Mrs M Bradley:** Who will take the final decision on the number of local offices, Chris?

**Mr Stewart:** As the ESA reconfigures and transforms its services, we expect it to bring forward proposals. However, it would be the Department — taking account of the views expressed by the Committee, of course — and the Minister who would make the decision.

**The Acting Chairperson:** I see that there are no further questions. You got off lightly today.

**Mr Stewart:** Extremely lightly, Chairman, and I am very grateful for that.

**The Acting Chairperson:** You have three or four weeks, apparently, to prepare the response to the question that we asked.

**Mr Stewart:** We will try to do better than that, Chairman.

# 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 17 April 2009

## Written Answers to Questions

### OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

#### Climate Change

**Mr McKay** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) what commitments are in the Programme for Government relating to Climate Change, and (ii) what responsibilities Ministers have in supporting and promoting this section of the Programme for Government. (AQW 5954/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness):** It is clear that climate change is one of the most serious problems facing the world. While we recognise that it requires action internationally we are determined to play our part in addressing this challenge. That is why sustainability is one of two cross cutting themes underpinning the Programme for Government.

Protecting and enhancing our environment is one of the five strategic priorities within the Executive Programme for Government. That priority sets out the collective targets for the Executive to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 25% below 1990 levels by 2025 and ensure 12% of our electricity is generated from indigenous renewable sources by 2012. In addition, PSA 22 sets out targets for departments in this regard. All departments and Ministers are committed to the delivery of these ambitious targets as we move forward. In line with OFMDFM's lead role in sustainable development policy we will continue to work with departments to realise our sustainability objectives through our Sustainable Development Strategy and the associated Implementation Plan.

#### Definition of 'Victim'

**Mr Elliott** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what the terms of reference are for the review of the definition of 'a victim' announced by the Junior Minister on 26 February 2009. (AQW 6116/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** Speaking on behalf of the Office, the deputy First Minister outlined our proposals to the Assembly on 31 March 2009, when he said, "We recognise the difficult issues that surround the definition of 'victim.' Victims and survivors should consider that issue. We will, therefore, request that the proposed victims' forum makes it a priority to examine the definition of 'victim' and brings forward its proposals." The Victims' Commissioners have already commenced preparatory work to establish the forum.

#### Infrastructure Projects

**Mr Craig** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline (i) all infrastructure projects; and (ii) the monetary value of each investment, via the investment strategy for Northern Ireland, planned for the Lagan Valley constituency up to 2011. (AQW 6187/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** The information you requested is listed in the table below. Projects of £0.5m or more have been listed separately. In some cases it has been necessary to include the full value of projects covering an area greater than Lagan Valley and where costs cannot be disaggregated by constituency.

Information has been provided up to the end of 2010-11 which is the term of the present Budget. The period beyond 2010-11 in the investment strategy for Northern Ireland is indicative and details of potential expenditure at constituency level are not available.

**ISNI PROJECTS OF £500,000 AND OVER IN LAGAN VALLEY CONSTITUENCY  
UP TO THE END OF 2011**

Department	Project Title	Value	Comments
Department of Education	Ballymacrickett P.S. Glenavy	£3.7m	New school on existing site – completed November 2008.
Department of Education	Brookefield Special School, Moira	£4.5m	New school on existing site – completed December 2008.
Department of Education	Pond Park P.S. Lisburn	£4.3m	New school on existing site – under construction, due to complete 2009/10.
Department of Education	Ballinderry P.S.	£2.8m	New school on existing site - under construction, due to complete 2009/10.
Department of Education	St Colman's P.S. Lambeg	£3.7m	New school on extended site – planning ongoing, estimated construction will start 2009/10.
Department of Education	Dromore Central P.S.	£9.3m	New school on existing site – planning ongoing, estimated construction will start 2009/10.
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment	Telecoms infrastructure projects – Northern Ireland Wide	£12.9m	£6.5m investment in 2009/10 & £6.4m investment in 2010/11. Although these projects are province wide they will include the Lagan Valley constituency
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment	Provision of serviced sites for client companies in the Lisburn area.	£4.4m	Planned investment in 2010/11.
Department for Regional Development	<b>Road Projects</b> A1 Junction Improvement Schemes	£15m	Estimated costs of programmed scheme.
Department for Regional Development	<b>Rail Projects</b> Track Relay – Knockmore to Lurgan	£55m	Subject to agreement of capital plans with Translink. Still at planning stage – project completion due 2014. Economic Appraisal under way.
Department for Regional Development	Purchase 20 new trains to improve services to Lisburn & surrounding areas	£100m	Approximate cost.
Department for Regional Development	Extended platforms on the railways networks	£0.6m	Part of the scheme to purchase 20 new trains.
Department for Regional Development	Upgrade 2 pedestrian crossings at railway crossings in Dunmurry	£2.5m	Scheduled for completion February 2010.
Department for Regional Development	Additional Park & Ride facilities at Lisburn Station	£3m	These projects are still to be confirmed in ongoing discussions around capital planning for the next two years.
Department for Regional Development	Additional Park & Ride facilities at Moira Station	£1m	
Department for Regional Development	<b>Bus Projects</b> Improve bus services to Dromore	£0.9m	Budget cost. Project completion due for July 2011 subject to budgets.

Department	Project Title	Value	Comments
Department for Regional Development	Water Projects Castor Bay/Moira Zonal Watermain Improvements	£3.4m	Northern Ireland Water does not hold details of capital projects broken down by parliamentary constituency. However, projects listed in this group are within the Lisburn Borough Council Area, which covers most of the Lagan Valley constituency.
Department for Regional Development	Lisburn North Rural Zone Watermain Improvements	£0.7m	
Department for Regional Development	Nutrient Removal at New Holland and Dunmurry Wastewater Treatment Works	£0.7m	
Department for Regional Development	Lower Ballinderry Wastewater Treatment Works	£0.9m	
Department for Regional Development	Ravarnet Wastewater Treatment Works	£1.4m	
Department for Regional Development	Annahilt Wastewater Treatment Works	£4.8m	
Department for Regional Development	Lisburn Town Zone Watermain Improvements	£2.3m	
Department for Regional Development	Dromara Wastewater Treatment Works	£3.1m	
Department for Regional Development	Edenderry Wastewater Treatment Works	£0.5m	
Department for Regional Development	Poundburn Wastewater Treatment Works	£0.7m	
Department for Regional Development	Dunmurry Drainage Area Plan (Phase 1)	£0.8m	
Department for Regional Development	Hugenot Drive Lisburn Sewage Pumping Station	£2.0m	
Department for Regional Development	Dunmurry Wastewater Treatment Works	£8.8m	
Office of the First Minister & deputy First Minister	Maze/Long Kesh	£3m	Remediation work planned for 2009-10
Department of Agriculture and Rural Development	Laurelvale-Laurevale Stream II	£0.5m	Estimated cost, at feasibility study stage. (Upgrading infrastructure for new developments & past major floods).
Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety	Lisburn Assessment and Resource Centre	Over £3m	Scheduled for completion 2009/10.
Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety	Replacement Theatres at Lagan Valley Hospital	£3.8m	Design stage. Scheduled to complete in 2010/11.
Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety	Lagan Valley Hospital and Health & Care Centre	Not Available	Planning Stage. Cost not available until business cases have been approved.
Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety	Dunmurry Health & Care Centre	Not Available	
Department for Education and Learning	South Eastern Regional College – Lisburn Campus	£20m	Estimated Cost. Under construction and due to complete in 2010.

Department	Project Title	Value	Comments
Department for Social Development	Housing projects Seymour Street Lisburn, 48 Elderly units	£8.5m	The new 5 year Social Housing Development Programme (2009/10 – 2013/14) is currently being formulated & will be published on the Housing Executive's website in due course.  The Housing Executive is unable to confirm the contents of its proposed programme of improvement schemes, which is currently being formulated.
Department for Social Development	Trinity place Lisburn, 15 General Needs units	£2.2m	
Department for Social Development	Pond Park Road Lisburn, 112 General Needs units	£8.4m	
Department for Social Development	Urban Group projects Colin Gateway (IDF scheme)	£3.5m	Belfast Regeneration Office project.

**ISNI PROJECTS UNDER £500,000 IN LAGAN VALLEY CONSTITUENCY  
UP TO THE END OF 2011**

Department	Projects	Group Value	Comments
Department for Regional Development	Road Projects	Not Available	Roads Service does not hold details of capital infrastructure projects on a parliamentary constituency basis. However, information on other capital expenditure projects with a value of less than £500,000 for the next two years, is included in the Autumn 2008 council reports for Lisburn, Down, Craigavon and Banbridge which can be accessed at <a href="http://www.roadsni.gov.uk/index/publications/publications-council_reports.htm">http://www.roadsni.gov.uk/index/publications/publications-council_reports.htm</a>
Department for Regional Development	<b>Water Projects</b> Water & Wastewater infrastructure improvement projects	£2.5	Current estimated costs.
Department of Culture Arts & Leisure	Dromara GFC & Lisburn Racquets Club	£0.37m	Building Sport & Places for Sport Initiatives.
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment	Road extension to Knockmore Hill Industrial Park	£0.17m	Investment in 2008/09.
Department of Agriculture and Rural Development	Lisburn-Brokerstown Road & Flush Bridge Streams and Lurgan-Tirsogue Drain	£0.45m	Estimated cost, at Feasibility Study stage. (Upgrading infrastructure for new developments & past major floods).
Department for Social Development	<b>Urban Group projects</b> 2 Voluntary & Community projects and 3 Belfast Regeneration Projects	£0.94m	Regeneration Improvements. Voluntary & Community projects funded under the Modernisation Fund Capital Programme.

### Advertising Expenditure

**Mr Gardiner** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to the answer to AQW 5476/09, how much has been spent on advertisements by each Department, placed in regional and local newspapers, broken down by each newspaper, in each of the last three years. (AQW 6363/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** Table A provides the classified advertising expenditure, broken down by Irish News, News Letter, Belfast Telegraph and weekly newspapers, for departments for financial years 05/06, 06/07, 07/08. Information is not readily available for each weekly newspaper. The information is as provided by each department in an annual return.



TABLE A

Classified Expenditure 2005/06				
Department	Irish News	News Letter	Belfast Telegraph	Weekly Press
DARD Core Department	£ 8,650.56	£ 8,101.41	£ 16,788.37	£ 34,696.55
DARD Agencies	£ 6,705.21	£ 6,364.33	£ 12,053.18	£ 29,311.07
DARD Non Departmental Public Bodies	£ 3,501.43	£ 1,099.95	£ 17,945.38	£ 604.84
<b>DARD Total</b>	<b>£ 18,857.20</b>	<b>£ 15,565.69</b>	<b>£ 46,786.93</b>	<b>£ 64,612.46</b>
DCAL Core Department	£ 3,446.73	£ 3,343.49	£ 6,769.64	£ 19,880.70
DCAL Agencies	£ -	£ 360.57	£ 581.91	£ -
DCAL Non Departmental Public Bodies	£ 10,691.20	£ 11,082.04	£ 51,357.06	£ 3,656.86
<b>DCAL Total</b>	<b>£ 14,137.93</b>	<b>£ 14,786.10</b>	<b>£ 58,708.61</b>	<b>£ 23,537.56</b>
DE Core Department	£ 3,957.61	£ 4,368.32	£ 7,995.42	£ -
DE Non Departmental Public Bodies (Includes Education and Library Boards)	£ 51,356.82	£ 46,125.39	£ 482,670.31	£ 245,092.07
<b>DE Total</b>	<b>£ 55,314.43</b>	<b>£ 50,493.71</b>	<b>£ 490,665.73</b>	<b>£ 245,092.07</b>
DEL Core Department	£ 12,390.32	£ 13,548.89	£ 21,644.90	£ 15,447.92
DEL Non Departmental Public Bodies	£ 2,359.01	£ 3,106.12	£ 20,485.14	£ -
<b>DEL Total</b>	<b>£ 14,749.33</b>	<b>£ 16,655.01</b>	<b>£ 42,130.04</b>	<b>£ 15,447.92</b>
DETI Core Department	£ 10,668.09	£ 11,562.74	£ 16,694.89	£ 31,591.04
DETI Non Departmental Public Bodies	£ 25,701.30	£ 54,214.14	£ 103,454.33	£ 42,640.10
<b>DETI Total</b>	<b>£ 36,369.39</b>	<b>£ 65,776.88</b>	<b>£ 120,149.22</b>	<b>£ 74,231.14</b>
DOE Core Department	£ 11,304.59	£ 14,381.70	£ 20,464.39	£ 7,407.77
DOE Agencies	£ 154,577.55	£ 160,089.34	£ 280,187.45	£ 785,881.23
DOE Non Departmental Public Bodies	£ 2,442.45	£ 1,196.20	£ 6,618.11	£ -
<b>DOE Total</b>	<b>£ 168,324.59</b>	<b>£ 175,667.24</b>	<b>£ 307,269.95</b>	<b>£ 793,289.00</b>
DFP Core Department	£ 43,156.04	£ 51,925.99	£ 96,796.14	£ 8,399.70
DFP Agencies	£ 5,060.89	£ 6,917.90	£ 12,564.72	£ 6,336.10
DFP Non Departmental Public Bodies	£ 8,167.10	£ 7,862.80	£ 21,326.33	£ -
<b>DFP Total</b>	<b>£ 56,384.03</b>	<b>£ 66,706.69</b>	<b>£ 130,687.19</b>	<b>£ 14,735.80</b>
DHSSPS Core Department	£ 39,168.45	£ 28,629.63	£ 49,595.32	£ -
DHSSPS Agencies	£ 1,216.04	£ 1,073.11	£ 166,206.19	£ 13,316.71
DHSSPS Non Departmental Public Bodies (Includes Boards and Trusts)	£ 26,090.67	£ 53,257.01	£ 1,474,958.85	£ 633,572.40
<b>DHSSPS Total</b>	<b>£ 66,475.16</b>	<b>£ 82,959.75</b>	<b>£ 1,690,760.36</b>	<b>£ 646,889.11</b>
DRD Core Department	£ 7,318.78	£ 8,534.84	£ 15,774.74	£ 12,346.87
DRD Agencies	£ 89,153.88	£ 102,541.90	£ 158,877.19	£ 127,891.16
DRD Non Departmental Public Bodies	£ 6,396.31	£ 6,804.58	£ 168,432.15	£ 3,597.13
<b>DRD Total</b>	<b>£ 102,868.97</b>	<b>£ 117,881.32</b>	<b>£ 343,084.08</b>	<b>£ 143,835.16</b>
DSD Core Department	£ 25,777.00	£ 27,213.00	£ 43,619.00	£ 2,745.00
DSD Agencies	£ 3,634.93	£ 4,856.52	£ 7,978.68	£ 1,002.00
DSD Non Departmental Public Bodies	£ 33,420.89	£ 42,293.55	£ 87,136.58	£ 74,654.72

Classified Expenditure 2005/06				
Department	Irish News	News Letter	Belfast Telegraph	Weekly Press
<b>DSD Total</b>	<b>£ 62,832.82</b>	<b>£ 74,363.07</b>	<b>£ 138,734.26</b>	<b>£ 78,401.72</b>
<b>2005/06 Total</b>	<b>£ 596,313.85</b>	<b>£ 680,855.46</b>	<b>£ 3,368,976.37</b>	<b>£ 2,100,071.94</b>

Classified Expenditure 2006/07				
Department	Irish News	News Letter	Belfast Telegraph	Weekly Press
DARD Core Department	£ 15,066.79	£ 15,574.88	£ 37,602.67	£ 45,086.21
DARD Agencies	£ 3,544.60	£ 3,274.23	£ 10,487.83	£ 17,990.57
DARD Non Departmental Public Bodies	£ 2,821.00	£ -	£ 5,368.00	£ 587.00
<b>DARD Total</b>	<b>£ 21,432.39</b>	<b>£ 18,849.11</b>	<b>£ 53,458.50</b>	<b>£ 63,663.78</b>
DCAL Core Department	£ 2,876.65	£ 1,739.79	£ 2,367.42	£ 1,445.72
DCAL Agencies	£ 1,179.54	£ 1,356.03	£ 1,865.16	£ -
DCAL Non Departmental Public Bodies	£ 6,485.26	£ 7,852.70	£ 37,628.76	£ 1,652.32
<b>DCAL Total</b>	<b>£ 10,541.45</b>	<b>£ 10,948.52</b>	<b>£ 41,861.34</b>	<b>£ 3,098.04</b>
DE Core Department	£ 4,507.22	£ 7,068.34	£ 9,250.03	£ 3,427.30
DE Non Departmental Public Bodies (Includes Education and Library Boards)	£ 27,779.72	£ 33,964.17	£ 490,314.72	£ 215,195.16
<b>DE Total</b>	<b>£ 32,286.94</b>	<b>£ 41,032.51</b>	<b>£ 499,564.75</b>	<b>£ 218,622.46</b>
DEL Core Department	£ 17,118.23	£ 19,494.74	£ 31,068.69	£ 41,197.49
DEL Non Departmental Public Bodies	£ 1,967.54	£ 2,868.37	£ 17,212.06	£ 1,807.28
<b>DEL Total</b>	<b>£ 19,085.77</b>	<b>£ 22,363.11</b>	<b>£ 48,280.75</b>	<b>£ 43,004.77</b>
DETI Core Department	£ 1,805.27	£ 2,459.48	£ 2,028.00	£ -
DETI Non Departmental Public Bodies	£ 53,019.36	£ 73,834.49	£ 125,662.51	£ -
<b>DETI Total</b>	<b>£ 54,824.63</b>	<b>£ 76,293.97</b>	<b>£ 127,690.51</b>	<b>£ -</b>
DOE Core Department	£ 16,038.02	£ 18,407.10	£ 27,732.41	£ 6,376.03
DOE Agencies	£ 126,127.13	£ 114,501.78	£ 233,989.44	£ 833,754.23
DOE Non Departmental Public Bodies	£ 4,455.73	£ 1,455.21	£ 9,461.00	£ -
<b>DOE Total</b>	<b>£ 146,620.88</b>	<b>£ 134,364.09</b>	<b>£ 271,182.85</b>	<b>£ 840,130.26</b>
DFP Core Department	£ 34,017.19	£ 32,034.84	£ 57,997.97	£ 2,459.03
DFP Agencies	£ 3,141.86	£ 4,204.64	£ 5,371.62	£ 3,275.52
DFP Non Departmental Public Bodies	£ 16,360.82	£ 19,584.20	£ 36,003.19	£ 89,735.60
<b>DFP Total</b>	<b>£ 53,519.87</b>	<b>£ 55,823.68</b>	<b>£ 99,372.78</b>	<b>£ 95,470.15</b>
DHSSPS Core Department	£ 38,579.02	£ 18,211.52	£ 30,410.95	£ 20,730.37
DHSSPS Agencies	£ 402.18	£ 246.79	£ 123,080.68	£ 1,097.70
DHSSPS Non Departmental Public Bodies (Includes Boards and Trusts)	£ 73,188.77	£ 60,325.03	£ 1,273,026.96	£ 520,983.98
<b>DHSSPS Total</b>	<b>£ 112,169.97</b>	<b>£ 78,783.34</b>	<b>£ 1,426,518.59</b>	<b>£ 542,812.05</b>
DRD Core Department	£ 12,021.05	£ 12,347.28	£ 21,690.51	£ 8,895.07
DRD Agencies	£ 60,385.01	£ 57,619.58	£ 96,526.29	£ 106,076.59
DRD Non Departmental Public Bodies	£ 43,485.76	£ 60,052.14	£ 130,465.37	£ 75,089.39
<b>DRD Total</b>	<b>£ 115,891.82</b>	<b>£ 130,019.00</b>	<b>£ 248,682.17</b>	<b>£ 190,061.05</b>

Classified Expenditure 2006/07				
Department	Irish News	News Letter	Belfast Telegraph	Weekly Press
DSD Core Department	£ 45,975.88	£ 50,760.61	£ 77,367.84	£ 8,860.00
DSD Agencies	£ 2,358.49	£ 3,480.59	£ 3,500.31	£ 273.00
DSD Non Departmental Public Bodies	£ 32,694.67	£ 40,716.15	£ 79,647.69	£ 65,467.45
<b>DSD Total</b>	<b>£ 81,029.04</b>	<b>£ 94,957.35</b>	<b>£ 160,515.84</b>	<b>£ 74,600.45</b>
<b>2006/07 Total</b>	<b>£ 647,402.76</b>	<b>£ 663,434.68</b>	<b>£ 2,977,128.08</b>	<b>£ 2,071,463.01</b>

Classified Expenditure 2007/08				
Department	Irish News	News Letter	Belfast Telegraph	Weekly Press
DARD Core Department	£ 13,909.12	£ 14,191.42	£ 27,738.13	£ 27,083.15
DARD Agencies	£ 999.51	£ 1,050.09	£ 1,074.61	£ 4,910.88
DARD Non Departmental Public Bodies	£ 6,196.60	£ 10,995.95	£ 25,434.05	£ 30,209.83
<b>DARD Total</b>	<b>£ 21,105.23</b>	<b>£ 26,237.46</b>	<b>£ 54,246.79</b>	<b>£ 62,203.86</b>
DCAL Core Department	£ 9,476.30	£ 8,389.23	£ 16,574.42	£ 9,437.04
DCAL Agencies	£ 382.92	£ 599.72	£ 859.46	£ -
DCAL Non Departmental Public Bodies	£ 28,792.39	£ 6,486.51	£ 122,392.73	£ 10,370.09
<b>DCAL Total</b>	<b>£ 38,651.61</b>	<b>£ 15,475.46</b>	<b>£ 139,826.61</b>	<b>£ 19,807.13</b>
DE Core Department	£ 782.00	£ 784.20	£ 1,029.71	£ -
DE Non Departmental Public Bodies (Includes Education and Library Boards)	£ 34,149.57	£ 35,206.57	£ 627,488.82	£ 56,438.00
<b>DE Total</b>	<b>£ 34,931.57</b>	<b>£ 35,990.77</b>	<b>£ 628,518.53</b>	<b>£ 56,438.00</b>
DEL Core Department	£ 8,585.19	£ 9,294.74	£ 17,480.64	£ 6,437.82
DEL Non Departmental Public Bodies	£ -	£ -	£ -	£ -
<b>DEL Total</b>	<b>£ 8,585.19</b>	<b>£ 9,294.74</b>	<b>£ 17,480.64</b>	<b>£ 6,437.82</b>
DETI Core Department	£ 4,182.42	£ 4,634.01	£ 8,481.08	£ 27,525.42
DETI Non Departmental Public Bodies	£ 27,712.45	£ 38,084.88	£ 65,101.40	£ 5,534.08
<b>DETI Total</b>	<b>£ 31,894.87</b>	<b>£ 42,718.89</b>	<b>£ 73,582.48</b>	<b>£ 33,059.50</b>
DOE Core Department	£ 8,821.32	£ 8,818.08	£ 15,477.39	£ 5,483.61
DOE Agencies	£ 171,726.00	£ 170,886.52	£ 276,512.51	£ 906,417.76
DOE Non Departmental Public Bodies	£ 8,626.75	£ 609.12	£ 18,622.40	£ -
<b>DOE Total</b>	<b>£ 189,174.07</b>	<b>£ 180,313.72</b>	<b>£ 310,612.30</b>	<b>£ 911,901.37</b>
DFP Core Department	£ 32,654.78	£ 41,815.86	£ 65,244.46	£ 8,740.59
DFP Agencies	£ 1,494.50	£ 2,244.10	£ 5,045.15	£ 4,875.63
DFP Non Departmental Public Bodies	£ 13,852.97	£ 18,245.75	£ 30,368.54	£ 8,588.98
<b>DFP Total</b>	<b>£ 48,002.25</b>	<b>£ 62,305.71</b>	<b>£ 100,658.15</b>	<b>£ 22,205.20</b>
DHSSPS Core Department	£ 14,023.65	£ 9,253.76	£ 15,641.53	£ -
DHSSPS Agencies	£ 202.72	£ 258.22	£ 140,768.25	£ -
DHSSPS Non Departmental Public Bodies (Includes Boards and Trusts)	£ 89,438.14	£ 38,924.72	£ 1,048,284.76	£ 390,999.61
<b>DHSSPS Total</b>	<b>£ 103,664.51</b>	<b>£ 48,436.70</b>	<b>£ 1,204,694.54</b>	<b>£ 390,999.61</b>

Classified Expenditure 2007/08				
Department	Irish News	News Letter	Belfast Telegraph	Weekly Press
DRD Core Department	£ 5,423.31	£ 7,371.32	£ 8,474.16	£ 2,178.23
DRD Agencies	£ 66,350.24	£ 70,407.42	£ 104,298.16	£ 118,422.17
DRD Non Departmental Public Bodies	£ 5,456.60	£ 1,836.92	£ 143,358.49	£ -
<b>DRD Total</b>	<b>£ 77,230.15</b>	<b>£ 79,615.66</b>	<b>£ 256,130.81</b>	<b>£ 120,600.40</b>
DSD Core Department	£ 22,321.68	£ 21,542.22	£ 33,519.99	£ 662.21
DSD Agencies	£ 15,546.15	£ 16,905.33	£ 28,404.21	£ 51,346.35
DSD Non Departmental Public Bodies	£ 30,147.72	£ 38,221.71	£ 82,759.11	£ 82,567.51
<b>DSD Total</b>	<b>£ 68,015.55</b>	<b>£ 76,669.26</b>	<b>£ 144,683.31</b>	<b>£ 134,576.07</b>
<b>2007/08 Total</b>	<b>£ 621,255.00</b>	<b>£ 577,058.37</b>	<b>£ 2,930,434.16</b>	<b>£ 1,758,228.96</b>

Expenditure on campaign advertising in newspapers is not recorded in the format requested and is not readily available by individual newspaper.

### Definition of ‘Victim’

**Mr Elliott** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what proposals are in place to change the definition of a ‘victim’ within legislation. (AQW 6370/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** Speaking on behalf of the Office, the deputy First Minister outlined our proposals to the Assembly on 31 March 2009, when he said, “We recognise the difficult issues that surround the definition of ‘victim. Victims and survivors should consider that issue. We will, therefore, request that the proposed victims’ forum makes it a priority to examine the definition of ‘victim’ and brings forward its proposals.” The Victims’ Commissioners have already commenced preparatory work to establish the forum.

### US Investments

**Mr Elliott** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister if the recently announced US investments have any conditions attached, such as the ‘McBride Principles’. (AQW 6446/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** This is a private equity fund which has been designed by the Office of the Comptroller of New York State. The Executive has had no involvement in the design of the Fund. All monies allocated by the Comptroller are from the pension funds of New York State employees. It is entirely a matter for the Comptroller of New York State what conditions are placed on those who wish to avail of the funds.

### Recent Visit to United States

**Mr Shannon** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what financial commitment it received from its visit to the United States over St Patrick’s Day this year. (AQW 6488/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** The key purpose of our visit to the United States around St Patrick’s Day was to promote new inward investment and to strengthen relationships with some of our most important existing investors. In New York, the deputy First Minister joined the Comptroller of New York State at the announcement of a \$30 million pension fund investment for Northern Ireland. The Fund will make private equity investments.

In Los Angeles we met with four prospective investors and we are hopeful that at least two of these companies will be in a position to announce major investments in the very near future. Our direct engagement with senior decision makers in all the companies we visited helped strengthen the investment opportunities that we can offer to American companies.



The Irish Technology and Leadership Group, a group of businesses and investors based in Silicon Valley, have committed to host a conference to examine business opportunities here later this year. This is a significant boost and we are delighted that the Group has chosen Belfast as the location for its 2009 conference.

In Chicago the First Minister met with senior executives at Allstate, one of our key investors; he also met with another prospective investor from the IT sector.

### Capital Investment

**Mr McNarry** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many jobs have been created through investment by Government Departments since devolution. (AQW 6496/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** Capital Investment from departments accounted for some 31% of the total output of the Construction Industry in 2007-08. On this basis it is estimated that in the 2007-08 financial year some 24,000 construction sector jobs were supported through capital investment by government departments. Statistics for the construction industry indicate that in the 2008-09 financial year Government capital investment has maintained a similar level of employment within the construction sector.

### North West Gateway Initiative

**Mr P Ramsey** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the future programmes, and their planned deliverables in the North West Gateway Initiative. (AQW 6537/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** The North West Gateway Initiative was established to provide a focus for sustained co-operative action between the Northern Ireland Executive and the Irish Government which, over a period of time, would make a real difference to the region. The Initiative has no direct associated funding but is aimed at deriving greater synergy through the effective practical co-operation and co-ordination of existing public expenditure. The region was defined as the Councils of Derry, Limavady and Strabane and Donegal County Council.

The Initiative has played an important role in providing a focus on the region and in encouraging practical co-operation between existing Departments and agencies on a North South basis in developing a range of projects.

Specifically, it has facilitated the development of a range of actions including a cross-border tourism framework, the North West Workforce Development Forum, cross-border health initiatives, a major investment in cross-border roads infrastructure projects and the establishment of a communications link between the North West Institute of Technology and the Letterkenny Institute of Technology, amongst others.

Whilst OFMDFM has an oversight role, the activities/projects are taken forward by individual Departments. The future work programmes, targets and anticipated outcomes for those projects are determined by each Department. You will appreciate that work is ongoing on a large range of issues and projects. If there is a particular project which you are interested in you may wish to seek information on progress from the appropriate NI Department.

### Funding for Victims and Survivors

**Mr Shannon** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) what increases have been made in funding for Victims and Survivors since devolution; (ii) if any group or individual has had funding reduced; and (iii) to confirm whether funding is due to be increased next year. (AQW 6579/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** In January 2008 we announced a total of £36 million over 3 years for victims and survivors, a very significant increase over previous years.

This year, increased levels of funding were available to victims and survivors groups through the core funding and development grant schemes, £2.3 million and £1.5 million respectively, and these levels are set to increase further in the coming financial year. An additional £1 million was also made available to groups to ensure a smooth transition between the Peace II and Peace III support packages. Individual victims benefited from over £2 million of funding delivered through the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund this year.

We intend to make £12.5 million available for work with victims and survivors during the next financial year. That represents an increase of 50% on this year's allocation.

### North West Gateway Initiative

**Mr P Ramsey** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) for an update on the plans emerging from the North West Gateway Initiative; and (ii) to outline future investment programmes under this initiative. (AQW 6630/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** We refer the Member to the answer provided in response to AQW 6537/09 relating to the future programmes and planned deliverables in the North West Gateway Initiative.

Details of all future investment programmes under the Initiative are not maintained centrally.

### Barroso Task Force Report

**Mrs D Kelly** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister when it will publish the action plan in response to the Barroso Task Force Report. (AQW 6665/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** The Executive Committee agreed its response to the European Commission's Task Force Report on Northern Ireland on 26 March. We presented President José Manuel Barroso with a copy of the Executive's 'Priorities for European Engagement', which included its 2008/09 Action Plan, on 31 March in Brussels. This document was made available immediately thereafter and we plan to make a statement to this House after the Easter recess.

### Bank Representatives

**Mr Simpson** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister when it plans to next meet with bank representatives to discuss approaches to tackling the current economic situation. (AQW 6763/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** We are continuing our dialogue with the banks. We met with the Ulster Bank on 3 February 2009, the Northern Bank on 26 February 2009, the Bank of Ireland on 3 March 2009 and the First Trust/AIB on 6 April 2009.

The four local banks have also agreed to participate in the Cross Sector Advisory Forum, the first meeting of which took place on 6 April 2009.

### Construction Industry

**Mr Newton** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister how she plans to respond to complaints that the difficulties in the construction industry are being used as an excuse by banks to refuse credit to small and medium sized enterprises, including those with marginal links to the construction industry. (AQW 6800/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** We remain concerned about reports that credit may still not be getting to local businesses. While we understand that there may be individual cases where loans cannot be made, we are anxious that this does not turn into a trend for refusals. Credit needs to reach our business on reasonable terms if we are to get out of the economic downturn and this will not happen unless the local banks are lending properly. We have now met with all the four major banks (Ulster Bank on 3 February 2009, the Northern Bank on 26 February, the Bank of Ireland on 3 March 2009 and First Trust/AIB on 6 April 2009). The four local banks have also agreed to participate in the Cross Sector Advisory Forum. Notwithstanding the positive messages that banks have been giving us on the funds available to lend, we will continue to monitor the situation and may return to these meetings, if we receive continuing reports of retrenchment.

### Corporate Responsibility Issues

**Dr Farry** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline what discussions have taken place with (a) colleagues in other jurisdictions; (b) the local business community; and (c) local trade unions regarding corporate responsibility issues. (AQW 6830/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** We met with representatives of Business in the Community on 2 February 2009 to discuss their work. We are supportive of the efforts of this group to promote corporate social responsibility and we have offered to lend whatever support we can to their activities.

### Departmental/Agency Charge Increases

**Mr McGlone** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in light of the economic downturn and its implications for business and domestic consumers alike, what measures the Executive plans to take to mitigate the effects of proposed Departmental/Agency charge increases. (AQW 6875/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** As a Department the only charges that OFMDFM or any of its public bodies levies on business and domestic customers are those payable in respect of public tours, events and filming at Crumlin Road Gaol and to the Planning Appeals Commission in respect of appeal fees and deemed application fees. We understand that there are no plans to change the current level of charges.

In relation to the Executive we announced in the Assembly on 15 December a range of measures which should sustain our economy over the coming months and years while confidence returns to the global credit market and economic prospects improve. These measures include a domestic rates freeze, a deferment on separate payments for water, reduced prescription charges now (and free from April 2010), and extension of the free bus scheme for the elderly.

### Executive Information Service

**Mr Dallat** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what the total cost of the Executive Information Service was, in each of the last four financial years. (AQW 6917/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** The salary costs for information officer grades (Principal Information Officer, Senior Information Officer, Information Officer and Assistant Information Officer) for each of the last four financial years are detailed in the table below.

Financial Year	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Total Salary Costs (Information Officer grades only)	£181158.48	£172267.52	£154869.08	£158828.02

### Executive Information Service

**Mr Dallat** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many staff have been employed in the Executive Information Service, in each of the last five years. (AQW 6918/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** The number of staff employed in the Executive Information Service, as at 1 April, for each of the last five financial years is detailed in the table below.

1 April	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Number of Staff in Post (Information Officer grades only)	4	5	4	6	5

## Northern Ireland Children's Commissioner

**Mr Weir** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what is the total legal budget for the Northern Ireland Children's Commissioner for 2009/10; and how this compares to the budget for each of the last three years. (AQW 6928/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** The amount budgeted for legal fees for 2009/2010 is £50,000.

The amounts spent by the Commissioner for Children and Young People for Northern Ireland in legal fees in each of the last three years were:

2006/2007	2007/2008	2008/2009
£39,336.68	£52,914.55	£105,811.54

The amount initially budgeted for legal fees and the amount actually spent can vary. When preparing her annual business plan, the Commissioner decides how she is going to allocate her overall funds. At this time the amount allocated for legal expenses is a provisional figure as the actual expenditure depends on what cases arise during the year which meet the Commissioner's criteria for support.

## Media Coverage

**Mr Kennedy** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail when it has complained to the media about coverage of the Department or the Executive, including (i) to whom it complained; and (ii) on what grounds it complained. (AQW 6939/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** The Executive Information Service (EIS) on behalf of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister is in daily contact with a wide range of media outlets to discuss media coverage of the Department and the Executive.

EIS regularly exercises its right to complain about media coverage that it feels is either inaccurate, misrepresentative or which it feels is unduly negative or unfair.

## Ombudsman's Office

**Mr Ford** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what plans it has to revise the role and functions of the Ombudsman's Office, in the light of the review of public administration. (AQW 6988/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** The OFMDFM published report – A Review of the Offices of the Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints, remains under consideration.

## Planning Appeals Commission

**Mr Newton** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what percentage of written representations of planning appeals received by the Planning Appeals Commission related to proposals for single dwellings. (AQW 6995/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** The Planning Appeals Commission is an independent tribunal Non-Departmental Public Body. Given its independent tribunal status, its Chief Commissioner has been asked to provide a response directly to you, and we understand that she has written to you in the following terms:

"I have been asked to provide you with information requested in the above Assembly Question.

The Planning Appeals Commission issued around 1405 decisions in 2008/09; of these decisions approximately 1002 were processed by means of written representation. It is not possible to state what percentage of these related to single dwellings, however, the Commission did receive approximately 493 planning appeals in 2008/09 and roughly 20% of these referred to single dwellings.



I would be happy to provide any further information you require arising out of this response or to meet with you to discuss the matter if that would be more suitable.”

## DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

### Agricultural Waste Strategy

**Mr Elliott** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in relation to the Agricultural Waste Strategy, what is (i) the status of the strategy; (ii) the timeframe for consultation on the strategy; and (iii) the timescale for its formal publication. (AQW 6492/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms M Gildernew):** The Waste Management Strategy for the north of Ireland “Towards Resource Management 2006-2020” includes measures for Agricultural Waste. Following public consultation, the strategy was published in March 2006 by the Department of the Environment which takes the lead on Waste Management issues. No separate Agricultural Waste Strategy has been developed.

Measures controlling organic manure and slurry promote its nutrient value and recycling as a valuable fertiliser. The Nitrates Action Programme Regulations ensure that most manure and slurry is managed on farms to utilise this nutrient resource without polluting the environment.

The Department of Environment’s Waste Management Regulations NI 2006 extend waste management controls to agriculture in accordance with the European Waste Framework and Landfill Directives. The NI Environment Agency is responsible for implementing these Regulations. Advice on managing agricultural waste in compliance with these regulations is provided in my Department’s Code of Good Agricultural Practice. This includes information on types of agricultural waste, disposal and recycling options and Duty of Care obligations

In line with the Waste Management Strategy for the north my Department’s Renewable Energy Action Plan recognises the opportunities presented by generating energy from waste.

### Farm Modernisation Scheme

**Mr Armstrong** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if all of the £15.25m secured to fund the Farm Modernisation Scheme will be spent on the current applications, including administrative costs. (AQW 6550/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** No not all of the £15.25m of the budget will be spent on this first tranche, this will amount to approximately £6m. The £15.25m covers all three tranches including METS and administrative costs.

### Farm Modernisation Scheme

**Mr Armstrong** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what consideration her Department has given to opening further tranches of the Farm Modernisation Scheme in 2009 after it closes for applications on 31 March 2009. (AQW 6551/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** I have commissioned a review for the way forward for the next two tranches of the Farm Modernisation Programme in light of concerns over the launch of tranche one . There will be no further tranches launched in 2009 until this review is completed.

### Bovine Tuberculosis

**Mr Elliott** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what percentage of overall Bovine Tuberculosis on farm tests were carried out by her Department’s in-house veterinary staff. (AQW 6555/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** In 2008 80% of all TB testing was carried out by Private Veterinary Practitioners (PVPs) and 20% by my Department’s in-house staff.

### Crossnacreevy Site

**Mr Elliott** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if her Department has any responsibility for releasing or raising any finances needed because of the miscalculation of the value of the Crossnacreevy Site (AQW 6557/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** My Department has responsibility for discharging the DARD Budget which contains a capital receipts target for the sale of Crossnacreevy in 2010/11. That target will not be met and officials are in ongoing discussions with DFP about the budgetary implications.

### Bovine Tuberculosis

**Mr Elliott** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what input her Department had in the Northern Ireland Audit Office report "The control of Bovine Tuberculosis in Northern Ireland." (AQW 6558/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** The NIAO consulted with my Department throughout its investigations. Following the completion of the NIAO's main fieldwork in 2006, the NIAO had a series of consultations with my Department on its findings. My Department had the opportunity to review the draft report before it was finalised.

At the conclusion of this process, there remained a number of matters in the report with which my Department said it did not agree or believed needed clarification.

For completeness, the NIAO has included these points in Appendix 10 of its report.

### Bovine Tuberculosis

**Mr Elliott** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action she is considering in response to the Northern Ireland Audit Office report, "The Control of Bovine Tuberculosis in Northern Ireland." (AQW 6559/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** I welcome the NIAO Report and its recommendations regarding the control of bovine TB. The Public Accounts Committee hearing to consider the NIAO report took place on Thursday 26 March. The next stage in the process is for the PAC to publish its Report. I look forward to seeing the PAC comments when they publish their Report in due course. My Department will then consider the PAC Report and a formal Memorandum of Reply will be laid before the Assembly within two months of receipt of the Report, giving our commitment to the recommendations that have been made.

My Department is continuing to work in partnership with our key stakeholders to develop the agreed joint industry/Government approach to TB that I announced in December. My Department will take full account of the recommendations of the Report as we develop the detail of the strategy.

### Dairy Industry

**Mr Poots** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps she is taking to assist the dairy industry. (AQW 6580/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** The dairy industry makes a vital contribution to the agri-food sector in the north of Ireland and my aim is to ensure that it remains competitive and continues to bring benefit to the local economy, particularly in rural areas. Therefore, when milk prices fell sharply last October my executive colleagues and I worked hard to secure the re-introduction of export refunds for dairy products. This included lobbying the Defra Minister to support the re-introduction and at my behest the First and deputy First Minister wrote to the Prime Minister. I and industry representatives welcomed the re-introduction by the European Commission on 22 January.

There is also a need to plan for the future so the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment and I agreed to provide support to Dairy UK (NI) to undertake a competitiveness study into the dairy sector. The aim of this study is to ensure that the North has a sustainable dairy sector with a structure to enable it to compete globally.

Financial assistance is also being provided under the Regional Food Programme. Over the last two years the Dairy Council has received funding offers of £228,870 for promotional and market research activities. Assistance is also available to the dairy sector under Axis 1 of the Rural Development Programme, which has a budget of £45m. The dairy sector also benefits indirectly from aid which continues to be provided under the EU School Milk Scheme to encourage the consumption of milk by school children.

In addition my Department carries out a wide range of activities aimed at assisting the dairy sector. These include the provision of technical support to producers and processors; the provision of knowledge and technology transfer programmes and benchmarking services which enable farmers to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their farm business. The industry also receives significant assistance from Government through AFBI and CAFRE, including dedicated dairy technologists.

My Department and I will continue to work for outcomes on issues which are in the best long term interests of the local dairy industry.

### Dairy Industry

**Mr Poots** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the strategy documents her Department has produced for the dairy sector, in the last five years. (AQW 6584/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** The Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development was recently informed of my agreement, and that of the The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Development, to provide support to Dairy UK (NI) to undertake a competitiveness study into the dairy sector. The overall objective of this study is to ensure that the north of Ireland has a sustainable dairy sector with a structure to enable it to compete globally. In view of the important contribution which the dairy sector makes to the local economy and the challenges which it is currently facing this is an important piece of strategic work.

Other strategy documents with a bearing on the dairy sector include the 'Fit For Market' report published in November 2004. The dairy industry was actively involved in implementation of the recommendations in this report and received significant financial support for various projects.

In addition the Red Meat Strategy was published in October 2007. One of the key findings of this study was in relation to dairy-origin beef models. A working group is currently taking forward this recommendation which has potential to benefit farmers by providing for an economically viable outlet for bull calves from dairy herds.

Finally, I can assure you that during the past five years my Department has worked closely with the dairy industry providing policy, technical, scientific and financial support to help ensure that it has a sustainable future

### Forestry Service

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many park rangers are employed in the Forestry Service. (AQW 6635/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** There are 18 industrial staff that have duties largely in connection with the recreation facilities and customer care issues at 9 Forest Parks. During periods of peak demand, additional industrial staff are made available on a needs basis.

### Tollymore Forest Park

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why 24 hour security is not provided at the caravan park in Tollymore Forest Park. (AQW 6636/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** It is my intention to improve customer facilities and customer service within Forest Service caravan and camping sites, by seeking partnership arrangements with suitably experienced providers. Towards this end, Forest Service staff are currently establishing the level of private sector interest in delivering caravanning and camping services; with the intention of securing a suitable partner or partners in 2009 / 2010. This process is in keeping with Government's "Wider Markets" initiative, and preference will be given to those who offer a 24 hour presence where appropriate.

Until this happens, sites will continue to be operated by DARD staff and it is impracticable to have these staff within this site 24 hours per day.

### **Tollymore Forest Park**

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many park rangers are employed by the Forest Service at Tollymore Forest Park. (AQW 6637/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** Currently 4 park rangers are employed on a full time basis within Tollymore Forest Park. A further 4 staff are available for park ranger duties on a needs basis.

### **Tollymore Forest Park**

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action her Department has taken or intends to take, to ensure that the Forest Service is combating anti-social behaviour at the caravan park in Tollymore Forest Park. (AQW 6638/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** My response to AQW 6636 also applies. A number of specific measures have been taken to address anti-social behaviour issues at the caravan site at Tollymore Forest Park. These include:

- a) The provision of education and advice to visitors via notice boards, site rules leaflet, and the involvement of Forest Service in the “Safer Mournes Partnership” initiative.
- b) The provision of Forest Education packages that include education provision on “good citizenship” and respect for the forest environment.
- c) The exclusion of offenders from the site.
- d) Refusal to take any future booking from known offenders.
- e) Evoking applicable legislation (including court orders).
- f) Meeting with Senior Police Officers to review interpretation and PSNI action taken.

### **Forestry Land**

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action her Department is taking to prevent anti-social or criminal behaviour on forestry land. (AQW 6639/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** Forest Service is very aware of the importance of maintaining the security of all forest areas and the need to restrict, as far as possible, anti-social or criminal behaviour. This is important in ensuring public safety and forest recreation benefits; preventing the theft/damage of timber and other publicly owned assets, and to maintain habitat diversity and protection of wildlife.

Basic forest security is achieved by placing gates or barriers on all forest roads where public vehicular access is not permitted. Security measures at these entrance points are reviewed and maintained or upgraded as required. Permitted vehicular access on operational forest roads is strictly controlled by permits or licence agreements.

Specific actions are taken throughout the forest estate to manage and control commercial activities. For example:

- All timber buyers are required to comply with the Forest Service Timber Permit Management System. All timber stacks are regularly inspected for theft;
- All incidents of forest fires, fly tipping, dumping of dead animals, dumping of by-products from diesel laundering, unauthorised motorised access etc are fully investigated. Forest Service also provides assistance to the appropriate authorities with a view to prosecuting identifiable offenders. Where possible, action is taken to discourage repeat offences.

A number of specific measures have been taken to address anti-social behaviour issues at the various caravan sites operated by Forest Service. These include:



- Refusal to take any future bookings from known offenders.
- The exclusion of offenders from the site.
- Use of applicable legislation (including court orders).
- Meeting with Senior Police Officers to review cases and PSNI action taken.
- The provision of Forest Education packages that include education provision on “good citizenship” and respect for the forest environment.

### Knock River in East Belfast

**Mr Newton** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development when the Knock River in East Belfast was last cleaned out; and when the next inspection will be carried out. (AQW 6647/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** As a designated watercourse maintained in the Rivers Agency’s programme of works, the Knock River in East Belfast was last inspected on 17 October 2008. Identified maintenance works required to ensure the free flow were subsequently carried out in the period from 11 to 17 November 2008. The next inspection of the Knock River is scheduled for the period September to December 2009, with any necessary maintenance works being carried out during September 2009 to March 2010.

In the event of complaints or severe weather predictions additional inspections will be carried out as necessary.

### Thermally Efficient Schemes

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she has received any inquiries about thermally efficient schemes to provide energy for homes in the countryside. (AQW 6658/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** To date I have not received any inquiries regarding thermally efficient schemes to provide energy for homes in the countryside.

### Risk Based Inspections of Feed Businesses

**Dr McDonnell** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) to give a breakdown of the programme of inspections of (a) feed businesses in Northern Ireland, (b) for imports from the Republic of Ireland and (c) for imports from other sources providing the number of samples taken and analysed and the outcomes in terms of findings from both the inspections and the sampling/analyses; and (ii) how and where in the public domain consumers can access this data. (AQW 6704/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** Risk based inspections of all feed businesses including farms are undertaken by Quality Assurance Branch inspectors. Samples are also taken on a risk basis for laboratory testing.

In 2008/09 a total of 1239 feed related inspections were completed and 619 samples were submitted for a range of analyses.

Animal feed legislation is common to all EU Member States, enabling the free movement of feed materials. Therefore DARD does not have a sampling and inspection programme specifically targeting products coming from other Member States. However, if there is a known problem with materials coming from another EU Member State or an EU Rapid Alert has been issued, DARD inspectors work closely with local feed businesses to isolate the problem material, sample and test and arrange for recall of that material, if necessary.

QAB inspectors regularly sample imports of feed materials from non-EU countries. The FSA in consultation with the EU Commission provides guidance regarding the products and origins of greatest risk, which enables targeting of high risk products. Samples are screened for a range of contaminants including toxins, heavy metals, processed animal proteins and dioxins. In 2008/09, 253 samples of imported material were obtained and no problems were detected.

Results of inspections and testing are reported to the FSA, who in turn make returns to the EU Commission. Results are also reported to businesses and where results are unsatisfactory enforcement action is initiated. Relevant stakeholders are also informed of results.

## Fishing Boats

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what assistance has she given to fishing boats so that they can fish the area (box) in the Clyde, Scotland. (AQW 6714/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** No assistance has been provided to fishing boats to enable them to fish the Clyde “box”. In 2009 the Scottish Government again closed parts of the Firth of Clyde to certain types of fishing method from 14 February to 30th April in order to protect spawning cod. This closure has been imposed every year since 2002 and the requirements of the closure are unchanged.

Under the new Days at Sea regime that applies to the West of Scotland, of which the Clyde forms part, vessels have to use selective gear as specified in the new TAC and Quota Regulation. All Administrations are also offering more days at sea to vessels that adopt selective gear that goes beyond the statutory minimum specification in order to reduce cod mortality. Selective fishing gear may eligible for funding under the European Fisheries Fund and my Department would welcome applications when the Fund opens in May.

## Single Farm Payment Scheme

**Mr Hamilton** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development when she intends to make a decision on the issue of duplicate fields claims that were applied for under the 2005 Single Farm Payment scheme. (AQW 6726/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** Since receiving the duplicate field judgement my Department has been engaged with its legal advisers as to the impact of the judgement on other duplicate field cases. I and my officials are considering the legal advice given and the options available. I would hope to be in a position to make a decision shortly after the Easter break.

## Departmental Funds for Halls

**Mr Simpson** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what the total amount of funding was from her Department for (i) Orange halls; (ii) GAA halls; and (iii) other rural community halls, in each of the last three years. (AQW 6753/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** The figures for Orange Order and other halls in receipt of departmental funds are detailed in the attached table. No Cumann Lúthchleas Gael (Gaelic Athletic Association) hall received funding in this period.

		2006	2007	2008
Total	5,035,313.38	3,085,325.56	915,309.75	1,034,678.07
Orange Halls	714,632.53	322,327.27	118,368.75	273,936.51
Others	4,320,680.85	2,762,998.29	796,941.00	760,741.56

## Rural Businesses

**Mr Simpson** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many rural businesses her Department has assisted in each of the last three years (i) in total; and (ii) broken down by constituency. (AQW 6762/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** The information is not held in the form requested and could only be produced at disproportionate cost. However 39,981 farm businesses received grant or subsidy in the last EAGF financial year 16 October 2007 to 15 October 2008.

The Department recognises the interest shown by Members in having better information on the level of payments broken down by constituency. Details of subsidy/grant payments for European financial years 2002 to October 2007 are already published on the Department’s website. Further details of payments for the European financial year to October 2008 will be published by the end of April 2009 on the DEFRA website.

The information on CAP, Rural Development and other grant payments for the EAGF year October 07/08, summarised by postcode prefix level, is currently available in the Assembly Library.

### Departmental Funds for Halls

**Mr Simpson** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many (i) Orange halls; (ii) GAA halls; and (iii) other rural community halls, have benefited from support programmes managed and funded by her Department in rural areas, in each of the last three years. (AQW 6764/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** The figures for Orange Order and other halls in receipt of departmental funds are detailed in the attached table. No Cumann Lúthchleas Gael (Gaelic Athletic Association) hall received funding over the period.

	2006	2007	2008	Total
Orange Halls	8	1	7	16
Other Halls	42	10	22	74
	50	11	29	90

### Welfare of Horses

**Mr Elliott** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps are being taken to introduce legislation to protect the welfare of horses. (AQW 6816/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** Under the Welfare of Animals Act (NI) 1972, it is already an offence to cause unnecessary suffering to any animal. An owner can be adjudged to have permitted cruelty if he fails to exercise reasonable care to prevent unnecessary suffering. It is also an offence to abandon an animal. The PSNI is responsible for enforcing the 1972 Act with regard to non-farm animals including horses, and has the power to seize an injured or sick animal, or, in the worst cases, to have it destroyed in order to prevent further suffering.

I recently announced my intention to bring forward a new Animal Welfare Bill. I expect to be in a position shortly after the Summer Recess to seek Executive approval to bring forward the Bill.

As I believe that it is vitally important that animal welfare legislation across the Island of Ireland is broadly compatible, the new legislation that I bring forward will also reflect on developments in the South, where new animal welfare legislation is also under consideration. I will also seek to ensure that we learn lessons from Britain where legislation has already been introduced.

In bringing forward new legislation, I will want to ensure that the maximum penalties are available to the Courts for animal cruelty offences, so that these penalties can act as a sufficient deterrent, and provide adequate protection for animals. This is one of the key areas that I will seek to address in new legislation.

In considering what new legislation is needed, I will of course take on board any lessons that might be learned from welfare incidents particularly those concerning horses which have been brought to my attention in recent times.

### Countryside Management Scheme

**Mr T Clarke** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) how much money has been allocated to the new Countryside Management Scheme; (ii) when the money was made available; (iii) when the scheme was opened; (iv) when the scheme closed; and (v) when the scheme will reopen. (AQW 6843/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:**

- (i) Under the Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2007 – 2013, funding of £219 million is available for the agri environment measure. This includes the funding for existing participants as well as those joining the new Countryside Management Scheme (CMS) and the Organic Farming Scheme. It is anticipated that this funding will allow up to 5000 new participants in addition to those who wish to transfer from existing schemes to the new CMS.

- (ii) This funding is available for the duration of the RDP.
- (iii) The first tranche of the new CMS opened to application on 30 June 2008.
- (iv) The first tranche of the new CMS closed on 29 August 2008.
- (v) I anticipate that the next tranche of the new CMS will open in Summer 2009. I will announce the date in due course.

### Tourism Initiatives in North Antrim

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail her Department's (i) biker tourism initiative; and (ii) sailing lessons initiative in North Antrim. (AQW 6847/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** Under the leader+ Programme my Department paid a grant of £9786 to North Antrim leader+ group to deliver a 'Biker Tourism Co-operation Project'. The objective of the project was to complete research into biker tourism potential and aid four businesses in the area with the installation of biker facilities. To date the report has been completed and four businesses in the North Antrim Area have received assistance.

The Sailing Lesson initiative was a project initiated and undertaken by a private promoter with Leader+ grant aid of over nine thousand pounds obtained through North Antrim Leader group. The aim of the project was to offer high level sailing coaching, create a website and employ one person. This business is still running and now employs two people in the North Antrim area.

### Countryside Management Scheme

**Mr Bresland** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development on what date the Countryside Management Scheme will open to receive applications. (AQW 6944/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** It is anticipated that the new Countryside Management Scheme and the Organic Farming Scheme under the Rural Development Plan 2007 – 2013 will open for applications in summer 2009. I will announce the date in due course.

### Clay Lakes

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if he is aware that the Clay Lakes remain at risk of drying up again and what action he is taking to rectify this situation; and to provide a completion date for the handover of responsibility for managing the Clay Lakes to the Rivers Agency. (AQW 6970/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** DARD Rivers Agency currently has no responsibility for controlling water levels in the Clea Lakes. I can confirm that DARD Rivers Agency recently contacted the current controllers to alert them to high water levels posing a potential flood risk. Assurances were given that this situation would be remedied. Due to the legal complexities involved with the transfer of responsibility for water level management it is not possible at this time to provide a definite completion date as requested. However, I can assure you that every effort is being made to complete the transfer of control of the sluice gates for the purposes of the Agency providing more consistent water level management for drainage purposes. However, as the remit of the Agency is flood defence it would not assume any responsibility for low water levels during periods of extreme drought.

### Clay Lakes

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if he is aware that landowners at Clay Lakes have fishing rights, own land under the lakes and have water rights to households which pre-date the introduction of government stipulated levels in the 1970s; and to outline how the Rivers Agency will control water levels at the Clay Lakes while taking into consideration the rights of landowners in this location. (AQW 6974/09)



**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** DARD Rivers Agency currently has no responsibility for the control of water levels at the Clea Lakes. On transfer of water rights the Agency would intend to carry out maintenance works to the existing sluice gates, and will consider the construction of a weir structure to better ensure water levels are maintained. Landowners and other affected parties, including fisheries interests, would be fully consulted on any proposed works as necessary.

### Clay Lakes

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development the reasons why (i) water level stipulations at the Clay Lakes were agreed with a single individual rather than a majority of lakeside landowners; and (ii) water levels are not being kept constant by the use of automatic sluices as recently encouraged by the Rivers Agency. (AQW 6976/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:**

- (i) Available records indicate that the water level stipulations at the Clea Lakes were agreed with the United Chrome Tanners in 1969 as part of a wider arrangement for compensatory works to mitigate the impact of the Ardigon – Dibney Drainage Scheme on their Tannery operation. The Chrome Tanners were in possession of, and dependent on, water rights transferred from a 19th Century Mill Operation; the then Minister of Agriculture under Drainage Legislation was required to compensate for any diminution of water power or water rights associated with drainage schemes.
- (ii) The Rivers Agency is not responsible for operation of the automatic sluices or maintenance of the water levels and can act in an advisory capacity only.

### Clay Lakes

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why the undertaking that was given by officials, to landowners at Clay Lakes, during a meeting on 18 June 2008, has since been reneged on. (AQW 6977/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** At the meeting between representatives of DARD Rivers Agency, NI Environment Agency, Dunbia Dungannon and residents affected by the Clea Lakes on 18 June 2007 it was agreed that responsibility for control of water levels lay with Dunbia Dungannon. It was also agreed that if the historic agreement between the Ministry of Agriculture (now DARD) and the United Chrome Tanners Ltd dated August 1969 be negated it may be possible for the Rivers Agency to construct a control weir at the outlet to the lake. As work regarding the legal transfer of control of water level management remains ongoing it is my understanding that no undertaking has been reneged on.

### Farm Modernisation Scheme

**Mr McGlone** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail all correspondence and communication received from the European Commission since the application process for the Farm Modernisation Scheme commenced. (AQW 7014/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** The Department received a letter from the European Commission on the afternoon of 17 February, dated 12 February, drawing our attention to the need to have defined criteria for the selection of operations and projects and asking which selection criteria would be applied to the Farm Modernisation measure.

The Department received a second letter from the European Commission on 12 March suspending the proposal to include additional national funding in the scheme. This suspension is linked to the Commission's comments on the selection process.

The Department received a third letter from the European Commission on 2nd April, dated 30 March, noting that it is not their role to approve the selection process for the programme and that it is therefore up to the Department to take a decision on how to proceed. The Commission has also said they will continue to make payments to the Rural Development Programme.

Underpinning this formal correspondence, there has been ongoing informal communication between the Department and the European Commission.

## DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

### Festivals and Events

**Mr K Robinson** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail his Department's funding for festivals and events in East Antrim since May 2007, broken down by each event. (AQW 5758/09)

**Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr G Campbell):** Details of the funding for festivals and events in East Antrim since May 2007 by my Department and its arm's-length bodies are contained in the attached Annex A.

#### ANNEX A

##### EVENTS GROWTH FUND

2007/08	
Event / Festival	Award (£)
Guinness Carrick Sevens 07	5,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,000</b>

##### COMMUNITY FESTIVALS FUND (CFF)

2007/08	
Event / Festival	Award (£)
Carrick Pageant	3,900
Broadisland Gathering	3,000
Chaine Folk & Blues	1,500
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,400</b>

##### DCAL EVENTS UNIT

2008/09	
Event / Festival	Award (£)
Aquarama Carrickfergus Incorporating Annual Sea Cadet Corps National Sailing Regatta 2008	10,000
World Junior and Cadet Fencing Championships 2009	85,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>95,000</b>

##### COMMUNITY FESTIVALS FUND\*

2008/09	
Event / Festival	Award (£)
Carrick Sevens	3,700
Carrick Pageant	5,000
Whitehead Festival	500

2008/09	
Event / Festival	Award (£)
Carrickfergus Ladies Football Festival	6, 200
Sea Cadets Regatta and Aquarama	4, 000
Broadisland Gathering	7, 000
Harbour Community Group - Community Fun Day	800
Gleno Community Group – Storytelling Festival	1, 200
Ulster Scots Four Day Festival	6, 000
Rathcoole Cultural Festival	1, 000
Monkstown Community Festival	2, 000
Monkstown Family Fest & Fireworks Extravaganza	1, 750
Sewing Seeds – Potato Festival	1, 000
Newtownabbey Community Relations Forum	950
Newtownabbey Community Voice	700
<b>Total</b>	<b>41, 800</b>

\*2008/09 figures are inclusive of 50% matched funding from local councils.

### Ulster-Scots Agency

The following detail incorporates the period from May 2007.

#### PAYMENTS PENDING – AUTHORISED

Group	Amount Authorised (£)
Cairncastle (Soiree)	250
<b>Total</b>	<b>250</b>

#### LETTERS OF OFFER – MONEY ALLOCATED BUT NOT YET CLAIMED

Group	Amount Offered (£)
Cairncastle (soirees/burns night)	5, 000
Ballycarry Comm Assc (festival)	8, 014
Sir Edward Carson FB (festival)	3, 000
Larne District LOL No.1 (festival)	9, 080
Naggyburn (festival)	2, 950
Naggyburn (concert evening)	250
<b>Total</b>	<b>28, 294</b>

#### PAYMENTS MADE

Group	Amount Paid (£)
Glynn Primary School (after-schools club)	900
Cairncastle LOL 692 Community & Cultural Group (soirees/festivals/summer schools)	34, 074
Ballycarry Community (festival)	2, 125
Ballycarry Community Association (festival)	11, 769

Group	Amount Paid (£)
Larne YMCA (summer school)	1, 050
Larne District LOL No:1 Education & Cultural Group (Festival)	250
Naggyburn Ulster-Scots & Schomberg Orange Cultural Society (concert evening)	250
East Antrim Traditional Music School (Festival)	7, 000
<b>Total</b>	<b>57, 420</b>

**TUITION**

East Antrim Elementary Accordion Orchestra	562
East Antrim (Killyglen) Accordion Orchestra	1, 361
Sir Edward Carson	1, 080
East Antrim (Killyglen) Accordion Orchestra	1, 361
<b>Total</b>	<b>4, 364</b>

**Festivals and Events**

**Mr K Robinson** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail his Department's funding of festival and events since May 2007, broken down by constituency. (AQW 5760/09)

**Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** Funding details, broken down by constituency where this detail is available, can be found in the attached Annex A.

**ANNEX A****NORTHERN IRELAND EVENTS COMPANY - 2007/08**

2007/08		
Event	Constituency	Award (£)
9th Annual Blues on the Bay Festival 07	South Down	5, 000
7th World Jet Masters 07	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	7, 500
All Ireland Antrim Girls Golf Ch'Ships 07	South Antrim	10, 000
All Ireland Cup & Shields Final 07	Belfast	5, 000
Aspects Irish Literature Festival 07	North Down	5, 000
Big Tickle Comedy Festival 07	Foyle	7, 000
Circle One BSPA Portrush Open 07	North Antrim	6, 000
University of Ulster Foyle Cup Youth Football Tournament 07	Foyle East Londonderry	44, 712
Garden Show Ireland 07	Lagan Valley	15, 000
Guinness Carrick Sevens 07	East Antrim	5, 000
Irish Country Lifestyle 07	South Antrim	10, 000
NI International Horse Show 07	East Belfast	49, 684
NI Milk Cup 07	East Londonderry North Antrim South Antrim	25, 000
Out to Lunch	East Belfast	8, 891
Tennis Legends	East Belfast	40, 000



2007/08		
Event	Constituency	Award (£)
The National Countrysports Fair 07	Lagan Valley	10, 000
Ulster Grand Prix 07	Lagan Valley	5, 000
Under 19's Rugby World Championships 07	Belfast East	50, 000
Urban Beach Tour - NI 07	East Belfast	12, 000
Yonex Irish International Badminton Championships 2007	Lagan Valley	2, 175
<b>Total</b>		<b>322, 962</b>

**DCAL EVENTS UNIT – 2008/09**

2008/09		
Event	Constituency	Award (£)
10th Annual Guinness Blues on the Bay Festival 2008	South Down	5, 000
Aquarama Carrickfergus Incorporating Annual Sea Cadet Corps National Sailing Regatta 2008	East Antrim	10, 000
Garden Show Ireland 2008	Lagan Valley	25, 000
Guinness Folk Festival 2008	North Antrim	6, 100
Hillsborough International Oyster Festival 2008	Lagan Valley	15, 000
International Indoor Athletics 2009	Belfast East	7, 250
Joint British Isles & International Series 2009	Belfast South	7, 250
Magner's Big Tickle Comedy Festival 2008	Foyle East Londonderry	6, 500
Northern Ireland Dance Music Awards 2008	Belfast East	5,000
Northern Ireland International Airshow 2008	North Antrim	18, 000
Out to Lunch 2009	Belfast North	6, 100
Trans / Urban Arts Academy 2008	Belfast East	10, 000
26th Annual Northern Ireland Milk Cup International Youth Football Tournament 2008	East Londonderry North Antrim South Antrim	50, 000
Belfast Maritime Festival 2009	Belfast East	200, 000
August Feile – West Belfast Festival 2008	Belfast West Belfast North Belfast East	50, 000
European Round FIM Trials & World Round FIM Trials 2008	North Down	40, 000
Kennedy International North West 200	North Antrim	58, 750
Rally Ireland	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	888, 000
Ulster Grand Prix Bike Week 2008	Lagan Valley	40, 000
University of Ulster Foyle Cup 2008	Foyle East Londonderry	50, 000
World Junior and Cadet Fencing Championships 2009	East Antrim	85, 000

2008/09		
Event	Constituency	Award (£)
Total		1, 582, 950

### Festivals and Events

**Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much funding his Department has provided for cultural events and festivals in each (a) constituency; and (b) council area, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 6061/09)

**Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** The information requested is set out, where this is possible, at Annex A.

#### Annex A

#### ARTS

##### Community Festivals Fund (2006/07, 2007/08)

During the period 2006- 08 the community festivals fund was administered by the Northern Ireland Events Company.

The application process was through an open competition, open to all festival organisers across Northern Ireland. Information for the first two years of the community festivals fund is not held by council area or on a constituency basis. (84 projects were funded during this period)

##### Community Festivals Fund (2008/09)

On 1 April 2008 the delivery of the CFF transferred to local councils. DCAL provided funding on the basis that each council would provide at least 50% match funding.

The table below shows the funding awarded by DCAL to each district council in 2008/09.

District Council	Deal Award (£)
Antrim	12, 300
Ards	18, 000
Armagh	13, 700
Ballymena	15, 600
Ballymoney	6, 800
Banbridge	10, 600
Belfast	77, 300
Carrickfergus	9, 700
Castlereagh	15, 800
Coleraine	14, 200
Cookstown	8, 500
Craigavon	22, 600
Londonderry	31, 200
Down	16, 500
Dungannon	12, 800
Fermanagh	15, 000
Larne	8, 000
Limavady	8, 900
Lisburn	28, 400

District Council	Deal Award (£)
Magherafelt	9,900
Moyle	4,400
Newry & Mourne	25,400
Newtownabbey	20,400
North Down	18,600
Omagh	13,100
Strabane	12,400
<b>Total</b>	<b>450,100</b>

The table below shows the funding awarded through the CFF to each constituency in 2008/09.

Constituency	Community Festivals Fund (Cff) Awards (£)
Belfast North	56,657
Belfast South	58,273
Belfast West	58,474
Belfast East	20,246
East Antrim	35,613
East Londonderry	44,780
Foyle	60,000
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	52,832
Lagan Valley	57,118
Mid Ulster	50,110
North Antrim	47,072
North Down	39,950
Newry and Armagh	53,796
South Down	64,287
South Antrim	38,011
Strangford	34,032
Upper Bann	66,442
West Tyrone	48,252
Across Belfast North, South Antrim, East Antrim	6,800
<b>Total</b>	<b>892,745</b>

Figures, for constituency areas, include at least 50% match funding by councils. Councils can put, up to 10% of their contribution, towards administrative costs.

The table below shows the funding awarded by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland in each district council in 2006/07.

District Council	Award (£)
Antrim	20,000
Ards	10,000
Armagh	290,468

District Council	Award (£)
Ballymoney	1, 350
Belfast	8, 952, 630
Carrickfergus	18, 090
Castlereagh	71, 651
Coleraine	277, 167
Cookstown	99, 839
Craigavon	144, 235
Londonderry	1, 486, 484
Down	413, 155
Dungannon	65, 992
Fermanagh	106, 272
Larne	5, 500
Limavady	21, 000
Lisburn	309, 651
Magherafelt	71, 763
Moyle	13, 420
Newry & Mourne	180, 391
North Down	174, 174
Omagh	115, 333
Strabane	60, 522
<b>Total</b>	<b>12, 909, 087</b>

The table below shows the funding awarded by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland in each constituency in 2006/07.

Constituency	Award (£)
South Antrim	20, 000
Strangford	50 ,200
Newry & Armagh	463, 232
North Antrim	14, 770
Belfast North	2, 140, 164
Belfast South	4, 898, 036
Belfast East	285, 408
Belfast West	1, 668,404
East Antrim	23, 590
East Londonderry	298, 167
Mid Ulster	215, 011
Upper Bann	144, 235
Foyle	1, 486, 484
South Down	420, 782
Lagan Valley	301, 720



Constituency	Award (£)
North Down	174, 174
West Tyrone	175, 855
Fermanagh & S.Tyrone	128, 855
<b>Total</b>	<b>12, 909, 087</b>

The table below shows the funding awarded by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland in each district council in 2007/08.

District Council	Award (£)
Antrim	15, 000
Ards	10, 001
Armagh	97, 225
Belfast	7, 751, 992
Carrickfergus	5, 000
Castlereagh	6, 440
Coleraine	190, 150
Cookstown	67, 090
Craigavon	63, 788
Londonderry	1, 230, 322
Down	113, 930
Dungannon	10, 000
Fermanagh	34, 300
Larne	5, 000
Limavady	10, 000
Lisburn	262, 622
Magherafelt	5, 000
Moyle	54, 023
Newry & Mourne	146, 790
North Down	75, 320
Omagh	49, 000
Strabane	22, 000
<b>Total</b>	<b>10, 225, 173</b>

The table below shows the funding awarded by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland in each constituency in 2007/2008

Constituency	Award (£)
South Antrim	15, 000
Strangford	16, 441
Newry & Armagh	239, 195
Belfast North	2, 035, 834
Belfast South	4, 543, 227

Constituency	Award (£)
Belfast East	162, 134
Belfast West	1, 031, 259
East Antrim	10, 000
East Londonderry	200, 150
Mid Ulster	77, 090
Upper Bann	63, 788
Foyle	1, 230, 322
South Down	118, 930
Lagan Valley	242, 160
North Down	75, 320
North Antrim	54, 023
West Tyrone	71, 000
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	39, 300
<b>Total</b>	<b>10, 225, 173</b>

The table below shows the funding awarded by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland in each district council in 2008/2009.

District Council	Award (£)
Antrim	78, 750
Ards	51, 751
Armagh	127, 000
Banbridge	8, 000
Belfast	10, 104, 772
Castlereagh	79, 000
Coleraine	143, 000
Craigavon	155, 863
Londonderry	1, 573, 264
Down	165, 100
Dungannon	53, 250
Fermanagh	60, 000
Lisburn	307, 042
Magherafelt	55, 000
Moyle	20, 260
Newry & Mourne	188, 987
Newtownabbey	21, 865
North Down	166, 243
Omagh	163, 350
<b>Total</b>	<b>13, 522, 497</b>

The table below shows the funding awarded by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland in each constituency in 2008/2009

Constituency	Award (£)
South Antrim	78, 750
North Antrim	20, 260
East Antrim	21, 865
Strangford	130, 751
Newry & Armagh	315, 987
Belfast North	3, 291, 107
Belfast South	5, 179, 564
Belfast East	287, 239
Belfast West	1, 346, 862
East Londonderry	143, 000
Mid Ulster	91, 250
Upper Bann	155, 863
Foyle	1, 573, 264
South Down	173, 100
Lagan Valley	307, 042
North Down	166, 243
West Tyrone	163, 350
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	77, 000
<b>Total</b>	<b>13, 522, 497</b>

**Footnote:** In addition, the Arts Council of Northern Ireland allocated £367,025 in 2006/2007, £295,496 in 2007/2008 and £505,123 in 2008/2009 to organisations whose activities are regional, for example Youth Music Orchestra and Opera Theatre Company. These figures are not reflected in the tables.

## Events

The table below shows funding provided, through the Northern Ireland Events Company (NIEC), in 2006/2007:

District Council	Constituency	Award (£)
Belfast	Belfast North, South, East, West	15, 000
Belfast	Belfast North, South, East, West	29, 615
Antrim	South Antrim	9, 000
North Down	North Down	10, 000
Carrickfergus	East Antrim	5, 000
Belfast	Belfast North, South, East, West	15, 000
Londonderry	Foyle	12, 500
Limavady	East Londonderry	1, 173
Lisburn	Lagan Valley	20, 000
Fermanagh	Fermanagh and South Tyrone	20, 000
Londonderry	Foyle East Londonderry	60, 047
Belfast	Belfast North, South, East, West	8, 000
Carrickfergus	East Antrim	4, 728
Belfast	Belfast North, South, East, West	30, 000

District Council	Constituency	Award (£)
Antrim	South Antrim	15, 000
Down	Strangford	7, 000
Belfast	Belfast North, South, East, West	25, 000
Coleraine	East Londonderry	11, 941
Belfast	Belfast North, South, East, West	14, 000
Belfast	Belfast North, South, East, West	8,891
Belfast, Fermanagh	Belfast East, Fermanagh and South Tyrone	€411, 197*
Down	Strangford	3, 000
Banbridge	Newry and Armagh	4, 286
Belfast	Belfast North, South, East, West	50, 000
Newry & Mourne	South Down	5, 000
Lisburn	Lagan Valley	15, 000
Belfast	Belfast North, South, East, West	15, 000
Belfast	Belfast North, South, East, West	27, 818
Lisburn	Lagan Valley	8, 000

\*Payment in Euro because the agreement between Rally Ireland and the NIEC stated this.

The table below shows funding provided to events facilitated by the NIEC in 2006/07.

District Council	Constituency	Award (£)
Magherafelt	Mid Ulster	495, 122
Down	Strangford	392, 814
Fermanagh	Fermanagh and South Tyrone	152, 357

The table below shows funding provided, through the Northern Ireland Events Company (NIEC), in 2007/2008:

District Council	Constituency	Award (£)
Newry & Mourne	South Down	5, 000
Fermanagh	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	7, 500
Antrim	South Antrim	10, 000
Belfast	Belfast North, South, East, West	5, 000
North Down	North Down	5, 000
Londonderry	Foyle	7, 000
Coleraine	North Antrim	6, 000
Foyle, Limavady and Strabane	Foyle East Londonderry	44, 712
Lisburn	Lagan Valley	15, 000
Carrickfergus	East Antrim	5, 000
Antrim	South Antrim	10, 000
Belfast	Belfast North, South, East, West	49, 684
Coleraine, Ballymoney and Ballymena	East Londonderry North Antrim South Antrim	25, 000



District Council	Constituency	Award (£)
Belfast	Belfast North, South, East, West	8, 891
Belfast	Belfast North, South, East, West	40, 000
Lisburn	Lagan Valley	10, 000
Lisburn	Lagan Valley	5, 000
Belfast, North Down	Belfast South & North Down	50, 000
Belfast	Belfast North, South, East, West	12, 000
Lisburn	Lagan Valley	2, 175

The DCAL Events Unit provided funding for the following events in 2008/2009:

District Council	Constituency	Award (£)
Newry & Mourne	South Down	5, 000
Carrickfergus	East Antrim	10, 000
Lisburn	Lagan Valley	25, 000
Coleraine	North Antrim	6, 100
Lisburn	Lagan Valley	15, 000
Belfast	Belfast North, South, East, West	7, 250
Belfast	Belfast South	7, 250
Londonderry	Foyle East Londonderry	6, 500
Belfast	Belfast East	5, 000
Coleraine	North Antrim	18, 000
Belfast	Belfast North, South, East, West	6, 100
Belfast	Belfast East	10, 000
Coleraine, Ballymoney and Ballymena	East Londonderry, North Antrim South Antrim	50, 000
Belfast	Belfast East	200, 000
Belfast	Belfast West Belfast North Belfast East	50, 000
North Down	North Down	40, 000
Coleraine	North Antrim	85, 000
Fermanagh*	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	880, 000
Lisburn	Lagan Valley	40, 000
Foyle, Limavady and Strabane	Foyle East Londonderry	50, 000
Newtownabbey	East Antrim	85, 000

\*Cross border event

### Plantation Exploration/Commemoration

**Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, in relation to the plans for the Plantation Exploration/Commemoration, to detail (i) the resources that will be allocated; and (ii) the joint approach that is being taken with the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment in terms of international marketing and development. (AQW 6629/09)

**Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** My Department, through its relevant arm's-length Bodies, will provide advice and guidance to any organisation considering ways of commemorating the Plantation of Ulster.

A range of activities and projects, in relation to the 400th anniversary of the Plantation of Ulster, have already been planned as set out below:

- The Ulster-Scots Agency intends to republish the Reverend George Hill's 'An Historical Account of the Plantation of Ulster at the commencement of the seventeenth century, 1605 – 1620', first published in 1877. It will be accompanied by digital images of the Raven Phillips maps held by the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland. Those maps will also feature in the Ulster-Scots Agency's educational resources on the Plantation, funded by the Special European Programmes Body;
- Northern Ireland Screen has agreed to partly fund a bilingual documentary series from the Irish Language Broadcast Fund. The series entitled 'Dissenting Voices' is scheduled to be broadcast in January 2010 and will illustrate what life was like on both sides of the Irish Sea at the time of the plantation;
- New history displays will feature in the refurbished Ulster Museum. These will provide background to the Plantation and its main features. They will consider Ulster as the departing point for the Gaelic lords and present an account of the settlement of Ulster up to 1615, covering the establishment of the Royal schools, the development of towns and ports, including Londonderry and Coleraine, and the development by the London Companies, of the county formerly known as Coleraine; and
- A range of events will take place across the library service. For example, the Linen Hall library is planning an exhibition of contemporary books and pamphlets.

At present there is no formal cooperation with DETI in terms of international marketing and development.

### Newtownards Library

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when the economic appraisal will be completed for the new Newtownards Library; and when is construction expected to begin. (AQW 6657/09)

**Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** The South Eastern Education and Library Board has been working in conjunction with the Northern Ireland Library Authority to explore a range of feasible options for the provision of public library services in Newtownards.

The likely timescale and cost of the project will not be known until the Economic Appraisal is finalised. From 1 April 2009 responsibility for the project will transfer to the Northern Ireland Library Authority.

While deliberations have taken longer than expected it is important to explore all the options and achieve the best value for money for a potential investment of over £3m.

After the completion of the Economic Appraisal it will take a minimum of 12 to 15 months for detailed designs to be developed and planning permission to be secured before construction can commence on site.

### Ulster-Scots and Irish-Language Projects

**Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many (i) Ulster-Scots and (ii) Irish-language projects his Department has funded (a) in total; and (b) broken down by constituency, in each of the last four years. (AQW 6737/09)

**Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** The total number of Ulster-Scots and Irish-language projects funded by DCAL and its statutory agencies and arm's-length bodies including the Arts Council, Ulster-Scots Agency and Foras na Gaeilge over the last four years is shown in the table below;

Year	Ulster Scots	Irish
2008	77	37
2007	55	38
2006	30	37
2005	17	51

Unfortunately, this information is not maintained by parliamentary constituency by the Ulster-Scots Agency and Foras na Gaeilge. I have instructed these Agencies to begin formatting the information relating to funded projects by parliamentary constituency from 1 April 2009.

### Financial Awards Made by Department

**Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the financial awards made by his Department to (i) GAA clubs; (ii) Irish language; (iii) Ulster Scots; and (iv) Loyal Orders, for events, projects, and other awards, in the Upper Bann area, in each of the last four years. (AQW 6738/09)

**Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** The information requested is set out at Annex A.

#### Annex A

Funding set out in the attached table was not awarded directly by the Department, but either by the Arts Council Northern Ireland, or through the community festivals fund (CFF). The CFF was initially administered by the Northern Ireland Events Company and in 2008 was devolved to local district councils.

	Event/Project /Other	Financial Year	Financial Award (£)
(i) GAA Clubs	Nil	Nil	Nil
(ii) Irish Language	Gaelic Week	08/09	2, 475
(iii) Ulster Scots	Co. Down Pipe Band Championships	08/09	4, 500
	Ulster Scots Folk Orchestra	08/09	10, 000
(iv) Loyal Orders	2007 Twelfth July Festival	07/08	5, 000
	Boyne and Beyond (Gifford)	06/07	3, 000
	Lurgan District Community Festival 2006	06/07	3, 000

### Projects Planned for Upper Bann

**Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the (i) projects; and (ii) amount of investment planned for the Upper Bann constituency, for each of the next three financial years. (AQW 6752/09)

**Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** Please see attached Table.

#### DCAL CAPITAL PROJECTS – UPPER BANN

Ongoing and Planned Projects					
Name	Value	Start Date	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
St Paul's GAC, Taghnevan - Construction of a multi-sports complex.	245,000	2008/09	24,500	0	0
Lurgan Rugby Football & Cricket Club - Refurbishment of 2 existing rugby pitches and training area	126,093	2008/09	25,219	0	0
Glenavon FC – Stadia Safety works	800,000	2010/11	0	800,000	0
Portadown Boat Club - New boathouse and storage area	500,000	2009/10	250,000	250,000	0

Ongoing and Planned Projects					
Name	Value	Start Date	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Craigavon Borough Council - Provision of Inclusive Fitness suite at Craigavon Leisure Centre	40,000	2009/10	40,000	0	0
Glenavon FC – Ground improvements under Soccer Strategy	235,960	2009/10	235,960	0	0
Lurgan Celtic FC	60,860	2008/09	40,000	20,860	0
Floating Jetty at Moneypenny's Lock Newry Canal Project Promoter: Craigavon Borough Council	£7,200 DCAL Contribution (Approx 50% of total cost)	n/k	£7,200	0	0

### Trouble at International Football Match

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what discussions he has had with the PSNI about the trouble caused by some Polish fans in connection with the football match at Windsor Park on Saturday, 28 March 2009. (AQW 6788/09)

**Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** I have already issued a public statement condemning all the disturbances which took place in and around the football match at Windsor Park on Saturday 28 March 2009. However, policing, and the trouble that occurred in connection with the game on 28 March, are reserved matters and therefore the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Office (NIO). In addition, discussions with the police about the trouble caused in connection with the match are a matter for the Irish Football Association (IFA) which is responsible for the organisation of all Northern Ireland home international football games at Windsor Park.

### Proposed New National Stadium

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if he would consider a financial contribution to the proposed new Danny Blanchflower stadium as the new national stadium. (AQW 6790/09)

**Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** I have had individual meetings with the sports' governing bodies with the intention of finding a cost-effective and sustainable way of assisting football, rugby and gaelic games develop solutions to their stadia needs and have asked them to let me have a short list of options on stadium provision, highlighting their preferred option.

I will wish to further discuss each of the options received with the governing bodies. In due course preferred options and their associated business cases will need to be subjected to economic appraisal to Green Book standards to ensure value for money, operational viability and affordability. The Government's financial contribution to overall stadia development will need to be considered as part of this.

### Trouble at International Football Match

**Mr Savage** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much the Irish Football Association has paid Eventsec and other firms to provide security for international matches at Windsor Park, in each of the last three years. (AQW 6806/09)

**Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure does not retain information on how much the Irish Football Association (IFA) has paid Eventsec or other firms to provide security for international matches at Windsor Park. This is entirely a matter for the IFA.

### Trouble at International Football Match

**Mr Savage** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail any contact between his Department and the Home Office about violence emanating from a small section of visiting Polish football fans. (AQW 6808/09)



**Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** Violence emanating from football fans is a reserved matter and therefore the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Office (NIO). It would be a matter for the NIO to consider whether violence involving visiting Polish fans should be raised with the Home Office in the first instance.

### Proposed New National Stadium

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what discussions he has had about the new stadium that has been proposed for the Danny Blanchflower playing fields in East Belfast. (AQW 6858/09)

**Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** I have had individual meetings with the sports' governing bodies with the intention of finding a cost-effective and sustainable way of assisting football, rugby and gaelic games develop solutions to their stadia needs and have asked them to let me have a short list of options on stadium provision, highlighting their preferred option.

I will wish to further discuss each of the options received with the governing bodies. In due course preferred options and their associated business cases will need to be subjected to economic appraisal to Green Book standards to ensure value for money, operational viability and affordability. The Government's financial contribution to overall stadia development will need to be considered as part of this.

### Ulster Scots Agency Newspaper

**Mr Butler** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) how much funding has been provided by his Department for the Ulster Scots Agency newspaper, The Ulster Scot; (ii) how many copies of the newspaper are published; and (iii) what are the areas and bodies that receive the newspaper. (AQW 6906/09)

**Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** The Department does not directly fund the Ulster-Scots Newspaper. The newspaper is financially supported by the Ulster-Scots Agency who has provided £337,355 of funding and published a total of 1,557,000 issues over the last three years as detailed in the table below:

Year	2006	2007	2008
Funding	£66,109	£119,080	£152, 166
Published	434,000 (7 issues)	520,000 (8 issues)	603,000 copies (9 issues)

The newspaper is distributed as a supplement within the News Letter and also via a mailing list as detailed below:

- Democratic Unionist Party
- Ulster Unionist Party
- England and Scotland
- House of Lords
- MLAs
- MPs
- Community Groups
- NI Libraries
- Overseas
- Dáil Éireann
- ROI Senate
- Ulster-Scots Groups
- Local Media
- Councils/Local Government

I trust you find this information helpful.

## DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

## Teaching Posts

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Education the number of teaching posts in each school in the North Down constituency. (AQW 6388/09)

**Minister of Education (Ms C Ruane):** Ní bhailíonn an Roinn eolas ar líon na bpost do mhúinteoirí i dTuaisceart na hÉireann, ach bailíonn sí eolas maidir le líon na múinteoirí.

The Department does not collect data on the number of teaching posts, but does collect the numbers of teachers. The numbers of teachers in each school in the North Down parliamentary constituency in the academic year 2007-2008 is given in the table below.

## TEACHERS' IN SCHOOLS IN NORTH DOWN PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY, 2007-2008

School Name	Number of Teachers Filling or Temporarily Filling Teaching Posts in 2007-2008
<b>Nursery Schools</b>	
Bangor Nursery School	2
Hollywood Nursery School	1
Trinity Nursery School	3
<b>Primary Schools And Preparatory Departments Of Grammar Schools</b>	
Ballyvester Ps	6
Hollywood Ps	18
Crawfordsburn Ps	8
Ballyholme Ps	28
Donaghadee Ps	23
Clandeboy Ps	10
Millisle Ps	8
Redburn Ps	6
Bloomfield Road Ps	17
Grange Park Ps	16
Kilcooley Ps	9
Rathmore Ps	22
Towerview Ps	21
Kilmaine Ps	24
Ballymagee Ps	18
St Patrick's Ps	11
St Anne's Ps	3
St Comgall's Ps	12
St Malachy's Ps	13
Bangor Central Ps	28
Glencraig Ps	12
Glenlola Collegiate Prep. Dept.	6
Bangor Grammar School Prep. Dept.	9

School Name	Number of Teachers Filling or Temporarily Filling Teaching Posts in 2007-2008
Sullivan Upper School Prep. Dept.	14
<b>Secondary And Grammar Schools</b>	
Donaghadee High School	23
Bangor Academy And 6th Form College	95
St Columbanus' College	37
Priory College	36
Glenlola Collegiate	67
Bangor Gs	61
Sullivan Upper School	79
<b>Special Schools</b>	
Clifton Special School	17
Lakewood Special School	9

- 1 This table contains the total number of teachers in full-time or part-time permanent positions, teachers employed on a daily (1/365th) basis, and teachers temporarily covering vacancies (either full- or part-time). It does not include information on unfilled vacancies, or information on posts shared by teachers.

### South Eastern Education and Library Board

**Mr B Wilson** asked the Minister of Education when she proposes to re-instate the Board of the South Eastern Education and Library Board. (AQW 6524/09)

**Minister of Education:** Tá athbhunú Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Oirdheiscirt atá ar fionraí fós faoi bhreithniú agus fógrófar mo chinneadh i ndáil leis seo ag an oiriúnach amach anseo.

The reinstatement of the suspended Board of the South-Eastern Education and Library Board remains under consideration and my decision in relation to this will be announced at the appropriate time.

### Teaching Posts

**Mr Ross** asked the Minister of Education how many teaching posts there are in primary schools in the East Antrim constituency. (AQW 6529/09)

**Minister of Education:** Ní bhailíonn an Roinn eolas ar líon na bpost do mhúinteoirí i dTuaisceart na hÉireann, ach bailíonn sí eolas maidir le líon na múinteoirí.

The Department does not collect data on the number of teaching posts in the north of Ireland, but does collect the numbers of teachers. The numbers of teachers in each school in the East Antrim parliamentary constituency in the academic year 2007-2008 is given in the tables below.

#### TEACHERS' IN SCHOOLS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN EAST ANTRIM PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY, 2007-2008

School Name	Teachers Filling or Temporarily Filling Posts in 2007-2008
Carnalbanagh Ps	4
Larne And Inver Ps	9
Carrickfergus Model Ps	17
Olderfleet Ps	10
Woodburn Ps	9

School Name	Teachers Filling or Temporarily Filling Posts in 2007-2008
Mullaghdubh Ps	3
Eden Ps	10
Glynn Ps	4
Ballycarry Ps	7
Greenisland Ps	19
Carrickfergus Central Ps	9
Whiteabbey Ps	18
Upper Ballyboley Ps	4
Sunnylands Ps	9
Moyle Ps	19
Whitehead Ps	19
King's Park Ps	15
Linn Ps	19
Victoria Ps	25
Toreagh Ps	6
Silverstream Ps	8
Hollybank Ps	11
Woodlawn Ps	14
Oakfield Ps	17
Cairncastle Ps	7
Seaview Ps	4
St Anthony's Ps	6
St John's Ps	9
Lourdes Ps	2
St James' Ps	14
St Nicholas' Ps	6
St Macnissi's Ps	10
Kilcoan Ps	4
Carnlough Controlled Integrated Ps	3
Corran Integrated Ps	10
Acorn Integrated Ps	10

- 1 This Table Contains The Total Number Of Teachers In Full-Time Or Part-Time Permanent Positions, Teachers Employed On A Daily (1/365th) Basis, And Teachers Temporarily Covering Vacancies (Either Full- Or Part-Time). It Does Not Include Information On Unfilled Vacancies, Or Information On Posts Shared By Teachers.



**TEACHERS<sup>1</sup> IN SCHOOLS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN EAST ANTRIM PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY, 2007-2008**

School Name	Teachers Filling or Temporarily Filling Posts in 2007-2008
Larne High School	40
Carrickfergus College	63
Monkstown Community School	50
Downshire School	59
St Comgall's High School	17
Ulidia Intergrated College	42
Carrickfergus Gs	56
Larne Gs	51
Belfast High School	67
St Macnissi's College	41

- 1 This Table Contains The Total Number Of Teachers In Full-Time Or Part-Time Permanent Positions, Teachers Employed On A Daily (1/365th) Basis, And Teachers Temporarily Covering Vacancies (Either Full- Or Part-Time). It Does Not Include Information On Unfilled Vacancies, Or Information On Posts Shared By Teachers.

**Teaching Posts**

**Mr Ross** asked the Minister of Education how many teaching posts there are in secondary schools in the East Antrim constituency. (AQW 6530/09)

**Minister of Education:** Ní bhailíonn an Roinn eolas ar líon na bpost do mhúinteoirí i dTuaisceart na hÉireann, ach bailíonn sí eolas maidir le líon na múinteoirí.

The Department does not collect data on the number of teaching posts in the north of Ireland, but does collect the numbers of teachers. The numbers of teachers in each school in the East Antrim parliamentary constituency in the academic year 2007-2008 is given in the tables below.

**TEACHERS<sup>1</sup> IN SCHOOLS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN EAST ANTRIM PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY, 2007-2008**

School Name	Teachers Filling or Temporarily Filling Posts in 2007-2008
Carnalbanagh Ps	4
Larne And Inver Ps	9
Carrickfergus Model Ps	17
Olderfleet Ps	10
Woodburn Ps	9
Mullaghduh Ps	3
Eden Ps	10
Glynn Ps	4
Ballycarry Ps	7
Greenisland Ps	19
Carrickfergus Central Ps	9
Whiteabbey Ps	18

School Name	Teachers Filling or Temporarily Filling Posts in 2007-2008
Upper Ballyboley Ps	4
Sunnylands Ps	9
Moyle Ps	19
Whitehead Ps	19
King's Park Ps	15
Linn Ps	19
Victoria Ps	25
Toreagh Ps	6
Silverstream Ps	8
Hollybank Ps	11
Woodlawn Ps	14
Oakfield Ps	17
Cairncastle Ps	7
Seaview Ps	4
St Anthony's Ps	6
St John's Ps	9
Lourdes Ps	2
St James' Ps	14
St Nicholas' Ps	6
St Macnissi's Ps	10
Kilcoan Ps	4
Carnlough Controlled Integrated Ps	3
Corran Integrated Ps	10
Acorn Integrated Ps	10

1 This Table Contains The Total Number Of Teachers In Full-Time Or Part-Time Permanent Positions, Teachers Employed On A Daily (1/365th) Basis, And Teachers Temporarily Covering Vacancies (Either Full- Or Part-Time). It Does Not Include Information On Unfilled Vacancies, Or Information On Posts Shared By Teachers.

#### TEACHERS<sup>1</sup> IN SCHOOLS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN EAST ANTRIM PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY, 2007-2008

School Name	Teachers Filling or Temporarily Filling Posts in 2007-2008
Larne High School	40
Carrickfergus College	63
Monkstown Community School	50
Downshire School	59
St Comgall's High School	17
Ulidia Intergrated College	42
Carrickfergus Gs	56

School Name	Teachers Filling or Temporarily Filling Posts in 2007-2008
Larne Gs	51
Belfast High School	67
St Macnissi's College	41

1 This Table Contains The Total Number Of Teachers In Full-Time Or Part-Time Permanent Positions, Teachers Employed On A Daily (1/365th) Basis, And Teachers Temporarily Covering Vacancies (Either Full- Or Part-Time). It Does Not Include Information On Unfilled Vacancies, Or Information On Posts Shared By Teachers.

### Moira Primary School's New Nursery Unit

**Mr Craig** asked the Minister of Education what the estimated timescale is for the completion of work on Moira Primary School's new nursery unit. (AQW 6561/09)

**Minister of Education:** Tá tugtha le fios dom ag Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlaine an Oirdheiscirt go ndéanfar breithniú ar an tionscadal i dtaca le clár mionoibreacha na bliana seo, in éineacht le tosaíochtaí iomaíochta eile agus ó thaobh na n-acmhainní airgeadais a bheidh ar fáil.

The South Eastern Education and Library Board has advised that the project will be considered for this year's minor works programme, along with other competing priorities and in the context of the financial resources which will be available.

### History Curriculum in Secondary Level Education

**Mr Elliott** asked the Minister of Education what topics are available for study as part of the history curriculum in secondary level education; and for a breakdown of the topics available for each of the individual year groups. (AQW 6614/09)

**Minister of Education:** Is cuid den churaclam reachtúil anseo, ón Bhunchéim go hEochairchéim 3, í an Stair. Tugann bun inneachar reachtúil na Staire creatlach agus solúbthacht do mhúinteoirí le leithead agus doimhneacht an ábhair a mhúnlú ionas go bhfreastalóidh sé ar riachtanais gach dalta.

History is part of the statutory curriculum here from Foundation Stage to Key Stage 3. The statutory minimum content for history provides a framework and the flexibility for teachers to tailor the breadth and depth of coverage to meet the needs of individual pupils.

At Key Stage 3, there is an explicit requirement for schools to deliver the minimum content through a broad and balanced range of: historical periods; Irish, British, European and global contexts; and significant political, social economic, cultural and religious development. This includes providing opportunities for pupils to investigate the long and short term consequences of the partition of Ireland and the impact of events and ideas of the 20th century on the world.

At Key Stage 4, there is significantly less curricular prescription in order to provide greater choice and flexibility for pupils. At Key Stage 4 and in sixth form it is for pupils to choose to study history.

Schools here are free to choose which awarding body they use when entering pupils for GCSEs or A levels. The subject content for history will therefore vary, depending upon the examination specification (syllabus) set by individual awarding bodies. Awarding bodies are required to design and develop their GCSE and A level specifications against criteria set down by the Qualifications' Regulators.

The content requirements set out in the current criteria for GCSE and A level history are very broad in that they define the general parameters for specification development rather than specific topics or periods of history to be studied. These are left to the discretion of the awarding body. For example, in both GCSE and A level history a key requirement is that all awarding bodies must allocate at least 25% of the course content to significant individuals, topics and issues related to Irish and/or British History. Awarding bodies have the freedom to specify content within this broad context.

### STEM Subject Teachers

**Mr Butler** asked the Minister of Education (i) how many teachers are qualified to teach STEM subjects in each educational sector; and (ii) how many STEM subject teachers there were in each educational sector, in each of the last five years. (AQW 6676/09)

**Minister of Education:** Tá tugtha le fios ag an Chomhairle Ghinearálta Teagaisc (GTCNI) go bhfuil 4,125 múinteoir ‘STEM’ ar Chlár na Múinteoirí faoi láthair agus aithníodh 3,314 den líon sin mar mhúinteoirí a raibh conarthaí buana \ sealadacha acu.

Ní choinnítear eolas stáiriúil agus ní bhíonn eolas de réir earnálacha oideachais.

The General Teaching Council (GTCNI) has advised that there are currently 4,125 ‘STEM’ teachers on their Register of Teachers of which 3,314 have been identified as permanent/temporary contracted.

Historical data is not held nor is information available by education sector.

### School Pupils in Upper Bann

**Mr Gardiner** asked the Minister of Education how many pupils in (i) primary; and (ii) secondary schools in the Upper Bann constituency do not have English as their first language. (AQW 6677/09)

**Minister of Education:** Tá an t-eolas a iarradh sa tábla thíos.

The information requested is contained in the table below.

**PUPILS WHO HAVE ENGLISH AS AN ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE ATTENDING PRIMARY AND POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN THE UPPER BANN CONSTITUENCY – 2008/09**

School type	Number of pupils who have English as an additional language
Primary	587
Post-primary	246
Total	833

**Source:** School census.

**Note:**

- Figure for primary schools includes nursery, reception and year 1 – classes.
- A child with English as an additional language is defined as one for whom English is not their first language and who has significant difficulty with the English language and requires assistance.

### Secondary Schools

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Education to detail the secondary schools that do not have year 13 and 14 pupils enrolled. (AQW 6691/09)

**Minister of Education:** Tá an t-eolas a iarradh sa tábla thíos.

The information requested is contained in the table below.

**Post-primary schools that currently do not have pupils enrolled in a sixth form – 2008/09**

**School Name**

- Armagh Integrated College
- Aughnacloy College
- Ballee Community High School
- Ballymoney High School
- Blackwater Integrated College
- Brownlow Int College
- Castle High School
- Clounagh Junior High School



- Craigavon Senior High School
- Crumlin Integrated College
- De La Salle Secondary School
- Donaghadee High School
- Dromore High School
- Drumcree College
- Dundonald High School
- Dunluce School
- Dunmurry High School
- Garvagh High School
- Killicomaine Junior High School1
- Knockbreda High School
- Lisnaskea High School
- LurgAn Junior High School1
- Markethill High School
- Movilla High School
- Nendrum College
- Newtownabbey Community High School
- Newtownhamilton High School
- Our Lady Of Lourdes High School
- Parkhall High School
- Rathfriland High School
- Saintfield High School
- St Aidan's High School
- St Aloysius High School
- St Benedict's College
- St Brigid's High School
- St Colmcille's High School
- St Columban's College
- St Eugene's High School
- St John's High School
- St Joseph's Boys' High School, Newry
- St Joseph's High School, Coalisland
- St MarY's College, Irvinestown
- St Mary's High School, Belleek
- St Mary's High School, Lurgan
- St Patricks & St Brigids High School
- St Paul's College
- St Paul's Junior High School1
- Strabane High School
- Tandragee Junior High School1
- The High School Ballynahinch

**Source:** Annual school census.

**Note:**

1. Junior High schools have been included, but only enrol children up to Year 10.
2. Sixth form defined as pupils in Year 13 or above studying level 3 courses.

### School Enrollment

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the schools that have year 13 and 14 pupils enrolled; and (ii) the number of these pupils in each school. (AQW 6692/09)

**Minister of Education:** Tá an t-eolas a iarradh sa tábla thíos.

The information requested is contained in the table below.

#### POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS WITH PUPILS ENROLLED IN A SIXTH FORM – 2008/09

School Name	Total
Abbey Christian Brothers Gs	218
Antrim Gs	187
Aquinas Diocesan Gs	218
Ashfield Boys' High School	71
Ashfield Girls' High School	107
Assumption Gs	259
Ballycastle High School	53
Ballyclare High School	283
Ballyclare Secondary School	114
Ballymena Academy	318
Banbridge Academy	380
Banbridge High School	19
Bangor Academy And 6th Form College	257
Bangor Gs	207
Belfast Boys' Model School	154
Belfast High School	233
Belfast Model School For Girls	171
Belfast Royal Academy	386
Bloomfield Collegiate	193
Cambridge House Grammar School	236
Campbell College	197
Carrickfergus College	70
Carrickfergus Gs	196
Castleberg High School	52
Christian Brothers' Gs	250
Christian Brothers Secondary School	155
City Armagh High School	14
Coláiste Feirste	79
Coleraine Secondary School	58
Coleraine Academical Institution	126

School Name	Total
Coleraine High School	208
Cookstown High School	155
Corpus Christi College	108
Cross And Passion College	158
Cullybackey High School	47
Dalriada School	220
Dean Brian Maguirc College	55
Devenish College	104
Dominican College, Portstewart	269
Dominican College, Belfast	109
Down High School	266
Downshire School	66
Drumglass High School	32
Drumragh College	108
Dunclug College	93
Edmund Rice College	82
Enniskillen Collegiate	145
Erne Integrated College	84
Fivemiletown High School	84
Fort Hill College	89
Foyle & Londonderry College	225
Friends' School	266
Glastry College	66
Glengormley High School	164
Glenlola Collegiate	269
Grosvenor Gs	289
Hazelwood College	138
Holy Cross College	250
Holy Trinity College	187
Hunterhouse College	169
Immaculate Conception College	36
Integrated College Dungannon	95
Kilkeel High School	126
La Salle Boys' School	218
Lagan College	196

School Name	Total
Larne Gs	184
Larne High School	66
Laurelhill Community College	83
Limavady Gs	253
Limavady High School	85
Lismore Comprehensive School	228
Lisnagarvey High School	51
Lisneal College	105
Little Flower Girls' School	135
Loreto College	195
Loreto Gs	270
Lumen Christi College	223
Lurgan College	203
Maghera High School	18
Magherafelt High School	56
Malone Integrated College	136
Methodist College	520
Monkstown Community School	21
Mount Lourdes Gs	306
New-Bridge Integrated College	89
Newry High School	109
Newtownbreda High School	78
North Coast Integrated College	50
Oakgrove Integrated College	148
Omagh Academy	175
Omagh High School	65
Orangefield High School	30
Our Lady And St Patrick's College	332
Our Lady Of Mercy Girls' School	94
Our Lady's Gs	222
Portadown College	374
Portora Royal School	130
Priory College	23
Rainey Endowed School	190
Rathmore Gs	353



School Name	Total
Regent House School	358
Sacred Heart College	148
Sacred Heart Gs, Newry	230
Shimna Integrated College	105
Slemish College	120
Sperrin Integrated College	57
St Brigid's College	102
St Catherine's College	243
St Cecilia's College	187
St Ciaran's High School	146
St Colman's College , Newry	238
St Colman's High School, Ballynahinch	68
St Colm's High School, Draperstown	63
St Colm's High School, Lisburn	83
St Columbanus' College	54
St Columba's High School	24
St Columb's College	412
St Comgall's High School	32
St Comhghall's High	83
St Dominic's High School	267
St Eugene's College	5
St Fanchea's College	32
St Gemma's High School	60
St Genevieve's High School	223
St Joseph's Secondary School, Derry	122
St Joseph's College, Enniskillen	7
St Joseph's College, Ravenhill Road	106
St Joseph's Convent Gs	137
St Joseph's High School, Coleraine	55
St Joseph's High School, Crossmaglen	61
St Louis Gs, Ballymena	243
St Louis Gs, Kilkeel	154
St Louise's College	471
St Macnissi's College	152
St Malachy's College , Belfast	246

School Name	Total
St Malachy's High School, Castlewellan	203
St Mark's High School	113
St Mary's Christian Brothers' Gs	265
St Mary's College, Clady	43
St Mary's College, Derry	151
St Mary's Gs, Magherafelt	283
St Mary's High School, Downpatrick	89
St Mary's High School, Newry	111
St Mary's Limavady	85
St Michael's College, Enniskillen	214
St Michael's Grammar, Magheralin	281
St Patrick's Academy, Dungannon	407
St Patrick's Co-Ed Comp College, Magherafelt	350
St Patrick's College, Ballymena	85
St Patrick's College, Banbridge	50
St Patrick's College, Bearnagheeha	122
St Patrick's College, Mullaghmore	69
St Patrick's Gs, Downpatrick	203
St Patrick's Gs, Armagh	203
St Patrick's High School, Dungiven	38
St Patrick's High School, Keady	220
St Patrick's High School, Lisburn	31
St Paul's High School, Camlough	230
St Peter's High School, Derry	77
St Pius X College	126
St Rose's High School	91
Strabane Gs	118
Strangford Integrated College	82
Strathearn School	192
Sullivan Upper School	288
The Royal Belfast Academical Inst.	262
The Royal School Armagh	178
The Royal School Dungannon	168
Thornhill College	393
Ulidia Intergrated College	91

School Name	Total
Victoria College	227
Wallace High School	312
Wellington College	188

**Source:** School census.

**Note:**

1. Figures may include some children who are re-sitting level 2 exams.

### School Meals

**Miss McIlveen** asked the Minister of Education how many (i) boys; and (ii) girls, entitled to free school meals, obtained three As at A level standard, in the last academic year. (AQW 6712/09)

**Minister of Education:** Number of Year 14 school leavers achieving 3 or more grade As at A level standard by gender and free school meal entitlement 2006/07

	Pupils not entitled to free school meals	Pupils entitled to free school meals	Total
Boys	676	24	700
Girls	1,021	42	1,063
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,697</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>1,763</b>

**Source:** School Leavers Survey

### A Levels

**Miss McIlveen** asked the Minister of Education how many (i) boys; and (ii) girls obtained three As at A level standard, in the last academic year. (AQW 6713/09)

**Minister of Education:** Number of Year 14 school leavers achieving 3 or more grade As at A level standard by gender and free school meal entitlement 2006/07

	Pupils not entitled to free school meals	Pupils entitled to free school meals	Total
Boys	676	24	700
Girls	1,021	42	1,063
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,697</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>1,763</b>

**Source:** School Leavers Survey

### Middletown Estate

**Mr Elliott** asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to her answer to AQW 6099/09, (i) if the £3,411,554 cost to the budget was augmented by a similar amount from the Republic of Ireland; (ii) if these amounts included all costs of acquisition of the Middletown estate; and (iii) in what year the acquisition costs were paid. (AQW 6729/09)

**Minister of Education:** Is féidir liom a dheimhniú gur roinneadh ar bhonn 50/50 idir an Roinn Oideachais ó Thuaidh agus an Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta ó Dheas aon chistiú caipitil agus aon chistiú ioncaim a bhain leis an tionscadal um Ionad Uathachais Choillidh Chanannáin.

I can confirm that all capital and revenue funding relating to the Middletown Centre for Autism project have been shared on a 50/50 basis between the Department of Education (DE) in the north and the Department of Education and Science (DES) in the south.

In the figures provided in the answer to AQW 6099/09 amounts were also provided, which related to DE internal costs relevant to the Middletown project. These costs were specific to DE only and DES will have had their own internal costs of unrelated amounts.

With regards to parts (i) and (ii) of your question, I can confirm that the amounts provided in AQW 6099/09 did include all costs for the acquisition of the Middletown estate which took place in June 2004. The overall capital cost was £3m which was split evenly between DE and DES.

### **Broughshane Primary School**

**Mr Storey** asked the Minister of Education for her assessment of the accommodation at Broughshane Primary School. (AQW 6731/09)

**Minister of Education:** A request for a replacement school was submitted last year to the North Eastern Education and Library Board by the Boards of Governors of the school. The condition of the building is generally good and this together with relatively few shortfalls in accommodation resulted in the North Eastern Education and Library Board being unable to recommend that the school be considered a priority at this time. A permanent extension was carried out to the school in 1998 and the mobiles at the school are in relatively good condition.

### **North Eastern Education and Library Board**

**Mr Storey** asked the Minister of Education to list the schemes in the North Eastern Education and Library Board major capital building programme that are awaiting approval from her Department. (AQW 6732/09)

**Minister of Education:** There are currently fourteen North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB) schemes which are at draft economic appraisal stage and have not yet been agreed between the board and the Department:

- Antrim Primary School
- Ballycastle High School
- Ballyclare Primary School
- Castle Tower Special School
- Cambridge House Grammar
- Carrickfergus Grammar School
- Carrickfergus High School
- Carrickfergus College
- Crumlin High School
- Cullybackey High School
- Coleraine High School (joint EA with Coleraine Academical Institution)
- Kilmoyle Primary School
- Larne High School
- The Thompson Primary School
- There are two NEELB primary-school schemes for which economic appraisals have been approved and which await agreement of funding to proceed. The primary schools concerned are Woodburn and Islandmagee.
- The NEELB has identified twelve potential capital major works schemes which will need to be assessed with the department before they could proceed to appraisal stage. These are as follows:
  - Ashgrove Primary School
  - Carnmoney Primary School
  - Carrickfergus Central Primary School
  - Carrickfergus Model Primary School
  - Clough Primary School
  - Greenisland Primary School
  - Hezlett Primary School



- Linn Primary School
- Moyle Primary School
- Randalstown Primary School
- Dunclogh College
- Downshire School

The need for these schemes has not yet been with the Department.

### North Eastern Education and Library Board

**Mr Storey** asked the Minister of Education to list the schemes in the North Eastern Education and Library Board major capital building programme that have had economic appraisals approved and are awaiting new starts clearance from her Department. (AQW 6733/09)

**Minister of Education:** There are currently fourteen North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB) schemes which are at draft economic appraisal stage and have not yet been agreed between the board and the Department:

- Antrim Primary School
- Ballycastle High School
- Ballyclare Primary School
- Castle Tower Special School
- Cambridge House Grammar
- Carrickfergus Grammar School
- Carrickfergus High School
- Carrickfergus College
- Crumlin High School
- Cullybackey High School
- Coleraine High School (joint EA with Coleraine Academical Institution)
- Kilmoyle Primary School
- Larne High School
- The Thompson Primary School

There are two NEELB primary-school schemes for which economic appraisals have been approved and which await agreement of funding to proceed. The primary schools concerned are Woodburn and Islandmagee.

The NEELB has identified twelve potential capital major works schemes which will need to be assessed with the department before they could proceed to appraisal stage. These are as follows:

- Ashgrove Primary School
- Carnmoney Primary School
- Carrickfergus Central Primary School
- Carrickfergus Model Primary School
- Clough Primary School
- Greenisland Primary School
- Hezlett Primary School
- Linn Primary School
- Moyle Primary School
- Randalstown Primary School
- Dunclogh College
- Downshire School

The need for these schemes has not yet been with the Department.

### North Eastern Education and Library Board

**Mr Storey** asked the Minister of Education to list the schemes in the North Eastern Education and Library Board major capital building programme. (AQW 6734/09)

**Minister of Education:** There are currently fourteen North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB) schemes which are at draft economic appraisal stage and have not yet been agreed between the board and the Department:

- Antrim Primary School
- Ballycastle High School
- Ballyclare Primary School
- Castle Tower Special School
- Cambridge House Grammar
- Carrickfergus Grammar School
- Carrickfergus High School
- Carrickfergus College
- Crumlin High School
- Cullybackey High School
- Coleraine High School (joint EA with Coleraine Academical Institution)
- Kilmoyle Primary School
- Larne High School
- The Thompson Primary School

There are two NEELB primary-school schemes for which economic appraisals have been approved and which await agreement of funding to proceed. The primary schools concerned are Woodburn and Islandmagee.

The NEELB has identified twelve potential capital major works schemes which will need to be assessed with the department before they could proceed to appraisal stage. These are as follows:

- Ashgrove Primary School
- Carnmoney Primary School
- Carrickfergus Central Primary School
- Carrickfergus Model Primary School
- Clough Primary School
- Greenisland Primary School
- Hezlett Primary School
- Linn Primary School
- Moyle Primary School
- Randalstown Primary School
- Dunclug College
- Downshire School

The need for these schemes has not yet been with the Department.

### Portadown College

**Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Education if she will agree to have Departmental officials visit Portadown College to discuss why its Board of Governors wants the new school to be built on the existing footprint. (AQW 6739/09)

**Minister of Education:** Chuir mé in iúl ag an díospóireacht ar Portadown College ar na maillaibh gur iarradh ar Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Deiscirt (SELB) tabhairt faoi obair bhreise ar an Bhreithmheas Eacnamaíochta (EA)

I indicated during the recent debate on Portadown College that the Southern Education and Library Board (SELB) has been asked to undertake some further work on the economic appraisal (EA).

I stress, as I did during the debate, the importance of ensuring that the principles of appraisal have been correctly applied and that the decision on how best to provide suitable accommodation for current and future pupils attending Portadown College is robust and presents value for money. To that end the EA must address a full range of feasible options. I hope that the work on the appraisal can be concluded quickly.

### Youth Workers

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Education how many (i) youth workers; and (ii) hours per week will be provided for youth workers in 2009/10 for (a) Doury Road, Ballymena; (b) Ballykeel, Ballymena; and (c) Dunclog, Ballymena. (AQW 6772/09)

**Minister of Education:** Thug Príomhfheidhmeannach Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Oirthuaiscirt an t-eolas seo a leanas don bhliain 2009/10.

The Chief Executive of the North Eastern Education and Library Board has provided the following information for 2009/10.

	Doury Road		Ballykeel		Dunclog	
	FT	PT	FT	PT (1)	FT	PT (2)
Youth Workers	1	9	1	10	1	5
Hours per week provided for youth workers	3.6	44	7.2	49	7.2	29

(1) This figure includes 1 part time worker funded under the DSD Employability and Citizenship Scheme for a total of 5 hours per week.

(2) This figure includes an application for 1 part time youth worker under the DSD Employability and Citizenship Scheme for a total of 5 hours per week. This application has not yet been approved.

### South Eastern Education and Library Board

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Education to list the schemes in the South Eastern Education and Library Board's major capital building programme, that are awaiting approval from her Department. (AQW 6795/09)

**Minister of Education:** Tá cúig scéim de chuid Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Deiscirt nár shocraigh an Roinn breithmheas eacnamaíochta orthu leis an Bhord go fóill;

There are five South-Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) schemes for which economic appraisals have not yet been agreed between the Department and the board;

- Academy Primary School, Saintfield
- Ballynahinch Primary School
- Downpatrick Primary School and Nursery School
- Killinchy Primary School
- Down High School

Economic appraisals for a new Ballywalter Primary School and for sports hall provision at Saintfield High School have been agreed and await agreement to proceed.

Additionally, the SEELB has identified six potential capital major works schemes. These are;

- Bangor Central Primary School
- Brownlee Primary School
- Cairnshill Primary School
- Forthill Campus, Lisburn
- Londonderry Primary School

- Tonagh, Knockmore, Old Warren and Lisburn Central Primary Schools

Of these schemes, my Department has recently assessed and agreed the need for a replacement Bangor Central Primary School and a draft EA prepared by the SEELB is under consideration. The remaining schemes have not yet been assessed or agreed by my Department but further engagement with the SEELB on these schemes can be expected in the near future.

### South Eastern Education and Library Board

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Education to list the schemes in the South Eastern Education and Library Board's major capital building programme, that have had economic appraisals approved and are awaiting for new start clearance from her Department. (AQW 6796/09)

**Minister of Education:** Tá cúig scéim de chuid Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Deiscirt nár shocraigh an Roinn breithmheas eacnamaíochta orthu leis an Bhord go fóill;

There are five South-Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) schemes for which economic appraisals have not yet been agreed between the Department and the board;

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### South Eastern Education and Library Board

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Education to list the schemes in the South Eastern Education and Library Board's major capital building programme. (AQW 6797/09)

**Minister of Education:** Tá cúig scéim de chuid Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Deiscirt nár shocraigh an Roinn breithmheas eacnamaíochta orthu leis an Bhord go fóill;

There are five South-Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) schemes for which economic appraisals have not yet been agreed between the Department and the board;

- Academy Primary School, Saintfield
- Ballynahinch Primary School
- Downpatrick Primary School and Nursery School
- Killinchy Primary School
- Down High School



Economic appraisals for a new Ballywalter Primary School and for sports hall provision at Saintfield High School have been agreed and await agreement to proceed.

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Of these schemes, my Department has recently assessed and agreed the need for a replacement Bangor Central Primary School and a draft EA prepared by the SEELB is under consideration. The remaining schemes have not yet been assessed or agreed by my Department but further engagement with the SEELB on these schemes can be expected in the near future.

### **St Oliver Plunkett PS, Forkhill**

**Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of Education when the newbuild for St Oliver Plunkett PS Forkhill will commence. (AQW 6801/09)

**Minister of Education:**

(i) It is estimated that the newbuild for St Oliver Plunkett PS, Forkhill will commence in late summer 2009 and complete around summer 2010.

(ii) It is estimated that the newbuild for St Patrick's PS, Dromintee will commence in late summer 2009 and complete around summer 2010.

(iii) It is estimated that the newbuild for St Clare's Convent PS will commence in autumn 2009 and complete around spring 2012.

(iv) It is estimated that the newbuild for Carrick PS Burren's will commence in late summer 2009 and complete around late 2010.

(v) It is estimated that the newbuild for St Joseph's PS Newry will commence in early 2010 and complete around summer 2011.

Braitheann na hamscálaí seo ar chur i gcrích sásúil na bpróiseas riachtanach pleanála agus tógála ar fad agus infhaighteacht na n-acmhainní i rith bliain áirithe. Beidh siad faoi réir beartas na Roinne, mar shampla pleanáil cheantar-bhunaithe agus tabharfaidh siad san áireamh iad.

These timescales are of course subject to all the necessary planning and building processes being completed satisfactorily and the availability of resources in any particular year. They will also be subject to, and take into account, Departmental policies such as area based planning.

### **St Patrick's PS, Dromintee**

**Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of Education when the newbuild for St Patrick's PS Dromintee will commence. (AQW 6802/09)

**Minister of Education:**

(i) It is estimated that the newbuild for St Oliver Plunkett PS, Forkhill will commence in late summer 2009 and complete around summer 2010.

(ii) It is estimated that the newbuild for St Patrick's PS, Dromintee will commence in late summer 2009 and complete around summer 2010.

(iii) It is estimated that the newbuild for St Clare's Convent PS will commence in autumn 2009 and complete around spring 2012.

(iv) It is estimated that the newbuild for Carrick PS Burren's will commence in late summer 2009 and complete around late 2010.

(v) It is estimated that the newbuild for St Joseph's PS Newry will commence in early 2010 and complete around summer 2011.

Braitheann na hamscálaí seo ar chur i gcrích sásúil na bpróiseas riachtanach pleanála agus tógála ar fad agus infhaighteacht na n-acmhainní i rith bliain áirithe. Beidh siad faoi réir beartas na Roinne, mar shampla pleanáil cheantar-bhunaithe agus tabharfaidh siad san áireamh iad.

These timescales are of course subject to all the necessary planning and building processes being completed satisfactorily and the availability of resources in any particular year. They will also be subject to, and take into account, Departmental policies such as area based planning.

### **Abbey-St. Clare's, Newry**

**Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of Education when the newbuild for Abbey-St. Clare's Newry will commence. (AQW 6803/09)

#### **Minister of Education:**

(i) It is estimated that the newbuild for St Oliver Plunkett PS, Forkhill will commence in late summer 2009 and complete around summer 2010.

(ii) It is estimated that the newbuild for St Patrick's PS, Dromintee will commence in late summer 2009 and complete around summer 2010.

(iii) It is estimated that the newbuild for St Clare's Convent PS will commence in autumn 2009 and complete around spring 2012.

(iv) It is estimated that the newbuild for Carrick PS Burren's will commence in late summer 2009 and complete around late 2010.

(v) It is estimated that the newbuild for St Joseph's PS Newry will commence in early 2010 and complete around summer 2011.

Braitheann na hamscálaí seo ar chur i gcrích sásúil na bpróiseas riachtanach pleanála agus tógála ar fad agus infhaighteacht na n-acmhainní i rith bliain áirithe. Beidh siad faoi réir beartas na Roinne, mar shampla pleanáil cheantar-bhunaithe agus tabharfaidh siad san áireamh iad.

These timescales are of course subject to all the necessary planning and building processes being completed satisfactorily and the availability of resources in any particular year. They will also be subject to, and take into account, Departmental policies such as area based planning.

### **Carrick PS Burren's**

**Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of Education when the newbuild for Carrick PS Burren's will commence. (AQW 6804/09)

#### **Minister of Education:**

(i) It is estimated that the newbuild for St Oliver Plunkett PS, Forkhill will commence in late summer 2009 and complete around summer 2010.

(ii) It is estimated that the newbuild for St Patrick's PS, Dromintee will commence in late summer 2009 and complete around summer 2010.

(iii) It is estimated that the newbuild for St Clare's Convent PS will commence in autumn 2009 and complete around spring 2012.

(iv) It is estimated that the newbuild for Carrick PS Burren's will commence in late summer 2009 and complete around late 2010.

(v) It is estimated that the newbuild for St Joseph's PS Newry will commence in early 2010 and complete around summer 2011.

Braitheann na hamscálaí seo ar chur i gcrích sásúil na bpróiseas riachtanach pleanála agus tógála ar fad agus infhaighteacht na n-acmhainní i rith bliain áirithe. Beidh siad faoi réir beartas na Roinne, mar shampla pleanáil cheantar-bhunaithe agus tabharfaidh siad san áireamh iad.

These timescales are of course subject to all the necessary planning and building processes being completed satisfactorily and the availability of resources in any particular year. They will also be subject to, and take into account, Departmental policies such as area based planning.

### St Joseph's PS, Newry

**Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of Education when the newbuild for St Joseph's PS Newry will commence. (AQW 6805/09)

**Minister of Education:**

(i) It is estimated that the newbuild for St Oliver Plunkett PS, Forkhill will commence in late summer 2009 and complete around summer 2010.

(ii) It is estimated that the newbuild for St Patrick's PS, Dromintee will commence in late summer 2009 and complete around summer 2010.

(iii) It is estimated that the newbuild for St Clare's Convent PS will commence in autumn 2009 and complete around spring 2012.

(iv) It is estimated that the newbuild for Carrick PS Burren's will commence in late summer 2009 and complete around late 2010.

(v) It is estimated that the newbuild for St Joseph's PS Newry will commence in early 2010 and complete around summer 2011.

Braitheann na hamscálaí seo ar chur i gcrích sásúil na bpróiseas riachtanach pleanála agus tógála ar fad agus infhaighteacht na n-acmhainní i rith bliain áirithe. Beidh siad faoi réir beartas na Roinne, mar shampla pleanáil cheantar-bhunaithe agus tabharfaidh siad san áireamh iad.

These timescales are of course subject to all the necessary planning and building processes being completed satisfactorily and the availability of resources in any particular year. They will also be subject to, and take into account, Departmental policies such as area based planning.

### Post- Primary School Leavers

**Mr Elliott** asked the Minister of Education (i) how many children left primary education in 2008 but were not registered in a post-primary school; and (ii) to detail any follow-up her Department has had with these children and their families. (AQW 6818/09)

**Minister of Education:** Faoi láthair, ní bhailíonn mo Roinn an t-eolas a iarradh. Tugadh isteach uimhreacha sainiúla daltaí (UPNanna) in iar-bhunscoileanna ó thús na scoilbhliana 2007/08 agus i mbunscoileanna ó thús na scoilbhliana 2008/09, áfach. Baineann na huimhreacha seo le daltaí aonair agus iad fós san earnáil bhunoideachais agus iar-bhunoideachais. Tá obair ar siúl a ligfidh don UPN aistriú leis an dalta agus é nó í ag aistriú ón earnáil bhunoideachais go dtí an earnáil iar-bhunoideachais.

My Department does not collect the information requested at present. However, unique pupils numbers (UPNs) were introduced in post-primary schools from the start of the 2007/08 school year and in primary schools from the start of the 2008/09 school year. These numbers relate to individual pupils while they remain in the primary or post-primary sector. Work is underway to enable the UPN to move with the pupil when transferring from the primary to post-primary sector.

I understand from the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) that they monitor the number of children transferring from primary to post-primary schools and undertake an assessment to determine unplaced children in their area at the close of the post-primary admissions procedure at 30 May each year.

Children may remain unplaced at this stage for a variety of reasons for example:

- they reside in border areas and have decided to attend school in the south;
- their families have moved elsewhere;

- they have been unable to get a place in their preferred school;
- they are awaiting an assessment;
- they are receiving Board organised home tuition;
- their parents have chosen to home educate; or
- they await approval to have an additional year in their primary school.

If unplaced children are identified, ELBs liaise with their parents/carers to determine what action should be taken. For example, they may advise families of the post-primary schools which have places available and request further preferences. Alternatively, the child may obtain a place in their original choice of post-primary school through a successful appeal. Children may also have a needs-appropriate school identified for them following an assessment by an educational psychologist. ELBs will continue to liaise with families until a suitable form of education for the child has been identified.

ELBs also complete a reconciliation exercise each September which highlights any child not enrolled in the school in which they were originally placed or if they have not enrolled elsewhere. The details of any child not enrolled in a school in September are then passed on to the Education Welfare Service (EWS) in each ELB. The EWS will contact the family to determine if appropriate home tuition is in place and, if not; work with the family to secure a school place.

### School Leavers Entering Third Level Education

**Ms J McCann** asked the Minister of Education what percentage of students went on to third level education in the last five years, broken down by parliamentary constituency. (AQW 6821/09)

**Minister of Education:** Tá an freagra mionsonraithe sa tábla thíos.

The answer is detailed in the table below.

Percentage of school leavers recorded as entering third level institutions by parliamentary constituency 2001/02 to 2006/07

	2001/02			2003/04			2004/05			2005/06			2006/07		
	HE	FE	Total	HE	FE	Total	HE	FE	Total	HE	FE	Total	HE	FE	Total
Belfast East	35.1	20.1	55.3	37.7	21.3	59.0	35.3	27.2	62.4	36.3	25.9	62.2	37.3	24.9	62.2
Belfast North	23.7	19.7	43.4	19.6	20.6	40.2	28.4	17.8	46.2	24.5	19.8	44.3	26.7	16.2	42.8
Belfast South	43.9	20.1	64.1	48.4	17.6	66.0	52.5	16.0	68.5	52.8	20.0	72.9	51.9	17.8	69.7
Belfast West	22.0	16.4	38.5	22.9	20.2	43.2	22.1	22.4	44.5	24.9	22.0	46.8	25.1	22.1	47.1
East Antrim	34.5	21.3	55.8	38.1	23.8	61.9	39.4	20.4	59.7	34.0	26.3	60.3	37.8	20.1	57.9
East Derry	32.9	35.1	67.9	35.6	27.6	63.2	31.6	36.0	67.5	33.6	38.3	71.9	36.3	36.2	72.4
Fermanagh And South Tyrone	43.0	23.5	66.5	46.2	23.4	69.6	45.4	25.6	71.0	43.3	25.4	68.7	42.8	29.4	72.2
Foyle	34.0	31.4	65.5	40.3	27.7	68.0	40.9	33.4	74.3	44.1	24.7	68.7	41.1	30.1	71.2
Lagan Valley	39.8	30.9	70.7	39.4	26.8	66.2	38.8	29.7	68.4	39.8	27.5	67.2	42.7	25.0	67.7
Mid Ulster	35.7	26.7	62.4	41.0	24.1	65.2	40.5	22.8	63.3	37.0	28.8	65.7	45.2	22.0	67.3
Newry And Armagh	33.9	32.9	66.7	33.6	32.2	65.8	36.9	32.7	69.7	36.0	35.3	71.3	39.0	32.9	71.9



	2001/02			2003/04			2004/05			2005/06			2006/07		
	HE	FE	Total	HE	FE	Total	HE	FE	Total	HE	FE	Total	HE	FE	Total
North Antrim	34.1	30.0	64.0	34.5	25.0	59.5	38.2	28.4	66.7	34.9	32.5	67.3	38.9	29.1	68.1
North Down	42.1	33.5	75.6	42.4	30.8	73.2	45.2	32.6	77.8	44.3	34.3	78.5	43.0	32.5	75.5
South Antrim	34.0	29.4	63.4	36.9	29.2	66.2	40.1	26.0	66.0	41.3	28.8	70.1	37.7	28.5	66.2
South Down	35.3	26.1	61.5	33.5	26.7	60.2	38.5	24.9	63.4	38.1	25.3	63.4	36.1	24.1	60.1
Strangford	35.4	29.7	65.1	34.4	35.6	70.0	36.9	32.7	69.6	37.5	37.0	74.5	36.9	34.4	71.3
Upper Bann	34.2	30.4	64.6	31.2	38.9	70.1	35.2	36.1	71.2	34.7	32.7	67.4	35.7	33.7	69.3
West Tyrone	40.6	21.0	61.6	43.2	21.9	65.1	48.3	25.2	73.6	42.7	21.6	64.4	43.9	29.9	73.8
<b>Ni Average</b>	<b>35.0</b>	<b>26.8</b>	<b>61.8</b>	<b>36.0</b>	<b>26.7</b>	<b>62.7</b>	<b>38.1</b>	<b>27.5</b>	<b>65.6</b>	<b>37.4</b>	<b>28.2</b>	<b>65.6</b>	<b>38.4</b>	<b>27.4</b>	<b>65.9</b>

Source: School Leavers Survey

## Education and Library Board Workers

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Education when Education and Library Board workers will be told of the location of their jobs in the new Education and Skills Authority. (AQW 6846/09)

**Minister of Education:** Aithnímh gur ceist rí-thábhachtach í ceist an tsuímh ina mbeidh foireann na mBord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne agus foireann eagraíochtaí eile lonnaithe, a mbeidh a gcuid feidhmeanna ag aistriú go dtí an Údarás um Oideachas agus Scileanna. Níor socraíodh ceist an tsuímh go fóill.

I recognise that location is a critical issue for staff in the Education and Library Boards and staff in other organisations whose functions will be transferring into the Education and Skills Authority. At this stage, no decisions have been taken on location.

A location strategy for ESA is currently being drawn up by the ESA Implementation Team, taking account of the new models of service delivery and associated organisational structures which the team is developing in consultation with staff in the existing organisations. The location strategy will be consistent with Executive policy on the location of public sector jobs and will have equality and improvement of service delivery at the heart of the decision making process.

A draft strategy is expected by the Summer. It will set out the ESA organisational structure and the proposed location of functions and will be implemented over the first 3 years of ESA. Decisions on the location of staff on Day 1 of ESA will be made in the Autumn and communicated in good time to staff before ESA is established on 1 January 2010.

## Free School Meals

**Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of Education how many pupils attending post-primary schools take up the entitlement to free school meals; and what percentage of the post-primary school enrolment they represent. (AQW 6877/09)

**Minister of Education:** Bíonn líon na ndaltaí a fhaigheann béilí scoile ag athrú ó sheachtain go seachtain. Tugann eolas a bhailítear gach bliain ón Áireamh Bhéilí Scoile léargas dúinn maidir leis na líonta a fhaigheann béilí scoile ar an lá a bhailítear eolas an áirimh. Seo a leanas na figúirí ón áireamh a rinneadh sa bhliain 2008.

The number of children taking school meals varies from week to week. However, information collected annually from the School Meals Census provides a snapshot of the numbers taking meals on the day on which census information is gathered. The figures from the 2008 census were as follows:

	Pupils Taking Free School Meals	% Number of Total Enrolment Taking Free School Meals
Total Post Primary	18,164	12.27
Non-Selective (Secondary)	15,285	10.33
Grammar	2,879	1.95

### Free School Meals

**Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of Education how many pupils who attend non-selective post-primary schools are entitled to free school meals. (AQW 6878/09)

**Minister of Education:** Tá an t-eolas a iarradh sa tábla thíos.

The information requested is detailed in the table below.

#### POST-PRIMARY PUPILS ENTITLED TO FREE SCHOOL MEALS (FSM) BY SCHOOL TYPE, 2008/09

School type	Number of pupils entitled to FSM	Total enrolment	% of total enrolment entitled to FSM
Secondary	20,868	85,576	24.4
Grammar	3,521	62,410	5.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>24,389</b>	<b>147,986</b>	<b>16.5</b>

Source: School census.

### Free School Meals

**Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of Education how many pupils attending non-selective schools take up the entitlement to free school meals; and what percentage of the post-primary school enrolment they represent. (AQW 6879/09)

**Minister of Education:** Bíonn líon na ndaltaí a fhaigheann béilí scoile ag athrú ó sheachtain go seachtain. Tugann eolas a bhailítear gach bliain ón Áireamh Bhéilí Scoile léargas dúinn maidir leis na líonta a fhaigheann béilí scoile ar an lá a bhailítear eolas an áirimh. Seo a leanas na figúirí ón áireamh a rinneadh sa bhliain 2008.

The number of children taking school meals varies from week to week. However, information collected annually from the School Meals Census provides a snapshot of the numbers taking meals on the day on which census information is gathered. The figures from the 2008 census were as follows:

	Pupils Taking Free School Meals	% Number of Total Enrolment Taking Free School Meals
Total Post Primary	18,164	12.27
Non-Selective (Secondary)	15,285	10.33
Grammar	2,879	1.95

### Free School Meals

**Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of Education how many pupils attending grammar schools take up the entitlement to free school meals; and what percentage of the post-primary school enrolment they represent. (AQW 6880/09)

**Minister of Education:** Bíonn líon na ndaltaí a fhaigheann béilí scoile ag athrú ó sheachtain go seachtain. Tugann eolas a bhailítear gach bliain ón Áireamh Bhéilí Scoile léargas dúinn maidir leis na líonta a fhaigheann béilí scoile ar an lá a bhailítear eolas an áirimh. Seo a leanas na figúirí ón áireamh a rinneadh sa bhliain 2008.

The number of children taking school meals varies from week to week. However, information collected annually from the School Meals Census provides a snapshot of the numbers taking meals on the day on which census information is gathered. The figures from the 2008 census were as follows:

	Pupils Taking Free School Meals	% Number of Total Enrolment Taking Free School Meals
Total Post Primary	18,164	12.27
Non-Selective (Secondary)	15,285	10.33
Grammar	2,879	1.95

### Free School Meals

**Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of Education how many pupils attending grammar schools are entitled to free school meals; and what percentage of the post-primary school enrolment they represent. (AQW 6882/09)

**Minister of Education:** Tá an t-eolas a iarradh sa tábla thíos.

The information requested is detailed in the table below.

#### POST-PRIMARY PUPILS ENTITLED TO FREE SCHOOL MEALS (FSM) BY SCHOOL TYPE, 2008/09

School type	Number of pupils entitled to FSM	Total enrolment	% of total enrolment entitled to FSM
Secondary	20,868	85,576	24.4
Grammar	3,521	62,410	5.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>24,389</b>	<b>147,986</b>	<b>16.5</b>

Source: School census.

### Grammar School Teachers

**Mr Butler** asked the Minister of Education how many teachers in the grammar school sector have availed of the early retirement scheme, in the last 5 years. (AQW 6904/09)

**Minister of Education:** Seo a leanas líon na múinteoirí a chuaigh ar scor ó earnáil na scoileanna gramadaí faoin scéim um luathscor i ngach bliain le cúig bliana anuas.

The number of teachers who have retired from the grammar school sector under the premature retirement scheme in each of the last five years is as follows:

Financial Year	Number of Prematurely Retired Teachers
2004 - 2005	31
2005 – 2006	69
2006 – 2007	67
2007 - 2008	117
2008 - 2009	42

### New Primary School at Carrick, Warrenpoint

**Mr P J Bradley** asked the Minister of Education how she intends to address the delay in issuing the tenders for the building of the new primary school at Carrick, Warrenpoint. (AQW 6908/09)

**Minister of Education:** Tá an scéim a bhaineann le Carrick PS ag ardchéim pleanála agus cuireadh iarratas réamh-thairisceana ar chostais isteach chuig an Roinn le déanaí fá choinne breithnithe.

The scheme for Carrick PS is well advanced in planning with a Pre-Tender cost submission having recently been submitted to the Department for consideration. Further information has been requested from the school's advisers and this is still awaited. The acquisition/vesting of additional land had been delayed due to redesign work to one of the proposed new school entrances. This redesign work has now been completed and the vesting process should be completed in the

near future. Tenders for the construction of the new school will be sought just as soon as vesting has been completed and all the information for the Pre-Tender submission has been received and agreed.

### Primary Schools

**Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of Education how many pupils attend primary schools. (AQW 6909/09)

**Minister of Education:** Tá an t-eolas a iarradh sa tábla thíos. Is féidir teacht ar eolas breise maidir le rolluithe scoile agus teidlíocht saorbhéilí scoile áfach sa rannán Statistics and Research ar shuíomh gréasáin na Roinne Oideachais ag an nasc seo a leanas:

[http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/32-statisticsandresearch\\_pg/32-statistics\\_and\\_research\\_statistics\\_on\\_education\\_pg/32\\_statistics\\_and\\_research-numbersofschoolsandpupils\\_pg.htm](http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/32-statisticsandresearch_pg/32-statistics_and_research_statistics_on_education_pg/32_statistics_and_research-numbersofschoolsandpupils_pg.htm)

The information requested is contained in the table below. However, further information in relation to school enrolments and entitlement to free school meals can be accessed on the Statistics and Research part of the Department of Education website via the following link:

[http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/32-statisticsandresearch\\_pg/32-statistics\\_and\\_research\\_statistics\\_on\\_education\\_pg/32\\_statistics\\_and\\_research-numbersofschoolsandpupils\\_pg.htm](http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/32-statisticsandresearch_pg/32-statistics_and_research_statistics_on_education_pg/32_statistics_and_research-numbersofschoolsandpupils_pg.htm)

#### PRIMARY<sup>1</sup> AND POST PRIMARY PUPILS ENTITLED TO FREE SCHOOL MEALS<sup>2</sup> (FSM) 2008/09

School type	All pupils entitled to FSM	Total enrolment	%
Primary schools	28,419	164,811	17.2
Post-primary schools	24,389	147,986	16.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>52,808</b>	<b>312,797</b>	<b>16.9</b>

**Source:** Annual school census.

**Note:**

- Figures for primary schools include nursery, reception and year 1 – 7 classes.
- Figures for nursery class children include those recorded as having a parent in receipt of Job Skills Allowance or Income Support and those entitled to free school meals.

### Free School Meals

**Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of Education how many pupils attending primary schools are entitled to free school meals; and what percentage of the primary-school enrolment they represent. (AQW 6910/09)

**Minister of Education:** Tá an t-eolas a iarradh sa tábla thíos. Is féidir teacht ar eolas breise maidir le rolluithe scoile agus teidlíocht saorbhéilí scoile áfach sa rannán Statistics and Research ar shuíomh gréasáin na Roinne Oideachais ag an nasc seo a leanas:

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**PRIMARY<sup>3</sup> AND POST PRIMARY PUPILS ENTITLED TO FREE SCHOOL MEALS<sup>4</sup> (FSM) 2008/09**

School type	All pupils entitled to FSM	Total enrolment	%
Primary schools	28,419	164,811	17.2
Post-primary schools	24,389	147,986	16.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>52,808</b>	<b>312,797</b>	<b>16.9</b>

**Source:** Annual school census.

**Note:**

- Figures for primary schools include nursery, reception and year 1 – 7 classes.
- Figures for nursery class children include those recorded as having a parent in receipt of Job Skills Allowance or Income Support and those entitled to free school meals.

**Post-Primary Schools**

**Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of Education how many pupils attend post-primary schools. (AQW 6911/09)

**Minister of Education:** Tá an t-eolas a iarradh sa tábla thíos. Is féidir teacht ar eolas breise maidir le rolluithe scoile agus teidlíocht saorbhéilí scoile áfach sa rannán Statistics and Research ar shuíomh gréasáin na Roinne Oideachais ag an nasc seo a leanas:

[http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/32-statisticsandresearch\\_pg/32-statistics\\_and\\_research\\_statistics\\_on\\_education\\_pg/32\\_statistics\\_and\\_research-numbersofschoolsandpupils\\_pg.htm](http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/32-statisticsandresearch_pg/32-statistics_and_research_statistics_on_education_pg/32_statistics_and_research-numbersofschoolsandpupils_pg.htm)

The information requested is contained in the table below. However, further information in relation to school enrolments and entitlement to free school meals can be accessed on the Statistics and Research part of the Department of Education website via the following link:

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**PRIMARY<sup>5</sup> AND POST PRIMARY PUPILS ENTITLED TO FREE SCHOOL MEALS<sup>6</sup> (FSM) 2008/09**

School type	All pupils entitled to FSM	Total enrolment	%
Primary schools	28,419	164,811	17.2
Post-primary schools	24,389	147,986	16.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>52,808</b>	<b>312,797</b>	<b>16.9</b>

**Source:** Annual school census.

**Note:**

- Figures for primary schools include nursery, reception and year 1 – 7 classes.
- Figures for nursery class children include those recorded as having a parent in receipt of Job Skills Allowance or Income Support and those entitled to free school meals.

**Free School Meals**

**Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of Education how many pupils attending post-primary schools are entitled to free school meals. (AQW 6912/09)

**Minister of Education:** Tá an t-eolas a iarradh sa tábla thíos. Is féidir teacht ar eolas breise maidir le rolluithe scoile agus teidlíocht saorbhéilí scoile áfach sa rannán Statistics and Research ar shuíomh gréasáin na Roinne Oideachais ag an nasc seo a leanas:

[http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/32-statisticsandresearch\\_pg/32-statistics\\_and\\_research\\_statistics\\_on\\_education\\_pg/32\\_statistics\\_and\\_research-numbersofschoolsandpupils\\_pg.htm](http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/32-statisticsandresearch_pg/32-statistics_and_research_statistics_on_education_pg/32_statistics_and_research-numbersofschoolsandpupils_pg.htm)

The information requested is contained in the table below. However, further information in relation to school enrolments and entitlement to free school meals can be accessed on the Statistics and Research part of the Department of Education website via the following link:

[http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/32-statisticsandresearch\\_pg/32-statistics\\_and\\_research\\_statistics\\_on\\_education\\_pg/32\\_statistics\\_and\\_research-numbersofschoolsandpupils\\_pg.htm](http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/32-statisticsandresearch_pg/32-statistics_and_research_statistics_on_education_pg/32_statistics_and_research-numbersofschoolsandpupils_pg.htm)

**PRIMARY<sup>7</sup> AND POST PRIMARY PUPILS ENTITLED TO FREE SCHOOL MEALS<sup>8</sup> (FSM) 2008/09**

School type	All pupils entitled to FSM	Total enrolment	%
Primary schools	28,419	164,811	17.2
Post-primary schools	24,389	147,986	16.5
Total	52,808	312,797	16.9

**Source:** Annual school census.

**Note:**

7. Figures for primary schools include nursery, reception and year 1 – 7 classes.
8. Figures for nursery class children include those recorded as having a parent in receipt of Job Skills Allowance or Income Support and those entitled to free school meals.

### Skip2bfit Programme

**Mr Hilditch** asked the Minister of Education if she will consider funding the introduction of the Skip2bfit programme in schools. (AQW 6923/09)

**Minister of Education:** Tá mé lántiomanta do pháistí a chur ar an eolas ag aois óg, faoi na tairbhí a bhaineann le stíl mhaireachtála shláintiúil.

I am fully committed to introducing children to the benefits of a healthy lifestyle at an early age.

In support of this, I launched my Curriculum Sports Programme in November 2007 to give our youngest pupils more opportunities to develop their physical literacy skills and to be active. I firmly believe this benefits not only their health but also their overall well-being, self-esteem and achievement in school.

It is a matter for individual schools to decide on any materials or programmes they wish to use to deliver the curriculum, and to meet any associated costs from within the resources available to them. My Department does not prescribe or support the use of any particular programmes or materials by schools to support their curricular provision. Schools may, however, seek advice from their Education and Library Board when making decisions about specific materials or programmes.

### Education and Skills Authority

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Education how many staff redundancies are expected when the Education and Library Board are changed to the Education and Skills Authority. (AQW 6925/09)

**Minister of Education:** Nuair a bhunófar an tÚdarás um Oideachas agus Scileanna ar 1 Eanáir 2010, tabharfar le chéile feidhmeanna na 5 Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne, CCMS, CCEA, an Chomhairle Ógra agus Coimisiún na Foirne, chomh maith le feidhmeanna tosaigh DE, NICIE agus CnaG.

The creation of the Education and Skills Authority on 1 January 2010 will bring together the functions of the 5 Education and Library Boards, CCMS, CCEA, the Youth Council and the Staff Commission and the front-line functions of DE, NICIE and CnaG. The key aim of the RPA in education is to improve education outcomes by creating a single organisation with responsibility for raising standards in every school in every sector and with clear accountability to me and to the Assembly for doing so. This will be facilitated by streamlining administration and releasing resources for re-allocation to the classroom and frontline support services.

The Outline Business Case for ESA indicates that by the end of year 3 of ESA an additional £20m per annum will be released to directly support improved education outcomes and in subsequent phases I believe we can radically improve service delivery in a way which will make further resources available to enhance the quality of

front line services. This will be achieved through the introduction of new service delivery models and a reduction of around 460 administrative and headquarter posts, with the greatest proportionate impact at senior and middle management levels.

I expect that streamlining can be achieved through a combination of the significant number of vacant posts and staff in acting up positions, natural wastage and voluntary severance and that compulsory redundancies can be avoided.

### Education Sector

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Education what is the anticipated savings in the education sector from the outcome of the review of public administration. (AQW 6926/09)

**Minister of Education:** Is é an feabhsú ar thorthaí oideachais agus ar chomhionannas an tsoláthair atá mar bhunábhar an Athbhreithnithe ar Riarachán Poiblí san Oideachas.

The review of public administration in education is fundamentally about improving educational outcomes and equality of provision. In doing so, there must be a focus on ensuring resources are efficiently and effectively used for improving the most important service that shapes and guides the development and life chances of our young people and builds strong and cohesive communities.

The anticipated efficiency savings arising from the establishment of the education and skills authority (ESA) are £8.3 million and £13 million in 2009-10 and 2010-11 respectively. These efficiency savings have already been taken into consideration by the Executive in determining the budget for Education in each of those years. From 2011-12, the level of anticipated efficiency savings is estimated to be in the region of £20 million.

### Free School Meals

**Mr Ross** asked the Minister of Education how many children in East Antrim are entitled to free school meals. (AQW 6960/09)

**Minister of Education:** Tá 1,584 páiste ag scoileanna agus in áiteanna maoinithe in ionaid dheonacha agus réamhscoile príobháidí i dtoghcheantar Aontroim Thoir atá i dteideal saorbhéilí scoile a fháil.

There are 1,584 children at schools and in funded places in voluntary and private preschool centres in the East Antrim constituency entitled to free school meals.

**Source:** school census.

**Note:**

1. Figures for primary include nursery, reception and year 1 – 7 classes.
2. Figures for nursery children are included, whether they are recorded as having a parent in receipt of Job Skills Allowance or Income Support, or are entitled to free school meals. Figures for children in preschool centres relate to children with a parent in receipt of Job Skills Allowance or Income Support.
3. Figures relate to children in funded places in voluntary and private preschool centres, nursery schools, primary schools and post-primary schools.

### Nursery Schools

**Mr McClarty** asked the Minister of Education why children whose parents receive state benefits are given preference for places at state nursery schools over children whose parents do not receive state benefits. (AQW 6979/09)

**Minister of Education:** Is í an aidhm atá ag an Chlár um Fhorleathnú Oideachais Réamhscoile (PSEEP) ná bliain amháin oideachais chistithe réamhscoile ar ardchaighdeán a chur ar fáil do gach páiste ar mian lena t(h) uismitheoirí í, sa bhliain díreach roimh oideachas éigeantach.

The aim of the Pre-School Education Expansion Programme (PSEEP) is to provide one year of high quality funded preschool education, in the year immediately before compulsory education, for every child whose parents wish it.

In determining the admissions criteria the Department of Education specifies some priorities i.e.

- Social disadvantaged (whose parents receive Income Support or income-based Jobseekers' Allowance) – because research has shown that those children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds tend to experience more difficulty at school than other children; and
- 4 year olds with July and August birthdays – because these children do not enter compulsory education until after their 5<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Preschool 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 include a range of factors such as proximity to the school or the previous attendance of siblings and are entirely at the discretion of the individual school/playgroup.

### Number of Teachers Sacked

**Mr Burns** asked the Minister of Education how many (i) teachers; and (ii) headteachers have been sacked, in each of the last 10 years. (AQW 6971/09)

**Minister of Education:** Sna cúig Bhórd Oideachais agus Leabharlainne agus CCMS, díbríodh 10 múinteoir agus múinteoir príomhoide amháin ó phost laistigh den deich mbliain seo chuaigh thart.

Within the five Education and Library Boards and CCMS 10 teachers and 1 head teacher has been sacked within the last 10 years.

## DEPARTMENT FOR EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING

### Further Education Courses

**Mr Newton** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) which Further Education courses have the highest percentage of (a) male enrolments; and (b) female enrolments; and (ii) to detail what is being done to encourage men to consider alternative non-traditional employment opportunities. (AQW 6514/09)

**Minister of Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey):** (i)(a) The Further Education courses which had the highest percentage of male enrolments in 2007/08 (the latest academic year for which validated data is available) were in Construction, Planning and the Built Environment, Education and Training and Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies.

(i)(b) The Further Education courses which had the highest percentage of female enrolments in 2007/08 were in Health, Public Services and Care, Retail and Commercial Enterprise and Business Administration and Law.

Source: Further Education Statistical Record.

(ii) In order to widen access and increase participation, Further Education (FE) Colleges offer a wide range of provision, through the Sector's main campuses and approximately 750 Community Outreach Centres. Through their outreach activities and programmes, Colleges engage with particular groups, including gender groups, using these opportunities to encourage them to re-engage in learning and to consider alternative non-traditional employment opportunities.

The Department's Careers Service also has a key role to play in supporting individuals' career decision making process through the provision of effective guidance and up to date labour market information. The approach to the delivery of careers guidance is impartial and client centred and explores the skills, interests, experience and achievement of the individual, together with labour market information relating to current and future employment opportunities and requirements. This includes non traditional employment opportunities for men.



Careers Advisers are encouraged in their initial training, and through Continuous Professional Development (CPD), to challenge gender stereotypes and to give clients a genuine understanding of the pay, rewards and challenges of occupations, particularly those not traditionally taken up by their gender.

### Further Education Courses

**Mr Ross** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many people over the age of 40 have enrolled for Further Education courses, in each of the last 5 years. (AQW 6532/09)

**Minister of Employment and Learning:** The table below shows the number of people aged over 40 who have enrolled for Further Education courses from 2003/04 to 2007/08 (the latest year for which validated data is available).

Academic year	Over 40 year old students
2003/04	47,513
2004/05	49,591
2005/06	47,176
2006/07	42,450
2007/08	33,802

**Source:** Further Education Statistical Record.

### Education Based Learning for School Leavers

**Mr Burns** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail how many private trainers offering work or education based learning for school leavers and adults and are in receipt of funds from his Department, have failed standards inspections, in each of the last five years. (AQW 6586/09)

**Minister of Employment and Learning:** None of the private training organisations offering work or education based learning for school leavers and are currently in receipt of funds from my Department have failed standards inspections.

### Further Education Colleges

**Mr Butler** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what steps his Department will be taking to address the findings in the recent auditor's report into the financial management of Further Education Colleges. (AQW 6667/09)

**Minister of Employment and Learning:** The Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) published his report on a Review of Financial Management in the Further Education Sector in Northern Ireland from 1998 to 2007, along with the Governance Examination of Fermanagh College of Further and Higher Education, on Wednesday 25 March 2009. Both reports are scheduled to be considered at the meeting of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) on 7 May 2009 where formal evidence will be taken from Departmental officials.

Following this meeting, the Committee will publish a report setting out its findings and recommendations which will be considered and responded to fully by my Department and the Department of Finance and Personnel. This will be done in the form of a DFP Memorandum of Reply, which is laid by the Minister of Finance and Personnel before the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Whilst it would be inappropriate for me to comment in detail in advance of the PAC hearing and the DFP Minister's considered response to the Committee's report, I can report that I am satisfied that monitoring arrangements have improved in the FE Colleges since the Auditor's report. A more comprehensive response to your query will be provided by the DFP in its Memorandum of Reply."

## Apprenticeships

**Mr Newton** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what contact he has had with the top 100 companies to ask them to deliver ApprenticeshipsNI at level 3; and if the Department has encouraged companies to deliver training at this level. (AQW 6682/09)

**Minister of Employment and Learning:** I have had extensive contact with top 100 companies and in many instances I have discussed skills development and the use of apprenticeships. While the Department would encourage Level 3 to be a desired achievement level, the ApprenticeshipsNI programme offers Level 2 apprenticeships for a number of reasons.

Firstly Level 2 apprenticeships replaced Jobskills Traineeships which encouraged the exploitation of unemployed school leavers. But Level 2 is also a qualification and competence level demanded by many sectors as sufficient for the employment offered, for example, construction, retail, hospitality and catering and social care. It is also a first realistic step for many learners that will encourage them to later raise their personal achievement bar to Level 3. This is particularly important to many returners to training, who are now able to take advantage of the new all age provision and the reduced contracted hours requirement.

For many sectors, for example, engineering, construction, electrical installation, gas fitting and automotive, level 3 is the industry norm and is now considered as a base for foundation degree and degree training for higher skilled technicians or those progressing into management responsibilities. As industry raises its need for skill levels the Department will continue to actively promote Level 3 qualifications.

## North West Regional College

**Ms Anderson** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if he will intervene in the current dispute at the North West Regional College to resolve the difficulties and restore an atmosphere conducive to the needs of both staff and students. (AQW 6728/09)

**Minister of Employment and Learning:** I am aware of the dispute which has arisen at the North West Regional College. The Governing Body of the College is responsible, in the first instance, for the resolution of such problems, and I have been assured that it is actively seeking a way forward.

My Department will remain in contact with the Governing Body as it strives to bring the matter to a satisfactory conclusion.

## Apprenticeship System

**Mr Newton** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how he intends to address the lack of confidence in the apprenticeship system held by small and medium enterprises; and how his Department intends to address this issue including consideration of possible centres of excellence for Small and Medium Enterprises, cooperation through cluster networks and structuring on a sectoral and/or geographical basis.. (AQW 6794/09)

**Minister of Employment and Learning:** I am aware that the Federation of Small Businesses recently briefed the Committee for Employment and Learning and outlined survey findings from a sample of UK SMEs. However, I am not aware of a general lack of confidence in the apprenticeship system by SMEs in Northern Ireland.

The ApprenticeshipNI programme is available to companies of all sizes and recent changes, such as the introduction of all age apprenticeships and the reduction to 21 hours per week as the minimum number of contracted hours for apprentices, are expected to meet the needs of SMEs in particular.

It is the role of the SSCs to promote equally, sector development as deemed appropriate and to bring forward any proposals. Where a group training approach is suggested the Department will consider support but recognises that this may not suit all training models. Examples of current co-operation are the Skills Smart, Skills Shop agreed pilot (although not yet taken forward by Skills Smart), and the work underway with the Engineering Training Council (ETC) to look at the feasibility of regional clustered apprenticeship training for small and medium sized engineering companies. A further successful initiative is the Northern Ireland spoke of the UK National Skills Academy in Manufacturing which is running under the auspices of ETC.

## Jobs and Benefits Offices

**Mr Kennedy** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to confirm the number of referrals from all Jobs and Benefits Offices to TWL Training Limited, in the County Antrim area, under Step 2, of the Steps to Work programme. (AQW 6851/09)

**Minister of Employment and Learning:** At 31 March 2009, the total number of referrals from the Jobs and Benefits Offices in Antrim, Ballymoney, Carrickfergus and Larne and the JobCentre in Ballymena, under Step 2 of the Steps to Work programme to TWL Training Limited, was 438.

## Research in Universities

**Mr Burns** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail how much the charitable and voluntary sectors have spent on research in universities, in each of the last five years, broken down by (i) institution (ii) charity; and (iii) research topic. (AQW 6873/09)

**Minister of Employment and Learning:** I have asked the two universities in Northern Ireland to provide this information as it is not held within my Department. Over the last five full academic years (2003/04 to 2007/08) a total of £36.483m was spent on research by the charitable and voluntary sectors. Of this, £29.988m was spent on the Queen's University Belfast and £7.495m on the University of Ulster. A total of 131 charitable and voluntary organisations were involved in this spend and it covered a total of 295 research areas and topics. I have appended Table A listing the charities and Table B detailing the research areas and topics.

Table A – Charity Listing	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	Total
Action Cancer	157,621	164,772	187,475	299,202	230,879	1,039,950
Action Mental Health		9,926				9,926
Action MS	10,031	10,771	9,965	12,006	52,089	94,862
Alcohol Education Research Council		5,000	4,826			9,826
Alzheimer's Disease Society					163,334	163,334
Alzheimer's Research Trust			30,000	70,500	16,700	117,200
Artillery Youth Centre			3,250			3,250
Association of Continence Advisers	1,758					1,758
BACCN	960					960
Bogside & Brandywell Women's Group-Com Fund	92,094					92,094
British Association of Urology Nurses	4,000					4,000
British Diabetic Assocn	86,712	70,347	507			157,566
British Geomorphological Research Group			400			400
British Heart Foundation	54,820	33,602	1,094	111,604	139,067	340,186
Camelot Foundation				78,965		78,965
Cancer Research UK	680,795	639,205	834,171	970,572	1,577,772	4,702,515
Cardiac Research Fund	29,357	37,584	25,280			92,221
Carnegie UK Trust		12,000				12,000
Cedar Foundation	2,550					2,550
CFPNI		2,263				2,263

<b>Table A – Charity Listing</b>	<b>2003/04</b>	<b>2004/05</b>	<b>2005/06</b>	<b>2006/07</b>	<b>2007/08</b>	<b>Total</b>
Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA)					36,980	<b>36,980</b>
Chartered Soc of Physiotherapy		567				<b>567</b>
Chest Heart & Stroke	49,159	95,859	131,590	107,376	139,454	<b>523,439</b>
CIMA General Charitable Trust Fund			9,974			<b>9,974</b>
College of Occupational Therapists via Uni York			2,832			<b>2,832</b>
Community Foundation N.I.				214,464	27,831	<b>242,295</b>
Community Foundation NI				7,088		<b>7,088</b>
Community Relations Council		34,855	76,640	374,500	25,152	<b>511,147</b>
Craft Northern Ireland					9,000	<b>9,000</b>
Cystic Fibrosis	33,174	35,450	73,406	113,444	79,411	<b>334,885</b>
Cystic Fibrosis Trust					250	<b>250</b>
DAIWA Anglo - Japanese Foundation			1,500		2,000	<b>3,500</b>
Derry Well Woman	50,236					<b>50,236</b>
Diabetes UK		149,924		145,326	204,435	<b>499,685</b>
Diabetes UK Support Group – LIMAVADY			2,000	1,250		<b>3,250</b>
Ear Foundation			2,000			<b>2,000</b>
Elizabeth Casson Trust			250			<b>250</b>
Eye Fund Charity, Bedford Hospital				24,500		<b>24,500</b>
Family Planning Association – Lottery	127,060					<b>127,060</b>
Foundation for people with learning disabilities		10,000				<b>10,000</b>
Freshwater Biological Association					28,198	<b>28,198</b>
Genetics Society			2,000			<b>2,000</b>
Gingerbread Northern Ireland		33,409		28,875		<b>62,284</b>
Global Dimensions in Schools NI					5,737	<b>5,737</b>
Heritage Lottery Fund			44,317		49,000	<b>93,317</b>
ICLRD				62,493		<b>62,493</b>
IFI	2,491	1,663	147	146	309	<b>4,755</b>
InterTradeIreland - Centre for Cross-Border Stud			19,200			<b>19,200</b>
Investment Property Forum Educational Trust		67,000				<b>67,000</b>
Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust		51,000				<b>51,000</b>
Joseph Rowntree Foundation			34,920	10,000	70,842	<b>115,762</b>
Leverhulme	133,629	128,014	244,221	225,247	150,923	<b>882,034</b>



<b>Table A – Charity Listing</b>	<b>2003/04</b>	<b>2004/05</b>	<b>2005/06</b>	<b>2006/07</b>	<b>2007/08</b>	<b>Total</b>
Leverhulme Trade CharitiesTrust	47,764					<b>47,764</b>
Macmillan Cancer Relief (via NHSSB)		15,000				<b>15,000</b>
Manchester Geographical Society			500			<b>500</b>
McClay Foundation	327,375	427,651	315,381	294,578	79,122	<b>1,444,108</b>
Multiple Sclerosis	11,559	15,946	-2,422	0	0	<b>25,084</b>
Multiple Sclerosis Society		4,500				<b>4,500</b>
NatCen				37,939		<b>37,939</b>
National Association of Theatre Nurses		900				<b>900</b>
NI Chest, Heart & Stroke Association	55,008	130,698			60,050	<b>245,756</b>
NI Kidney Research Fund	52,453	51,949	130,697	40,098	135,616	<b>410,814</b>
NI Leukaemia Research	222,925	250,380	277,465	348,490	389,137	<b>1,488,397</b>
NI Leukaemia Research Fund			155,702			<b>155,702</b>
NICTT - Lottery			91,200			<b>91,200</b>
NICVA		3,000				<b>3,000</b>
Northern Ireland Hospice Care	8,000	8,000	12,000		12,000	<b>40,000</b>
Northern Pharmacies Ltd Trust Fund	30,000					<b>30,000</b>
Northlands		29,683				<b>29,683</b>
NSPCC- NI		21,562				<b>21,562</b>
Nuffield	33,172	22,110	16,290	92,266	53,887	<b>217,725</b>
Organix Foundation					120,000	<b>120,000</b>
Other UK Charities	2,516,413	2,280,938	3,022,821	1,883,978	2,405,770	<b>12,109,919</b>
Parkinson's Disease Society				71,326		<b>71,326</b>
Phillips Price Memorial Trust				500		<b>500</b>
Physiotherapy Research Fund.				56,651	20,018	<b>76,669</b>
Playboard				1,134		<b>1,134</b>
Presbyterian Church in Ireland					5,000	<b>5,000</b>
Prince's Trust				12,931		<b>12,931</b>
Prostate Research Campaign UK					30,000	<b>30,000</b>
Quaternary Research Association			350			<b>350</b>
QUB Foundation	9,521	62,782	159,647	219,714	174,002	<b>625,665</b>
Rank Prize Foundation			10,000			<b>10,000</b>
Rank Prize Fund - Vacation Studentship					1,600	<b>1,600</b>
RICS				6,000		<b>6,000</b>
RICS Educational Trust		2,000				<b>2,000</b>
RICS Foundation	5,000					<b>5,000</b>
Royal Academy of Engineering	400				300	<b>700</b>

<b>Table A – Charity Listing</b>	<b>2003/04</b>	<b>2004/05</b>	<b>2005/06</b>	<b>2006/07</b>	<b>2007/08</b>	<b>Total</b>
Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children				50,473		<b>50,473</b>
Royal College of Speech & Language Therapists			500			<b>500</b>
Royal Inst.Chartered Surveyors					7,000	<b>7,000</b>
RVH Cardiac Research Fund			96,000			<b>96,000</b>
Save the Children (NI Programme)				12,541	11,756	<b>24,297</b>
Scottish Crop Research Institute				26,943		<b>26,943</b>
Society for Endocrinology					10,210	<b>10,210</b>
St Columb's Park House	2,000					<b>2,000</b>
The British Academy					300	<b>300</b>
The BUPA Foundation	82,973					<b>82,973</b>
The Burdett Trust		9,843	35,484	39,164		<b>84,491</b>
The Certified Accountants Educational Trust				11,640		<b>11,640</b>
The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy	600					<b>600</b>
The College of Optometrists	12,870		48,030		3,785	<b>64,685</b>
The Constance Owens Trust			100			<b>100</b>
The Flax Trust		25,000				<b>25,000</b>
The Foundation for Canadian Studies in the UK				17,643	4,709	<b>22,352</b>
The Garfield Weston Trust				15,000		<b>15,000</b>
The Howard Foundation			2,000	6,000		<b>8,000</b>
The Ileostomy and Internal Pouch Support Group			1,800	1,047		<b>2,847</b>
The Irish Nephrology Society: Amegen Res Grant			6,845			<b>6,845</b>
The Judith Trust			36,000			<b>36,000</b>
The Leverhulme Trust	49,042		33,949	58,221	159,270	<b>300,482</b>
The McGrath Trust/Ulster Garden Villages				900,000		<b>900,000</b>
The Nuffield Foundation	11,487	23,153	7,570	1,679	9,716	<b>53,605</b>
The Nuffield Trust		15,612				<b>15,612</b>
The Playhouse	2,500					<b>2,500</b>
The Rees Jeffreys Road Fund	2,500					<b>2,500</b>
The Royal Academy of Engineering	600	300		1,800	4,500	<b>7,200</b>
The Royal College of Midwives Trust	5,000					<b>5,000</b>
The Royal Geographical Society		15,000				<b>15,000</b>
The Royal Society	20,649	7,105	33,340	27,366	14,119	<b>102,579</b>

<b>Table A – Charity Listing</b>	<b>2003/04</b>	<b>2004/05</b>	<b>2005/06</b>	<b>2006/07</b>	<b>2007/08</b>	<b>Total</b>
The Understanding Conflict Trust	16,640					<b>16,640</b>
The Wellcome Trust	76,267	2,640	1,360	95,800	363,331	<b>539,398</b>
Triangle Housing Association Ltd	119,940					<b>119,940</b>
Ulster Cancer Foundation	316,622	298,269	432,677	199,958	362,693	<b>1,610,220</b>
Understanding Conflict Trust	35,228	54,663	58,451	10,300		<b>158,642</b>
University of Ulster Foundation				250,000		<b>250,000</b>
Wellcome	543,335	823,339	959,342	767,266	536,829	<b>3,630,112</b>
Women's Voice Maternity Service Liaison Committee		15,000				<b>15,000</b>
Youth Action NI & Nat Council of YMCAs of Ireland	12,000					<b>12,000</b>
Youth Action Northern Ireland		21,295				<b>21,295</b>
Youth Action Northern Ireland/ Big Lottery Fund			21,000			<b>21,000</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>6,146,290</b>	<b>6,231,529</b>	<b>7,706,045</b>	<b>8,416,005</b>	<b>7,984,084</b>	<b>36,483,953</b>

<b>Table B - Research Topic/ Area</b>	<b>2003/04</b>	<b>2004/05</b>	<b>2005/06</b>	<b>2006/07</b>	<b>2007/08</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>
13th Biennial Winter Workshop on Schizophrenia Research.			970			<b>970</b>
13th International Congress of Radiation Research				1,160		<b>1,160</b>
2004 IEEE International Workshop on IP Operations & Management (IPOM 2004).		1,960				<b>1,960</b>
2006 Royal Society Exhibition.			1,200			<b>1,200</b>
4th DNA Repair Workshop.	700					<b>700</b>
61st Annual Gaseous Electronics Conference.					1,230	<b>1,230</b>
7th Asia-oceania symposium on Fire Science and Technology				1,990		<b>1,990</b>
8th World Biomaterials Conference.					850	<b>850</b>
A comparative study of relative pupil size, ocular accommodation and intraocular pressure. between individuals taking antihistamines and that of a control group.					1,500	<b>1,500</b>
A palliative care needs assessment within the NHSSB.		15,000				<b>15,000</b>
A randomised controlled clinical trial to determine the efficacy of pelvic floor muscle training and neuromuscular electrical stimulation in a multiple sclerosis population with lower urinary tract dysfunction.	1,758					<b>1,758</b>

<b>Table B - Research Topic/ Area</b>	<b>2003/04</b>	<b>2004/05</b>	<b>2005/06</b>	<b>2006/07</b>	<b>2007/08</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>
A randomised double blind 12 week crossover trial of Hypertonic saline (HTS) 7: Versus saline (ITS) (09%) in patients with bronchiectasis.					20,018	<b>20,018</b>
A Study of Performance Measurement in the Outsourcing Decision.			9,974			<b>9,974</b>
A Survey of British Urology Nurses.	4,000					<b>4,000</b>
Actions and mechanisms underlying novel therapeutic actions of GIP receptor antagonists for diabetes.				145,326		<b>145,326</b>
Advanced brain-computer interface using recurrent quantum neural networks				3,730		<b>3,730</b>
African migrants in the North-West.			43,506			<b>43,506</b>
Agriculture, Veterinary & Food Science	60,487	30,345	37,534	35,393	34,100	<b>197,860</b>
Airway Clearance in Bronchiectasis: Is Non-invasive Ventilation a Useful Adjunct in Moderate to Severe Disease?	16,008					<b>16,008</b>
Allied Health Professions & Studies	61,256	39,215	50,378	29,735	63,211	<b>243,795</b>
American Geophysical Union Annual fall meeting (AGU)					1,270	<b>1,270</b>
An Analysis of Real-Time Protocols for Chaotic Encryption in IPv6.	5,137					<b>5,137</b>
An evaluation of the Ulster Cancer Foundation's "Smokebusters" club.					25,000	<b>25,000</b>
An examination of the communication between A & E and ICU nursing staff.	960					<b>960</b>
An exploration of the attitudes & knowledge of people in mid life to cancer prevention.				6,000		<b>6,000</b>
An exploration of the attitudes and knowledge of people in mid-life to cancer prevention.	45,000					<b>45,000</b>
An Exploration of the Psychosocial Risk Factors of Hazardous Alcohol Use in People with Learning Disabilities.		5,000				<b>5,000</b>
An exploration of the role of the staff nurse/development officer within Action Mental Health's New Horizon Units and Accept Services.		9,926				<b>9,926</b>



<b>Table B - Research Topic/ Area</b>	<b>2003/04</b>	<b>2004/05</b>	<b>2005/06</b>	<b>2006/07</b>	<b>2007/08</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>
An exploration of the support needs of parents with head and neck cancer.				10,000		<b>10,000</b>
An Integrated Marine Survey of the Bagamoyo/Zanzibar Channel, Tanzania.		15,000				<b>15,000</b>
An investigation of the efficacy of a novel holistic interventive strategy to improve clinical control in haemodialysis patients.			6,845			<b>6,845</b>
Anthropology	19,494	-4,207	66,986	28,055	5,943	<b>116,271</b>
Anti-cancer activities of soft fruit CAST AWARD				26,943		<b>26,943</b>
Archaeology	22,834	12,842	25,060	5,268	1,941	<b>67,947</b>
Architecture & the Built Environment			1,694	12,643	6,948	<b>21,284</b>
Are people with stomas more likely to develop low back pain?			1,800	1,047		<b>2,847</b>
Art in Public Summer School 2007					2,330	<b>2,330</b>
Beach morphodynamics under rising sea level scenarios in the UK and Japan.					2,000	<b>2,000</b>
Biological Sciences	85,258	60,942	123,063	84,013	116,718	<b>469,994</b>
Business & Management Studies	23,371	47,546	6,406	2,331	16,076	<b>95,731</b>
Canadian studies development programme 2007.					3,959	<b>3,959</b>
Canadian studies programme				3,050		<b>3,050</b>
Cancer Studies	1,673,298	1,960,824	1,985,269	2,427,972	2,930,394	<b>10,977,757</b>
Catalyst partnership for Newry and Armagh, Carrickfergus and Lisburn.	12,000					<b>12,000</b>
Celtic Studies		1,867	3,827	310		<b>6,004</b>
Celts and Slavs in Central and South-eastern Europe.					300	<b>300</b>
Centre for Young Men's Studies.		51,000				<b>51,000</b>
Chaotic behaviour in discrete time models of car following.			1,130			<b>1,130</b>
Characterization & evaluation of novel CYP2A4 inhibitors as anti-proliferative/prodifferentiating agents targeted towards hormone refractory prostate cancer					30,000	<b>30,000</b>

<b>Table B - Research Topic/ Area</b>	<b>2003/04</b>	<b>2004/05</b>	<b>2005/06</b>	<b>2006/07</b>	<b>2007/08</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>
Characterization of NPAS2 as a novel vitamin D receptor (VDR) interacting protein. A novel role for vitamin D in regulation of the peripheral clock?					9,500	<b>9,500</b>
Characterization of NPAS2 as a novel vitamin D receptor (VDR) interacting protein. A novel role of vitamin D in regulation of the peripheral clock?					710	<b>710</b>
Charge transport at molecular and bio molecular interfaces of carbon nanotubes.			12,000			<b>12,000</b>
Chemistry	367,354	380,172	190,969	85,257	43,672	<b>1,067,423</b>
Children's Friendship Project for Northern Ireland.		2,263				<b>2,263</b>
China - UK Science Networks.		1,150				<b>1,150</b>
Church House Research Project.					5,000	<b>5,000</b>
Civil engineering	78,510	48,446	26,347	40,838	33,720	<b>227,862</b>
Classics, Ancient History, Byzantine & Mod Greek	14,483	-6,142				<b>8,341</b>
Colloquium: 'When words collide'.		5,000				<b>5,000</b>
Common Gestures, Class Acts: Studies in 'young British art'.				20,734		<b>20,734</b>
Computer Science & Informatics	4,259	15,868	49,145	18,167	301	<b>87,741</b>
Consumption of meat in men aged 18-35 years - a pilot study.					1,600	<b>1,600</b>
Control of bioelectrocatalytic activity by means of magnetic fields				12,000		<b>12,000</b>
Control of DNA methylation in germ cell tumours.		10,000				<b>10,000</b>
Controls and consequences of oxygen depletion in lakes.					28,198	<b>28,198</b>
DAIWA foundation Small Grant.			1,500			<b>1,500</b>
Delineation of littoral cells along a coastal section of Co Down, Northern Ireland.		1,050				<b>1,050</b>
Dentistry	34,709	31,695	25,920	20,077	39,077	<b>151,478</b>
Detection of Biological Binding Events at Aligned Carbon Nanotubes Arrays.	12,000					<b>12,000</b>

<b>Table B - Research Topic/ Area</b>	<b>2003/04</b>	<b>2004/05</b>	<b>2005/06</b>	<b>2006/07</b>	<b>2007/08</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>
Development and Characterisation of Silicon Implemented Wide-Band Circuits and Architectures for Deployment in next Generation Radio Frequency Integrated Circuits.	4,837					<b>4,837</b>
Development and dissemination of antibiotic resistance in eye infecting MRSA.					3,874	<b>3,874</b>
Development and evaluation of potent long acting fatty acid linked analogues of GIP for type 2 diabetes.		149,924				<b>149,924</b>
Development of Land and Property Markets in Central and Eastern Europe - Issues of Data.	5,000					<b>5,000</b>
Diabetes Education for Adolescents				50,473		<b>50,473</b>
Diabetes Education for Adolescents.					204,435	<b>204,435</b>
Digital Games Research Association, Vancouver Canada 2005.		300				<b>300</b>
Director of the Cardiovascular Research Centre				900,000		<b>900,000</b>
Distinguished Visiting Fellowship - Dr Chen					4,500	<b>4,500</b>
Diversity in Action: Extension July 08-Sept 08 (Slippage).					15,393	<b>15,393</b>
Diversity in Action: Extension.					5,079	<b>5,079</b>
DNA methylation, mismatch repair and drug resistance				61,883		<b>61,883</b>
Do we need palliative care for patients with Parkinsons' disease?				71,065		<b>71,065</b>
Do we need palliative care for patients with Parkinsons' disease?				261		<b>261</b>
Donation to Research on Suicide.		25,000				<b>25,000</b>
Donation to the Vision Science Research Group				24,500		<b>24,500</b>
Education	60,108	72,131	38,572	208,538	363,663	<b>743,011</b>
Educational Sessions in Pulmonary Rehabilitation.		21,325				<b>21,325</b>
Effects of Novel GIP Agonists on the Beta-Amyloid-induced block of synaptic plasticity and memory formation impairments.			30,000			<b>30,000</b>

<b>Table B - Research Topic/ Area</b>	<b>2003/04</b>	<b>2004/05</b>	<b>2005/06</b>	<b>2006/07</b>	<b>2007/08</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>
Elected Representatives/ political parties and minority ethnic communities in Northern Ireland				74,061		<b>74,061</b>
Electrical & Electronic Engineering	62,200	12,878	6,099	6,518	15,956	<b>103,651</b>
Endocrine disruption and cancer.					120,000	<b>120,000</b>
Enduring Values in Medical & Health Care: The Case of Northern Ireland: Medicine and the Troubles.		15,612				<b>15,612</b>
English Language & Literature			388	18,592	-504	<b>18,476</b>
Enhancement Award for the Development of the History of Medicine in Ireland				94,400		<b>94,400</b>
Epidemiology & Public Health	443,303	441,031	477,272	422,348	422,786	<b>2,206,739</b>
Epidemiology of myopia in a UK child population					735	<b>735</b>
Epidemiology of myopia in a UK child population.			48,030			<b>48,030</b>
Equipment application					16,700	<b>16,700</b>
Evaluating the effectiveness of 'NSPCC One-to-one' counselling in schools.		21,562				<b>21,562</b>
Evaluation of Northlands Substance Misuse Project.		29,683				<b>29,683</b>
Evaluation of Princes Trust XL Programme				12,931		<b>12,931</b>
Evaluation of the Education for Citizenship Support.	2,000					<b>2,000</b>
Evaluation Programme for Community Relations Council core funded groups.		29,855	18,134			<b>47,989</b>
Evaulation of the "Living Well Cancer Programme".	6,000					<b>6,000</b>
Fatigue Research Project.					4,500	<b>4,500</b>
First European Conference on Earthquake Engineering and Seismology.				717		<b>717</b>
First International Conference on Quadruplex DNA				640		<b>640</b>
Flex and Ply.					122,490	<b>122,490</b>
Forward Thinking, Northern Ireland.					155,877	<b>155,877</b>
French			35,992	5,319	-5,350	<b>35,960</b>
Frequency dependent electrical detection of biological binding events at self assembled aligned carbon nanotube arrays.	1,650					<b>1,650</b>



<b>Table B - Research Topic/ Area</b>	<b>2003/04</b>	<b>2004/05</b>	<b>2005/06</b>	<b>2006/07</b>	<b>2007/08</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>
Funding a research assistant.	30,000					<b>30,000</b>
Future Ways Programme				10,300		<b>10,300</b>
Future Ways Programme.		18,375	20,179			<b>38,554</b>
Futureways Programme.	16,640					<b>16,640</b>
General Inequality in British & German Universities.					29,383	<b>29,383</b>
Genetics: screening, choice and rights.		10,000				<b>10,000</b>
Geography & Environmental Studies	117,507	104,721	108,838	63,355	3,778	<b>398,198</b>
Gift towards research on macula disease				2,000		<b>2,000</b>
Gift towards research on Macula Disease.			2,000	4,000		<b>6,000</b>
Good relations.		3,000				<b>3,000</b>
Health Services Research	11,713	21,428	1,855	5,053	1,963	<b>42,012</b>
Highly Sensitive Biosensors from Chemically Functionalized Graphene Sheets.					1,400	<b>1,400</b>
History	47,664	88,065	98,333	38,850	15,310	<b>288,221</b>
Hot Nano Topics 2008: 3 Overlapping workshops on current hot subjects in Nanoscience.					1,095	<b>1,095</b>
Housing and Neighbourhoods Monitor.					67,042	<b>67,042</b>
Iberian & Latin American Languages			708		2,279	<b>2,987</b>
ICLRD development funding.			19,200			<b>19,200</b>
Identifying perioperative nursing research priorities: A delphi study.		900				<b>900</b>
Identifying predictors that sustain women with a dual diagnosis to successfully reside in the community after discharge from a long-stay hospital.			36,000			<b>36,000</b>
Impact Electronic Assistive Technologies.			100			<b>100</b>
Impact of electronic assistive technology and environmental design as perceived by physically disabled adults in a supported housing scheme.	2,550					<b>2,550</b>
Impact of Poverty on Young Children's Experience of Poverty - Dissemination					3,800	<b>3,800</b>

<b>Table B - Research Topic/ Area</b>	<b>2003/04</b>	<b>2004/05</b>	<b>2005/06</b>	<b>2006/07</b>	<b>2007/08</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>
Implementing Equality Policies in Northern Ireland and Canada: A review of progress and Prospects.				25,000		<b>25,000</b>
Improving outcomes for patients requiring oral bowel preparation for colonoscopy.				9,994		<b>9,994</b>
Institutional Investment in Regeneration: Necessary Conditions for Effective Funding.		67,000				<b>67,000</b>
Insulin signalling analysis in a rodent model of Alzheimer's; interaction with GLP1 signalling.				19,000		<b>19,000</b>
Intelligent Image Capture and Processing.	5,000					<b>5,000</b>
Interfacial Properties of carbon nanotubes linked with biomolecules.			1,440			<b>1,440</b>
International Coastal Symposium (ICS2007)				1,879		<b>1,879</b>
International Conference on Applications of Diamond and Related Materials.			1,220			<b>1,220</b>
International Conference on Metallurgical Coatings and Thin Films ICMCTF2007				1,280		<b>1,280</b>
International Travel Grant				400		<b>400</b>
International Travel Grant - 4th IEEE International Symposium on Biomedical Imaging				700		<b>700</b>
International Travel Grant - ICMAT 2007 - International Conference on Materials for Advanced Technologies				700		<b>700</b>
International travel grant scheme 2004.	600					<b>600</b>
International Travel Grant.	400				300	<b>700</b>
Interventions to reduce the harmful effects of bullying in the life world of student midwives.	5,000					<b>5,000</b>
Investigating the actual and potential role of the GP and primary care nurses in the prevention of cancer: a mixed methods study.					124,000	<b>124,000</b>
Investigation and evaluation of Real Property taxes within CEE Countries.		2,000				<b>2,000</b>
TABLE B - Research Topic/ Area (cont.)	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	<b>Grand Total</b>

<b>Table B - Research Topic/ Area</b>	<b>2003/04</b>	<b>2004/05</b>	<b>2005/06</b>	<b>2006/07</b>	<b>2007/08</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>
Investigation of natural product pathways in phosphate metabolising.		580				<b>580</b>
Investigation of the effect of carbon catabolite repression on organophosphonate metabolism within a phosphonoacetate metabolising strain of <i>Agromyces fucosus</i> .		1,400				<b>1,400</b>
Joint Lectureship in Epidemiology and Medical Statistics.	39,000					<b>39,000</b>
Journeys Out: From conflict to participation				209,404		<b>209,404</b>
Journeys Out: From Conflict to participation extension 1				7,088		<b>7,088</b>
Journeys Out: From Conflict to Participation Extension 2.					27,831	<b>27,831</b>
Joy riding in Belfast.	47,764					<b>47,764</b>
Knowledge management measures for organisational accountability.					36,980	<b>36,980</b>
Large scale, integrative computational approaches to protozoan post-genomics.			1,340			<b>1,340</b>
Law	55,202	78,981	169,408	246,774	225,720	<b>776,085</b>
Learning & Changing Project.		36,288				<b>36,288</b>
Learning and Changing Project.	35,228		38,272			<b>73,500</b>
Learning to deal with difference in the workplace: An investigation of formal and informal process.				61,439		<b>61,439</b>
Lessons today for change tomorrow				15,000		<b>15,000</b>
Listening to children living in poverty				12,541		<b>12,541</b>
Listening to Children living in poverty - Extension					9,429	<b>9,429</b>
Listening to Children Living in Poverty - Extension March 2008.					2,327	<b>2,327</b>
Making It 07					9,000	<b>9,000</b>
Management of AF using a novel passive implantable atrial defibrillator.			96,000			<b>96,000</b>
Managing Diversity and Respecting our differences.					2,350	<b>2,350</b>
Mapping seabed habitats using remote acoustic techniques: Evaluating the link between backscatter and biology.		5,000				<b>5,000</b>

<b>Table B - Research Topic/ Area</b>	<b>2003/04</b>	<b>2004/05</b>	<b>2005/06</b>	<b>2006/07</b>	<b>2007/08</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>
Mathematical modelling of the heart - nursing award.	29,357	37,584	25,280			<b>92,221</b>
Mechanical, Aeron & Manufacturing Engineering	2,322	8,876	11,644	20,834	19,817	<b>63,493</b>
Medical Migration to and from Ireland 1860-1960.	76,267					<b>76,267</b>
Medicine Unspecified	643,000	456,692	340,724	20,013	23,694	<b>1,484,123</b>
Modulation of the anti-cancer activities of vitamin A and vitamin D through the process of reversible sumoylation.				10,000		<b>10,000</b>
Monitoring and evaluating the delivery and impact of the Global Dimensions through the Northern Ireland Curriculum.					5,737	<b>5,737</b>
Moving from residential homes to supported living: The impact on the social inclusion of people with learning disabilities.	119,940					<b>119,940</b>
Music	4,589	53,605	35,229	45,465	11,696	<b>150,583</b>
Network Grant - Novel strategies to prevent neurodegeneration in Alzheimer's Disease				51,500		<b>51,500</b>
New strategies to prevent neurodegeneration in Alzheimer disease using insulin-like drugs.					163,334	<b>163,334</b>
Non Invasive Ventilation in Cystic Fibrosis.	600					<b>600</b>
North American CF Conference					250	<b>250</b>
Nurse-Patient communication in the cancer treatment setting: a qualitative pilot study.					9,968	<b>9,968</b>
Nursing & Midwifery	24,628	25,682	28,865	25,122	21,158	<b>125,455</b>
Occurrence of food borne and food-poisoning bacterial pathogens in domestically composted household waste.			1,360			<b>1,360</b>
OSL Dating of Loess - Towards a deglacial chronology.			350			<b>350</b>
OSL Dating of Loess from NW England: Towards a deglacial chronology.			500			<b>500</b>
OSL dating of loess in Northwest England - towards a deglacial chronology.			400			<b>400</b>
Other Hospital Based Clinical Subjects	349,338	466,646	1,531,319	468,631	488,923	<b>3,304,855</b>
Other Laboratory Based Clinical Subjects	131,563	164,432	159,564	258,161	309,030	<b>1,022,749</b>



<b>Table B - Research Topic/ Area</b>	<b>2003/04</b>	<b>2004/05</b>	<b>2005/06</b>	<b>2006/07</b>	<b>2007/08</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>
Parental views on the outcomes of Paediatric Cochlear Implantation.			2,000			<b>2,000</b>
Partners in Practice.			35,484			<b>35,484</b>
Peace Agreement Database.					6,916	<b>6,916</b>
Pensions Deficits: The Financial Impact on FT 350 Companies				11,640		<b>11,640</b>
Pharmacy	147,786	272,859	412,301	410,136	369,116	<b>1,612,199</b>
Physics	21,405	-12,864	7,091	51,906	76,756	<b>144,294</b>
Politics & International Studies	127,562	54,986	87,380	40,516	17,881	<b>328,325</b>
Population based analysis of drinking behaviour and related psychological problems and cognitive impairment.			4,826			<b>4,826</b>
POSSIBILITIES (Extension 2)				14,774		<b>14,774</b>
Possibilities (extension)				14,101		<b>14,101</b>
Possibilities.		33,409				<b>33,409</b>
Post-transcriptional control of DNA methylation reprogramming in the mouse.					79,964	<b>79,964</b>
Pre-Clinical & Human Biological Sciences	96,851	216,930	277,220	255,491	329,204	<b>1,175,695</b>
Primary Care & Other Community Based Clinical Subj					1,667	<b>1,667</b>
Principles and practices of working with young women.		2,820				<b>2,820</b>
Priorities for Occupational Therapy Research (POTTER) project.			2,832			<b>2,832</b>
Prisons Memory Archive.			44,317			<b>44,317</b>
Prisons Memory Archive: Maze and Long Kesh					49,000	<b>49,000</b>
Professor William Twining Leverhulme Emeritus Fellowship Award				3,341		<b>3,341</b>
Promoting International Collaboration in Physiotherapy.				9,146		<b>9,146</b>
Protective effects of Fructans against carcino-genesis.		900				<b>900</b>
Proteomic analysis of the signalling events involved in Leukaemic transformation by the tyrosine kinase fusion protein Tel/PDGFR.			155,702			<b>155,702</b>
Psychiatry, Neuroscience & Clinical Psychology	70,133	50,901	30,804	86,179	88,101	<b>326,119</b>
Psychology	95,535	32,959	15,680	-5,227	45,033	<b>183,980</b>

<b>Table B - Research Topic/ Area</b>	<b>2003/04</b>	<b>2004/05</b>	<b>2005/06</b>	<b>2006/07</b>	<b>2007/08</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>
Public Attitudes and Public Service Responsiveness.				37,939		<b>37,939</b>
Pure Mathematics	12,152	1,176	7,303	7,288	33,959	<b>61,878</b>
Quality assurance audit of Greater New Lodge.			3,250			<b>3,250</b>
Racism & Multiculturalism in Education - Best Practice in the North West.			15,000			<b>15,000</b>
Realising Integrated Sustainable Communities in Deconstructed Interface Environments.				65,000		<b>65,000</b>
Redevelopment of programme for the delivery of fundamentals to Playboard workers.				1,134		<b>1,134</b>
Refractive Error: "The Change in Various Eccentric Ocular Parameters in Refractive Error Development".	12,870					<b>12,870</b>
Rehabilitation of Multiple Sclerosis.		4,500				<b>4,500</b>
Research on the needs and views of maternity service users.		15,000				<b>15,000</b>
Research Support Grant - Mr James McAteer				750		<b>750</b>
Research Support Grant - Mr James McAteer 2007.					750	<b>750</b>
Role of the novel genes Rudhira and Asrij during haemopoietic differentiation of embryonic stem cells,				1,400		<b>1,400</b>
Seabed mapping in the Gulf of Maine, Canada.			6,330			<b>6,330</b>
Selection of the most relevant signal components for faulty classification.			5,000			<b>5,000</b>
Self-organised Titanium Oxide Nanotubes for Biosensor Array Applications					5,800	<b>5,800</b>
Sexual Health and Well-Being of People with Learning Disabilities in Northern Ireland.	127,060					<b>127,060</b>
Small Connected Towns in Cross-Border Regions				6,220		<b>6,220</b>
Small equipment grant to support diabetes research				1,000		<b>1,000</b>
Small equipment grant to support diabetes research.			2,000	250		<b>2,250</b>
Social Work, and Social Policy & Administration	56,949	54,677	82,214	67,842	134,387	<b>396,069</b>
Sociology	93,836	56,724	-2,277	21,489	29,035	<b>198,807</b>

<b>Table B - Research Topic/ Area</b>	<b>2003/04</b>	<b>2004/05</b>	<b>2005/06</b>	<b>2006/07</b>	<b>2007/08</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>
Structure and Stability of Architectures in Guanine - Rich Gene Regulatory Regions.			13,200			<b>13,200</b>
Structure/Function relationship in the eye lens				3,970		<b>3,970</b>
Student Nurses' Perceptions of the Role of the Health Care Assistant (HCA).		9,843				<b>9,843</b>
Studies evaluating the effectiveness of community palliative care services					12,000	<b>12,000</b>
Studies evaluating the effectiveness of community palliative care services.	8,000	8,000	12,000			<b>28,000</b>
Study of nanocrystalline TiO2 films for a range of applications.			2,270			<b>2,270</b>
Summer Scholarship - Psychophysical assessment of non-refractive optical defects in healthy adults.					1,550	<b>1,550</b>
Summer Studentship.			2,000			<b>2,000</b>
Supporting the implementation of Cross-Border collaborative frameworks: Newry-Dundalk sub region.				29,213		<b>29,213</b>
Sustainable Communities				27,060		<b>27,060</b>
System identification for rapid generation of transparent analysable control code for autonomous mobile robots					129,887	<b>129,887</b>
Teaching of History in Northern Ireland - Publication				1,679		<b>1,679</b>
The 4th International Workshop on Statistical Seismology (Tokyo).			1,140			<b>1,140</b>
The anticancer effects of novel analogues of dihydroartemisinin.					1,400	<b>1,400</b>
The colon in health and disease.			10,000			<b>10,000</b>
The Cross-Border Childcare Research Project.	44,236					<b>44,236</b>
The evaluation of a school-based physical activity programme aimed at reducing childhood obesity and CVD risk profile.					11,792	<b>11,792</b>
The experience and coping behaviour of men with prostate cancer after radiotherapy treatment.			215,414			<b>215,414</b>

<b>Table B - Research Topic/ Area</b>	<b>2003/04</b>	<b>2004/05</b>	<b>2005/06</b>	<b>2006/07</b>	<b>2007/08</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>
The homocysteine- lowering effect of riboflavin in CVD patients with different MTHFR C677T genotypes.		36,490				<b>36,490</b>
The impact of fatigue on communication in multiple sclerosis: an insiders view.			500			<b>500</b>
The impact of poverty on young children's school experience				10,000		<b>10,000</b>
The impact of poverty on young children's school experience.			34,920			<b>34,920</b>
The impact of urban form on energy use in developing countries					7,000	<b>7,000</b>
The information seeking behaviour of men with cancer: a qualitative study.			9,933			<b>9,933</b>
The Leverhulme Visiting Professorship - Prof John Wilson Foster.	49,042					<b>49,042</b>
The Playhouse Early Years Project.	2,500					<b>2,500</b>
The political impact of Religious Independence in Northern Ireland.		9,000				<b>9,000</b>
The relationship between cross-community contact in Northern Ireland and attitudes to Ethnic minorities: A qualitative analysis.		6,703				<b>6,703</b>
The Role of Cytochrome P450 1B1 (CYP1B1) in Tumour Progression: Implications for the Prevention and Treatment of Cancer.	75,000					<b>75,000</b>
The Role of Cytochrome P450 1B1 (CYP1B1) in Tumour Progression: Implications for the Prevention and Treatment of Cancer.		37,500				<b>37,500</b>
The role of pancreatic beta-cell growth factors in stem cell differentiation into pancreatic islet all phenotypes for type 1 diabetes.		1,320				<b>1,320</b>
The study of DNA-linked carbon nanotube networks for advanced genetic testing.		2,515				<b>2,515</b>
The unmet needs of, and coping among carers of stroke sufferers in Northern Ireland, with particular focus on gender differences					5,766	<b>5,766</b>



<b>Table B - Research Topic/ Area</b>	<b>2003/04</b>	<b>2004/05</b>	<b>2005/06</b>	<b>2006/07</b>	<b>2007/08</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>
The unmet needs of, and coping among carers of stroke sufferers in Northern Ireland, with particular focus on gender differences.					42,492	<b>42,492</b>
The use of PRICE in the management of acute soft tissue injury				56,651		<b>56,651</b>
Theorising multiculturalism and social cohesion in Canada and the UK				13,843		<b>13,843</b>
Three Travel Awards.	2,812					<b>2,812</b>
To evaluate the effectiveness of the context assessment index as a tool to assess and develop person centred continence care in rehabilitation settings for older people.				39,164		<b>39,164</b>
Town & Country Planning	1,148	22,617	14,006	8,818	6,334	<b>52,923</b>
Transatlantic dialogue on emerging technologies: bioethics symposium					5,000	<b>5,000</b>
Transforming Lives				78,965		<b>78,965</b>
Transport Disadvantage in Rural Northern Ireland.	2,500					<b>2,500</b>
Travel Award.		567				<b>567</b>
Travel Grant Bulgaria				500		<b>500</b>
Travel Grant.			250			<b>250</b>
Trends in Shariah - compliant real estate investment				6,000		<b>6,000</b>
Troubles-related trauma in Northern Ireland: extent of the problem, associated factors and effects.			91,200			<b>91,200</b>
University of Ulster Real Estate Initiative				250,000		<b>250,000</b>
Using older people's stories to inform service development.	82,973					<b>82,973</b>
Vacation Scholarship 2005.		1,320				<b>1,320</b>
Virtual reality: It's use in the recovery of upper limb function following stroke.		72,883				<b>72,883</b>
Voices of the Future, Legacies of the Past: The perspectives of Children and Young People and the role of Education in Reconciliation.				169,000		<b>169,000</b>
Web based resource centre on peace building in Northern Ireland				5,060		<b>5,060</b>
Whose Voice is it Anyway?				5,000		<b>5,000</b>

<b>Table B - Research Topic/ Area</b>	<b>2003/04</b>	<b>2004/05</b>	<b>2005/06</b>	<b>2006/07</b>	<b>2007/08</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>
Women and Conflict: cross - community perspectives on the marching season in Northern Ireland.			27,619			<b>27,619</b>
Young Life and Times Survey Northern Ireland.		12,000				<b>12,000</b>
Young men and Violence Research (Sept 04 - May 05).		18,475				<b>18,475</b>
Young people's aspirations and women reconciling life in and outside the home in NI.	92,094					<b>92,094</b>
Young women living in Northern Ireland research project.			21,000			<b>21,000</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>6,146,290</b>	<b>6,231,529</b>	<b>7,706,045</b>	<b>8,416,005</b>	<b>7,984,084</b>	<b>36,483,953</b>

### University of Ulster redundancies

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many support staff are being made redundant at the University of Ulster's Jordanstown campus. (AQW 6883/09)

**Minister of Employment and Learning:** The University of Ulster is carrying out restructuring exercises in two areas of its Jordanstown campus – Residential Services and the Faculty of Computing and Engineering. Fourteen support staff roles within Residential Services will be discontinued. Thirteen of the support staff have asked for and have been granted voluntary redundancy effective from 5 June 2009. The remaining member of staff has asked to be considered for redeployment.

Within the Faculty of Computing and Engineering, five support staff have asked for and have been granted either voluntary redundancy or early retirement. Six staff have been redeployed to other posts in the University. The restructuring process is likely to be completed by 30 June 2009 by which time further voluntary redundancies or early retirements will have been explored with support staff as well as the opportunity to consider redeployment. At present the number to be made redundant or granted early retirement cannot be known until the process nears completion.

One further support post at Jordanstown will be discontinued in the Faculty of Life and Health Sciences in September 2009. The post holder is currently being interviewed for another post under redeployment procedures.

The university is handling these matters in line with its normal processes and procedures to minimise the potential for redundancies.

### Skills Pledge

**Mr Storey** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many companies have committed to the Skills pledge. (AQW 6889/09)

**Minister of Employment and Learning:** Northern Ireland and Scotland are not participating in the Skills Pledge initiative; Wales has its own basics skills version of the Skills Pledge.

The Skills Pledge programme in England is managed by the Learning and Skills Council, which is an England-only body. The Department has no information on the number of companies which have signed up to the Skills Pledge.

### Skills Pledge

**Mr Storey** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline how his Department has supported the Skills pledge. (AQW 6890/09)

**Minister of Employment and Learning:** Northern Ireland is not participating in the Skills Pledge initiative which was introduced in England in response to a recommendation in the Leitch “Review of Skills Report, Prosperity for All in the Global Economy: World Class Skills.” Scotland is not participating in the initiative and Wales has subsequently introduced its own basic skills version of the Pledge.

### Essential Skills Learners

**Mr Storey** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if essential skills learners can use their qualifications to contribute to the points for accessing a place in Queen’s University. (AQW 6895/09)

**Minister of Employment and Learning:** Essential Skills qualifications do not contribute towards University Central Admissions System (UCAS) tariff points in terms of accessing a place at Queens University (QUB). The University’s general entrance criteria require applicants to have GCSE at grade A\* to C, or other qualifications deemed equivalent by its Admissions Committee; Essential Skills qualifications do not satisfy these criteria, at present. My Department is in discussion with QUB regarding the possibility of Essential Skills at level 2 becoming an acceptable equivalent qualification for the purposes of meeting the University’s general entrance requirements.

### Essential Skills Learners

**Mr Storey** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if Queens University recognises essential skills qualifications under its Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme point system. (AQW 6896/09)

**Minister of Employment and Learning:** The Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme is a system which allows a student to claim exemptions from modules, or access to a particular level of study, where they have previous certificated learning from another higher education institution.

I am advised by Queen’s University that applicants would be expected to satisfy the university’s English Language requirement as well as course or subject requirements, which for some programmes include GCSE Mathematics or an acceptable qualification.

To date, Essential Skills Level 2 Literacy and Numeracy qualifications have not been accepted by the university in lieu of GCSE English Language and Mathematics.

My Department is in discussion with QUB regarding the possibility of Essential Skills at level 2 becoming an acceptable equivalent qualification for the purposes of meeting the University’s general entrance requirements.

### Lifelong Learning UK Project

**Mr Storey** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) to detail the amount of funding; and (ii) to provide a breakdown of how funding is being spent, on the Lifelong Learning UK project ‘Labour Market Information- Work Based Learning and Youth Work’. (AQW 6897/09)

**Minister of Employment and Learning:** The aim of the Lifelong Learning UK project on “Labour Market Information on Work Based Learning and Youth Work” was to identify and address workforce skills gaps and to achieve a holistic Sector Skills Agreement covering all areas in their footprint. A total of £74,350 funding support has been provided for this project and is broken down as follows:

- Inception meetings with stakeholders; background papers; tender to appoint a consultant; inception meeting with consultant. The funding was structured to cover two streams of work; £4,125 funding in relation to the Workbased Learning element and £3,300 for the Youth Work element.
- Research design; data collection; analysis of data; Project Steering Group Meetings; production of a final report. Again this was structured to cover two streams of work; £31,667.50 of funding was provided for the Workbased Learning element and £27,342.50 for the Youth Work element.

- £7,915 of funding was provided for a range of information sessions, merchandising and the launch of the Sector Skills Agreement

### STEM Subject Lecturers

**Mr Butler** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail (i) the number of lecturers that are qualified to teach STEM subjects in the further education sector; and (ii) the numbers of STEM subject lecturers in the further education sector, in each of the last 5 years. (AQW 6903/09)

**Minister of Employment and Learning:** The number of lecturers employed to teach STEM subjects in each of the

last five academic years (04/05, 05/06, 06/07, 07/08 and 08/09) is shown below.

Two Colleges (South West College and Southern Regional College) do not hold this information for the period prior to the merger of colleges in August 2007.

Name of College	Academic Year	No. of STEM subject Lecturers
Belfast Metropolitan College	08/09	193
	07/08	217
	06/07	204
	05/06	200
	04/05	192

Name of College	Academic Year	No. of STEM subject Lecturers
North West Regional College	08/09	158
	07/08	171
	06/07	155
	05/06	168
	04/05	187

Name of College	Academic Year	No. of STEM subject Lecturers
South Eastern Regional College	08/09	144
	07/08	180
	06/07	138
	05/06	117
	04/05	90

Name of College	Academic Year	No. of STEM subject Lecturers
Southern Regional College	08/09	260
	07/08	262
	06/07	Pre-merger staff information not available
	05/06	
	04/05	



Name of College	Academic Year	No. of STEM subject Lecturers
Northern Regional College	08/09	68
	07/08	62
	06/07	60
	05/06	60
	04/05	60

Name of College	Academic Year	No. of STEM subject Lecturers
South West College	08/09	76
	07/08	71
	06/07	Pre-merger staff information not available
	05/06	
	04/05	

### North West Regional College

**Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) how many Deputy/Assistant Directors were in post prior to the merger of North West Institute of Further and Higher Education and Limavady College; (ii) how many are in place now; and (iii) when and where were the additional positions advertised. (AQW 6907/09)

**Minister of Employment and Learning:** Prior to merger, the former North West Institute of Further and Higher Education, and Limavady College had six Deputy Directors (or posts of equivalent grade) in post and one unfilled vacancy.

Following merger, the North West Regional College (NWRC) now has five Deputy Directors (or equivalent) in post.

### Student Fees

**Mr Newton** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if he will have completed the review of student fees in time for it to be debated in this session of the Assembly, to allow appropriate actions to be implemented by the Higher Education institutions for the academic year 2010/11. (AQW 6922/09)

**Minister of Employment and Learning:** In terms of review timescales, I expect to receive an interim report for consideration in early June 2009. This will subsequently be brought before the Committee for Employment and Learning prior to a public consultation scheduled for Autumn 2009. The final report and Assembly debates are anticipated for early 2010 with the academic year 2011/2012 being the earliest possible date for implementation to allow appropriate time for the communication and development of any proposed new or revised arrangements.

### Further Education Colleges

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what the annual budget was for each of the Further Education Colleges in 2008/09. (AQW 6947/09)

**Minister of Employment and Learning:** Further Education College allocations are made on an academic year basis. For the 2008/09 academic year each college received the amounts detailed below through its main recurrent block grant allocation.

Belfast Metropolitan College	£34,561,800
North West Regional College	£22,637,800

Northern Regional College	£21,776,400
South Eastern Regional College	£21,756,000
South West College	£15,497,100
Southern Regional College	£24,770,900
<b>Total</b>	<b>£141,000,000</b>

Additionally, sector wide funds are made available in-year for specific purposes and allocated through demand led, earmarked funds.

### Regional Further Education Colleges

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the financial surpluses in each of the Regional Further Education Colleges, in 2008/09. (AQW 6951/09)

**Minister of Employment and Learning:** The financial year for the Further Education Colleges coincides with the academic year and runs from 1 August to 31 July. Accordingly, audited accounts for the 2008/09 financial year will not be available until November 2009.

### Public Service Agreements

**Mr McNarry** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what impact the acceleration of capital from the Department of Employment and Learning will have on Public Service Agreements, for the financial year 2010/11. (AQW 6985/09)

**Minister of Employment and Learning:** My Department has been successful in ensuring that a number of major projects have been brought to contract stage recently. Nevertheless, it is always difficult to accelerate capital spend. There is a significant lead in time required to preparing business cases, completing design work and obtaining planning permission. However, projects, including conventional and Public Private Partnership procurements with a value of some £235m, are currently being delivered in the College and University sectors. Given the volume of projects under way, there are no plans to adjust the existing Public Service Agreements for the financial year 2010/11.

## DEPARTMENT OF ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

### Plantation Exploration/Commemoration

**Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) to detail her Department's plans for product development and international marketing for the Plantation Exploration / Commemoration; and (ii) if a joint approach is being taken with the Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure in creating the product. (AQW 6631/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs A Foster):**

- (i) NITB has recently undertaken an Audit Report of the Ulster-Scots product within Northern Ireland, which has relevance to the Plantation Exploration/Commemoration, which highlights that there are some interesting features which might be exploited. However, many of the sites connected with Ulster-Scots are not staffed, have little interpretation and are not open at times convenient to visitors. The next step will be to identify places where products can be profitably developed looking in particular at interpretation and access, with a potential focus being on 'the American Connection'.
- (ii) NITB continues to work with the Ulster Scots Agency regarding cultural tourism in Northern Ireland. During recent meetings NITB agreed to assist the Agency in identifying a visitor-focused Ulster Scots tourism trail.

If a Plantation Exploration/Commemoration product is developed, Tourism Ireland will include this as part of its suite of marketing literature, publicity and promotional campaigns overseas.

### Tourist Motor Homes

**Mr Lunn** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for his assessment of provision in urban centres for tourist motor homes. (AQO 2508/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** The provision of tourist motor home facilities is essentially an issue for each Council to consider within their own operating environment and within the parameters of legislation as detailed in The Caravans Act (Northern Ireland) 1963.

Currently there are some specific facilities for motor homes in urban centres in Northern Ireland. These include two aires de service in Carrickfergus Borough Council, and a further aire de service in Broughshane which was installed by the Broughshane Community Development Association.

Motor home tourists can also access Council-run tourism amenity car parks where no height restriction barrier is installed. There are a range of these throughout urban and non urban areas of Northern Ireland.

### Northern Ireland Tourist Board

**Mr Gardiner** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the number; (ii) the names; and (iii) the investment figures of the projects that the Northern Ireland Tourist Board is operating or supporting, in (a) the Upper Bann constituency; (b) the Craigavon Borough Council area; and (c) the Banbridge District Council area, in each of the last three years. (AQW 6680/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** Under the Northern Ireland Tourist Board's (NITB) Tourism Development Scheme (TDS) 2008 – 2011 NITB received 8 applications from the Upper Bann Constituency of which 2 have been shortlisted and are now going through final approval assessment.

This includes the "Bringing People Closer Together at Portmore Lough Nature Reserve" with total grant rate sought at £35,730 and the "Enterprise Barge Restoration Project" with total grant sought at £30,000.

In addition, both Craigavon Borough Council and Banbridge District Council are members of the Armagh & Down Tourism Partnership.

NITB has made a commitment to provide the Armagh & Down Regional Tourism Partnership (RTP) with £70,000 plus VAT for three years from 2008/2009 for services which support the delivery of NITB's corporate objectives.

The RTP also received two offers under the International Fund for Ireland (IFI), one for £35,438 and the other for £73,556 on 23rd August 2007. Both offers relate to the support of activities, operations and initiatives which enhance product development and industry capability.

### Environment and Renewable Energy Fund

**Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what evaluation has been carried out of the Environment and Renewable Energy Fund. (AQW 6690/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** The Environment and Renewable Energy Fund (EREF) was split across six Government Departments (DETI, DSD, DARD, DFP, DOE, and OFMDFM). Departments who received EREF funding are responsible for ensuring evaluation of their individual EREF funded projects, under their Department's evaluation protocols.

To date DETI has completed evaluations of:-

- (i) Reconnect;
- (ii) Reconnect advertising campaign;
- (iii) the Grid Study;
- (iv) Carbon Trust (Invest NI); and

(v) development work within Action Renewables

The Evaluation of the Energy from Waste Programme both within DETI and Invest NI cannot take place until these projects have been completed. Similarly the energy storage study is still ongoing and so the evaluation has not yet taken place.

The DETI Evaluation Programme is reviewed and agreed annually by the Departmental Board and is managed centrally by the Policy Evaluation and Development Unit in accordance with the Department's Evaluation Protocol. Evaluation of on going projects will be included in this evaluation programme in due course.

### Package for Small Businesses

**Mr McNarry** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail which small firms are benefiting from the Chancellor's £7 Billion package for small businesses announced in November 2008; and to quantify the extent of that help. (AQW 6743/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** I am not in a position and nor would it be appropriate to identify individual firms that have received assistance from the range of financial measures announced by the Chancellor in November 2008 and launched by the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR) in January 2009. BERR has confirmed that the Enterprise Finance Guarantee scheme has £211 million of eligible applications from 1900 firms across the UK that have been granted or are being processed or assessed. Early indications show a low level of participation in the Enterprise Finance Guarantee Scheme in Northern Ireland and I and other Ministers will continue to press the local banks to give this scheme full consideration when assessing the needs of business customers.

### Debt Relief Scheme

**Mr McNarry** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action she is taking on debt relief after the consultation period on her debt relief scheme ends on 6 May 2009; and are there any interim measures she plans to take. (AQW 6744/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** DETI intend to take forward the procedure leading to the introduction of a Bill to set up the scheme. This will include briefing the ETI Committee on the outcome of the consultation, submission of a policy memorandum to the Executive and instructing Legislative Counsel to draft the Bill. I plan to introduce the Bill in June 2010.

There is no statutory authority for any interim measures.

### Companies Registry

**Mr McNarry** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if she will reduce fines for small companies missing their annual return deadline or shuttle return deadline with Companies Registry during this period of economic downturn. (AQW 6745/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** I appreciate that it may seem harsh to penalise companies in the current economic climate.

However, it is important that companies file their accounts on time as this is the bedrock of the limited liability system. If companies are to enjoy the benefits of limited liability, it is essential that customers, suppliers and stakeholders are able to view the company's latest available accounts to make informed judgements as a guide to their dealings with the company. A failure to file on time leaves an incomplete company record. For any company that cares about its reputation, for example with a view to securing credit, having all filings up to date is essential.

Nevertheless, in view of current difficult trading conditions, and to reduce the immediate burden of payment, Companies Registry is prepared to accept payment of the penalty by monthly instalments.



## Invest NI

**Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) how much money has been allocated to each overseas office; (ii) what the number of enquiries per office was and (iii) how many visits to Northern Ireland resulted from each office, over the past three years. (AQW 6820/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** Overseas is defined as outside the United Kingdom. On this basis, the Invest NI office in London has not been reflected in the responses below.

### (I) MONEY ALLOCATED TO EACH OVERSEAS OFFICE

	2006-07 £'000	2007-08 £'000	2008-09 3 £'000
Dublin	301	306	346
Brussels	263	303	335
Mumbai	-	236	351
San Jose	245	283	270
New York	277	406	280
Boston	1,351	1,520	1,610
Dusseldorf	232	159	185
Seoul	288	195	125
Shanghai	92	186	152
Taipei	205	49	-
Tokyo	145	41	-
Denver	95	113	126
Dubai	137	156	210
Singapore	65	15	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,696</b>	<b>3,968</b>	<b>3,990</b>

### (II) NUMBER OF ENQUIRIES PER OFFICE

Invest NI do not record enquiries per office. The agency's work in this area is proactive in nature consisting mainly of outbound calling to potential investors by investment executives.

### (III) NO. OF VISITS TO NORTHERN IRELAND RESULTING FROM EACH OFFICE, OVER THE PAST THREE YEARS

	2006-07 Inward visits <sup>1</sup>	2006-07 Trade <sup>2</sup>	2007-08 Inward visits <sup>1</sup>	2007-08 Trade <sup>2</sup>	2008-09 Inward visits <sup>1&amp;3</sup>	2008-09 Trade <sup>2&amp;3</sup>
Dublin	26	-	24	-	34	-
Brussels	6	-	3	-	2	-
Mumbai	-	-	-	-	4	25
San Jose	13	-	5	-	8	-
New York	18	-	5	-	19	-
Boston	4	39	10	21	32	43
Dusseldorf	1	-	-	24	-	32
Seoul	7	-	9	-	5	-
Shanghai	-	-	-	90	-	97
Taipei	-	-	-	-	-	-
Tokyo	1	-	-	-	-	-

	2006-07 Inward visits <sup>1</sup>	2006-07 Trade <sup>2</sup>	2007-08 Inward visits <sup>1</sup>	2007-08 Trade <sup>2</sup>	2008-09 Inward visits <sup>1&amp;3</sup>	2008-09 Trade <sup>2&amp;3</sup>
Denver	-	29	-	79	-	27
Dubai	-	36	-	37	-	102
Singapore	-	11	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>251</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>326</b>

**Notes:**

- 1 The above lists the number of inward visits to Northern Ireland handled or managed by each of the overseas offices (i.e. number of companies and influencers who visited NI). Inward visits often involve client facing personnel from the Belfast HQ.
- 2 The above lists the number of companies assisted by the overseas offices in identifying and developing trade / export opportunities.
- 3 2008-09 are provisional numbers based on data collated to 28 February 2009 and will be subject to change.

## Corporate Responsibility Issues

**Dr Farry** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline what discussions have taken place with (a) colleagues in other jurisdictions; (b) the local business community; and (c) local trade unions regarding corporate responsibility issues. (AQW 6832/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** The Executive recognises the importance of promoting socially and environmentally responsible practices. In that regard, Northern Ireland Departments have sought to work with organisations such as Business in the Community (BitC), to promote corporate responsibility in Northern Ireland.

Recently the First and deputy First Minister met with representatives from BitC to discuss opportunities for further corporate responsibility in the public sector. The Head of the Civil Service has also recently engaged in discussions with BitC to explore how the public sector can further utilise and encourage participation in corporate responsibility.

## Public Limited Companies

**Dr Farry** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to report on any plans she has to require public limited companies to publish an annual social responsibility report. (AQW 6853/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** The Executive recognises the importance of promoting socially and environmentally responsible practices. In that regard, Northern Ireland Departments have sought to work with organisations such as Business in the Community (BitC), to promote corporate responsibility in Northern Ireland.

It should also be noted that the Companies Act 2006, which is being implemented on a United Kingdom-wide basis, increased the requirements for quoted companies to report on environmental, employee, social and community matters. The Companies Act 2006 will be fully implemented by 1 October 2009 and I am not aware of any plans, at this stage, to increase these reporting requirements.

## Business in the Community

**Dr Farry** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to report on any discussions her Department has had with Business in the Community to develop corporate social responsibility similar to the initiatives undertaken by that organisation in other parts of the United Kingdom. (AQW 6854/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** The Executive recognises the importance of promoting socially and environmentally responsible practices. In that regard, Northern Ireland Departments have sought to work with organisations such as Business in the Community (BitC), to promote corporate responsibility in Northern Ireland.

DETI has not had any recent, significant contact with BitC, however, my officials identified key issues for discussion at a recent meeting of BitC and OFMDFM where opportunities for further corporate responsibility in the public sector were discussed.

### **Tourist Information Centres**

**Mr Craig** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how her Department is promoting Northern Ireland branded projects and items in tourist information centres/offices. (AQW 6898/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** Tourist Information Centres (TICs) are run by local authorities and regional tourism bodies. Day to day management and decisions including stock items rests with the relevant TIC. The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) works closely with the TIC network to ensure consistency of service and standards including staff knowledge and training.

A new brand strategy for Northern Ireland Tourism is currently being developed to ensure that visitors can experience the true Northern Ireland at every stage of their journey. This means ensuring that all aspects of the visitor journey and experience reflect the unique assets of Northern Ireland from attractions to food and from entertainment to retail.

During the financial year 2008/2009 NITB has delivered a number of branding initiatives for TIC team members. These initiatives have focused on ensuring that TIC staff are aware of the brand for Northern Ireland tourism and are equipped with the skills to improve visitor experiences. The initiatives included a Visitor Servicing Conference and Workshop, funding for regional familiarisation trips, two 'Welcome Host Plus' customer service training sessions designed to provide knowledge and skills enabling world class customer service delivery, induction training to new TIC team members and an opportunity for TICs of Excellence to be identified through the annual Northern Ireland Tourism Awards; and an opportunity is provided for TICs of Excellence to be identified through the Northern Ireland Tourism Awards which are delivered annually.

NITB will continue to work with TICs to facilitate the delivery of unique visitor experiences throughout Northern Ireland. A research programme will be undertaken to understand how visitors currently use TICs and the service they would like provided in the future. This research will include retail provision and feedback will be provided to all bodies responsible for TICs to ensure that the correct retail offering is provided.

### **Cost of Ferry Travel**

**Mr McNarry** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment as to whether the present cost of ferry travel between Northern Ireland and Great Britain is conducive to attracting tourists. (AQW 6956/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** Over the past decade the market for travel from Northern Ireland to Britain has remained reasonably static, with the main change being a degree of movement away from using ferries to using low-cost air services instead. This change has occurred despite the investment that ferry companies have made in new, state of the art, passenger car ferries and port-side facilities. In general terms, while ferry traffic has declined, air traffic has increased and there has been an overall 2% increase in combined sea and air carryings between 2007 and 2008.

Both the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and Tourism Ireland Ltd. have made significant investments in integrated marketing campaigns directed at the short-break market since 2007.

Ferry travel between Northern Ireland and Great Britain, from which Northern Ireland tourism benefits, is provided by private sector ferry companies. Fare levels are a matter for their commercial judgement, having regard to prevailing market conditions.

## DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT

### Refundable Deposits on Drinks Containers

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of the Environment if he will consider introducing refundable deposits on drinks containers. (AQW 6501/09)

**Minister of the Environment (Mr S Wilson):** I do not have any plans to introduce a refundable deposit scheme in respect of drinks containers.

### Working Group on PPS21

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of the Environment what the time-scale is for the report of the independent working group on PPS21. (AQW 6547/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** The Independent Working Group will report by 26 June 2009.

### National Park

**Mr Wells** asked the Minister of the Environment if he is carrying out any research before making a decision on the creation of a national park. (AQW 6608/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** I am carrying out research. For example, I will visit the Cairngorms National Park in Scotland from April 7 to April 9 to see for myself how a National Park works in practice. I want to hear about the impact it is having on the communities, businesses and farms within its boundaries and what people think about how it is working.

### Climate Change

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of the Environment what correspondence his department has had with the Met Office about Climate Change. (AQW 6624/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** Over the years my Department has had many contacts with the Meteorological Office to discuss possible future weather pattern scenarios in Northern Ireland. The most recent occasion was October 2008.

The “Preparing for a Changing Climate in Northern Ireland” report, known as the “SNIFFER report” published in January 2007, drew heavily on Meteorological Office data and models.

### Climate Change

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of the Environment for his Department’s assessment of the rise in the daily maximum temperature by 0.65C between 1914 to 2006. (AQW 6625/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** My Department continues to monitor and assess temperature fluctuations using Armagh Observatory records, Meteorological Office records and UK Climate Impacts Programme data.

### Climate Change

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of the Environment for his Department’s assessment of the decline by 25 days of air frost in the past 48 years. (AQW 6626/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** My Department continues to assess a number of variables in Northern Ireland. These include air temperature; hot and cold days; rainfall; snow days; and growing season length. Air frost is not a variable that we currently measure.



## Climate Change

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the theory that Climate Change will lead to (i) more rain in winter; (ii) more extreme natural events; and (iii) the warming of the sea. (AQW 6627/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** My Department has worked with, and continues to work with the UK Climate Impacts Programme (UKCIP) and the Scotland and Northern Ireland Forum for Environmental Research to investigate possible future climate scenarios. UKCIP uses modelled scenarios produced by the Meteorological Office Hadley Centre. These scenarios suggest more rain in the winter, more extreme natural events and sea surface warming, however given the complexities of these models the predictions must be treated with considerable caution.

## Carbon Footprint of MLAs

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of the Environment (i) to detail the research he carried out on the carbon footprint of MLAs; and (ii) to publish the research, including his own carbon footprint. (AQW 6628/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** Firstly, I only gathered information on members of the Environment Committee. Mileage claims submitted by MLAs are published on the Assembly website. I then accessed [www.carbonbalanced.org](http://www.carbonbalanced.org) which allowed me to calculate the carbon footprint for the number of miles claimed.

I would refer to my responses to the Environment Committee on 26 February and AQ 2377/09, which are both recorded in Hansard. I have not studied my carbon footprint because I am not exercised about it. I was simply giving the information to members who seem to be deeply concerned by the matter.

## Area Plan for North Down

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of the Environment when the area plan for North Down will be published. (AQW 6649/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** The Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015 (BMAP) was published in November 2004. BMAP relates to the administrative council areas of Belfast City, Lisburn City, Carrickfergus Borough, Castlereagh Borough, Newtownabbey Borough and North Down Borough.

The North Down and Ards Area Plan (1984-1995) will remain a material consideration in determining planning applications in North Down until such time as it is superseded by the adoption of BMAP.

The BMAP Public Inquiry commenced in April 2007 and concluded in May 2008. The Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) is currently considering all the information before it, prior to completing its report and making its recommendations to the Department. The PAC has indicated a preliminary timescale for delivery of the report to Planning Service as early summer 2010. However, the Commission would hope to be in a position to announce a firmer timescale later this year. Any review of timescales undertaken by the PAC may advance the Report.

Upon receipt of the report, Planning Service will consider the recommendations of the PAC and prepare the Plan for adoption.

## Strategic Projects Unit is

**Mr Hamilton** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) each article 31 planning application that the Strategic Projects Unit is processing; (ii) each non-article 31 application that the unit is processing, and (iii) the projects that are in pre-application discussions. (AQW 6725/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** Details of the applications currently being processed by my Department's Strategic Project teams are set out in the attached annexes.

Annex 1 – Article 31 applications

Annex 2 – Non Article 31 applications

Annex 3 – Pre-application discussions

## ANNEX B

## NON ARTICLE 31 APPLICATIONS

	Ref No	Applicant	Proposal / Location
1	S/2005/0342/O	Bow Street Mall Ltd	Demolition of properties and extension of existing Bow Street Mall, Lisburn
2	X/2005/0668/LB	Castlebawn Ltd	Shopping Centre, Court Street, Castle Bawn (Former abattoir site) Newtownards
3	W/2008/0886/F	Dermot Developments Ltd c/o Pragma Planning	Phase 1 of new residential development 169 Rathgae Road/School avenue, Bangor
4	W/2008/0115/F	MLS Partnership	Demolition of existing buildings and erection of 529 residential units at 182, 186, 188, & 188a Rathgae Rd Bangor
5	T/2008/0079	Randex Laboratories Ltd	Construction of new facility to accommodate manufacturing laboratory, 55 Diamond Road, Crumlin
6	W/2008/0294/F	MLS Partnership	Demolition of existing buildings and erection of 92 residential units at 182, 186, 188, 188a & 188b Rathgae Rd Bangor
7	W/2008/0302/RM	MLS Partnership	Demolition of existing buildings & erection of residential development at 182 Rathgae Rd, Bangor
8	Z/2008/1058/F	Titanic Quarters Ltd & Belfast Harbour Commissioners	Erection of financial service campus, Queen's Island, Belfast
9	S/2008/0192/F	Antrim Construction Company	Housing development Brokerstown Road, Knockmore Road, Lisburn
10	S/2008/0527/F	O'Kane & Devine Ltd	Residential development (526 dwellings) lands to the north and east of Ballymacash Primary School, Lisburn
11	S/2008/0537/RM	O'Kane & Devine Ltd	Residential development (470 dwellings) plus neighbourhood facilities lands to the north and east of Ballymacash Primary School, Lisburn
12	S/2008/0400/F	The Carvill Group	Variation of condition 6 of S/2003/0466/O to uplift residential numbers, land north of 27A, 64, 66 & 66A Ballinderry Road, west of Wallace Court Lisburn
13	S/2008/0485/F	O'Kane & Devine Ltd	Residential development ( dwellings) lands to the north and east of Ballymacash Primary School, Lisburn
14	S/2008/0526/F	O'Kane & Devine Ltd	Vary planning condition (S/2003/1780/O) re density Lands to the north and east of Ballymacash Primary School, Lisburn.
15	Z/2008/1548/RM	Titanic Quarters Ltd & Belfast Harbour Commissioners	Mixed use development, Abercorn basin Queen's Island, Belfast
16	Z/2008/1831/F	The Odyssey Trust Co Ltd	Extension to existing building to incorporate a Titanic signature project / Titanic experience / luxury hotel at Odyssey Complex, Queen's Quay, Belfast
17	Z/2008/1963/F	Culzean Properties	Hotel adjacent to Belfast City Airport
18	Z/2008/2150/F	Sainsburys	Petrol Filling Station, Kennedy Centre, Falls Road, Belfast
19	S/2008/1171/O	Bow Street Mall Ltd	Provision and construction of new access road off Thiepval Road rear of Bow Street Mall, Lisburn
20	S/2008/1172/O	Bow Street Mall Ltd	Redevelopment of lands comprising demolition of existing buildings and extend existing Bow Street Mall to form new retail development
21	Z/2008/2287/F	The Carvill Group	Proposed 3 storey marketing suite former Sirocco Works, Belfast
22	L/2008/0741/F	Western Health & Social Care Trust	Alternative "Blue Light" route to service new acute hospital Enniskillen
23	N/2008/0835/RM	J H Turkington & Sons	Superstore Marlborough Retail Park, Highfield Groce, Craigavon
24	K/2008/1167/F	Western Health & Social Care Trust	Road Widening of Donaghane Road & landscaping associated with proposed Omagh local hospital

	Ref No	Applicant	Proposal / Location
25	Z/2009/0079/RM	Titanic Quarters Ltd & Belfast Harbour Commissioners	Restoration of Hamilton Graving Dock, Queen's Island, Belfast
26	Z/2009/0092/F	Bombardier Aerospace	New factory, Airport Road West, Belfast
27	Z/2009/0097/F	Titanic Quarters Ltd & Belfast Harbour Commissioners	Restoration and part change of use of listed, former Harland & Wolff drawing offices to function rooms
28	Z/2009/0101/LB	Titanic Quarters Ltd & Belfast Harbour Commissioners	Restoration and part change of use of listed, former Harland & Wolff drawing offices to function rooms
29	Z/2009/0115/F	Titanic Quarters Ltd & Belfast Harbour Commissioners	Proposed mixed use development Abercorn Crescent / Queen's Road, Queen's Island, Belfast
30	K/2009/0007/F	Western Health & Social Care Trust	New single carriageway, 2 lane link road with new bridge over Camowen River to also serve new access for proposed Omagh local hospital
31	S/2008/0482/RM	O'Kane & Devine Ltd	Residential development (138 dwellings) lands to the north and east of Ballymacash Primary School, Lisburn

## ANNEX C

## PRE-APPLICATION DISCUSSIONS

Ref number	Proposal	Date Requested
A/2008/0267/Q	Fort George re-development, Londonderry	01/04/2008
H/2008/0118/Q	Restoration and retention of listed building & mixed use regeneration, Upperlands	18/02/2008
L/2008/0936/Q	Catalina Bay, Destination Resort, Gublusk bay, Enniskillen	18/06/2008
P/2008/0789/Q	Proposed industrial development at Carbane Industrial Estate Newry	11/06/2008
P/2008/0836/Q	New Bridge at Narrow Water, Warrenpoint	16/04/2008
S/2008/0259/Q	Mixed use Retail Park, Laganbank, Lisburn	03/03/2008
U/2008/0137/Q	Residential development at northern section of Ballyclare Relief Road	04/03/2008
Z/2008/0932/Q	Proposed Crematorium, Milltown, Belfast	04/06/2008
Z/2008/1388/Q	Mixed use development at Odyssey, Queen's Quay, Belfast	04/06/2008
Z/2008/1583/Q	Mixed use development at St George's Gate, Cromac Street, Belfast	21/07/2008
Z/2008/1857/Q	Re-development of Andrews Mill, Percy Street, Belfast	02/09/2008
Z/2008/1697/Q	Proposed stadium development at "The Valley" Newtownabbey	31/07/2008
Z/2008/2019/Q	Proposed major mixed development at Glenmona, Belfast	18/09/2008
Z/2008/2155/Q	96 apartments/car parking café/restaurant, Pilot Street, adjacent to Clarendon Dock, Belfast	17/10/2008
S/2008/1083/Q	Erection of elite facility for basketball and/or volleyball at lands at Laurel Hill Community College, Lisburn	22/10/2008
X/2008/0970/Q	Major retail led regeneration proposal at Newtownards Town Centre – lands bounded by High Street, Cross Street and Court Street	27/10/2008
R/2008/0594/Q	Multipurpose leisure development, Newcastle	23/09/2008
W/2008/0812/Q	Proposed new elite training facility at Ballyholme Yacht Club, Seacliff Road, Bangor	22/10/2008
U/2008/0671/Q	Proposed redevelopment of Northcott Shopping Centre, Glengormley	20/11/2008
Y/2008/0533/Q	Residential development, Millmount, Dundonald	04/12/2008
Q/2008/0665/Q	Retail development, Bridgewater Park, Banbridge	04/12/2008
X/2008/1112/Q	Retail development incorporating superstore, retail units, petrol filling station, car parking and associated works, Newtownards	08/12/2008

Ref number	Proposal	Date Requested
U/2008/0693/Q	Proposed relief road, Ballyclare connecting Ballyrobert Rd – Templepatrick Road through to Doagh Road – Rashee Road, Ballyclare	10/12/2008
I/2009/0003/Q	Proposed training college at land south of Desertcreat Road, east of A29 Dungannon Road, Cookstown	19/12/2008
W/2009/0014/Q	Site for mixed use development at Queen's Parade, Bangor	08/01/2009
Z/2009/0014/Q	Proposed Sydenham Interchange	22/12/2008
S/2009/0048/Q	Proposed Crematorium, Lisburn Road, Moira	15/01/2009
Z/2009/0075/Q	Enabling development at Ormiston House, Belfast	19/01/2009
R/2009/0069/Q	Proposed Velodrome, Inch Abbey Road, Downpatrick	28/01/2009
F/2009/0021/Q	Tesco Store, Inver Road, Larne	05/02/2009
K/2009/0151/Q	Design Exemplar at Omagh Hospital	20/02/2009
T/2009/0104/Q	The construction of a new facility to accommodate manufacturing laboratory, Largy Road, Crumlin	03/03/2009
Z/2009/0401/Q	Titanic Quarter Phase II – Black 12	19/03/2009

## Wind Turbines

**Mr T Clarke** asked the Minister of the Environment the Department's minimum required separation distance between a wind turbine and a domestic property. (AQW 6769/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** Planning applications for wind turbines are assessed in the context of Planning Policy PSU 12 'Renewable Energy', contained in 'A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland'. There is no specific policy or guidance relating to the proximity of nearby dwellings. However, careful consideration is given to the possible loss of amenity to a property from noise, shadow flicker, ice throw, reflected light, and possible interference with communications.

All proposals for wind turbines or wind farms or groups of wind turbines (including any associated ancillary development) will be assessed in respect of their implications for the visual, ecological and historic landscapes; the implications for agriculture and the safety and amenity of local residents.

## Wind Turbines

**Mr T Clarke** asked the Minister of the Environment which applications for wind turbines are (i) assessed by a local office; and (ii) assessed by headquarters. (AQW 6770/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** Planning permission is required for all wind turbines. Applications for wind farms / turbines producing energy specifically for the national Grid are currently dealt with in Planning Service HQ. Applications for turbines that produce energy for specific end users (e.g. hospital; school; farm etc.) are processed in the appropriate Divisional Planning Office.

## Wind Turbines

**Mr T Clarke** asked the Minister of the Environment when an Environmental Impact Assessment statement is required for a wind turbine. (AQW 6771/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** Wind turbines fall within descriptions of development listed under Schedule 2, category 3(j) to the Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999. The Department of the Environment is required to screen applications for the need for EIA where the development involves the installation of more than 2 turbines or the hub height of any turbine or height of any other structure exceeds 15 metres.

Schedule 2 projects located in defined "sensitive areas" will all require an EIA if they are likely to have significant effects on the environment. A "sensitive area" is defined as:



- a designated Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI);
- a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB);
- a designated National Park;
- a World Heritage Site;
- a scheduled Monument; or
- European Sites as defined in Regulation 9 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 such as a Special Protection Area (SPA) or a Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

### Northern Ireland Environment Agency

**Mr Newton** asked the Minister of the Environment in relation to Planning Application Z/2008/0014/F, (i) why it has taken the Northern Ireland Environment Agency over six months to respond to Planning Service, considering the deadline was 23 October, 2008; and (ii) when Planning Service can expect a response.

(AQW 6793/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** On behalf of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) I would like to apologise for the length of time it took to process this application. The Land and Resource Management (LRM) Unit within the Northern Ireland Environment Agency received a very high number of applications in the months of September, October and November 2008 for the redevelopment of brownfield sites. Due to this workload, combined with an existing backlog arising from the severe resource constraints which existed at that time, LRM was unable to process the application within the target timescale.

The Unit has now engaged specialist consultants to help clear the backlog and as a result, a response on this application was issued to Planning Service on 30 March 2009.

### Planning Service

**Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to his answer to AQW 4385/09, will he advise whether, when NIE is consulted on a planning application and advises that the development would contravene electrical safety regulations, the Planning Service would either refuse the planning application or otherwise inform the planning applicant and will he advise what other actions the Planning Service should take in those circumstances.

(AQW 6825/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** My Department ensures that Northern Ireland Electricity plc (NIE) is consulted on all individual planning applications on land crossed by existing overhead power lines where it is appropriate to do so. NIE will provide advice on operational safe clearance for development proposals. If, through the consultation process, NIE raise concerns regarding electrical safety regulations my Department will contact the applicant. It is the responsibility of the applicant to demonstrate how the development can be made safe through revised design measures. Following receipt of this information, my Department will confirm with NIE that they are satisfied with the amended drawings. If additional information is not submitted by the applicant my Department may consider refusing planning permission.

### Divisional Planning Offices

**Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to his answer to AQW 4385/09, will he advise whether the proximity of overhead cables is included within the parameters of 'interests of acknowledged importance'.

(AQW 6827/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** The proximity of overhead cables to development proposals submitted to my Department is included within the parameters of 'interests of acknowledged importance' (PPS1: General Principles, Paragraph 59). This is clearly a health and safety matter, and my Department ensures that Northern Ireland Electricity plc (NIE) is consulted on all individual planning applications on land crossed by existing overhead cables, where it is appropriate to do so. NIE will provide advice on operational safe clearances for development proposals, and full consideration of their response forms part of the decision making process.

## Recycling Material

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of the Environment what steps he is taking to address the poor prices for recycling material since prices have recently dropped dramatically. (AQW 6860/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** In Northern Ireland, a slowdown and difficulties in obtaining revenue for recyclates have been reported. However, goods are currently still moving albeit at a reduced rate for some materials and the things which householders here are being asked to identify, separate and place in the recycling bins and boxes are still being sent for recycling.

However, my officials have advised me that they believe the current lower prices internationally for some recyclable materials will be temporary and that the long-term outlook for the market remains strong, in part because of the growing demand for raw materials from developing countries.

The 3 Northern Ireland Waste Management groups are in regular contact with their contractors in respect of the prevailing situation and are keeping it under constant review. The Groups currently have no plans to stockpile material or send it to other alternative disposal routes such as landfill.

In my press statement of 12 January 2009 I encouraged everyone to play their part by placing only the appropriate materials in their recycling bins and boxes. This will ensure that the quality is as high as possible throughout the entire supply chain and is one of the key ways to ensure that sustainable markets for the materials can be found.

I acknowledge the challenges the current market situation has been causing councils and waste management companies but would stress that the Department will continue to work with all stakeholders to help them through what has been a difficult situation and to minimise the impacts on the environment both now and in the longer term.

## Hydro-Electric Turbines

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of licence applications received by his Department to operate a hydro-electric turbine since the Statutory Rule of Northern Ireland No. 482 Water Abstraction and Impoundment (Licensing) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 came into operation on 1st February 2007. (AQW 6940/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** Since the introduction of the Statutory Rule of Northern Ireland No. 482 Water Abstraction and Impoundment (Licensing) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 on 1 February 2007, the Northern Ireland Environment Agency has received 53 abstraction and impoundment licence applications, made in relation to the operation of hydro-electric turbines.

## Hydro-Electric Turbines

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of the Environment (i) how many licences have been issued for operating hydro-electric turbines (ii) to whom were they issued (iii) the date of issue and (iv) the location of each application, since the Statutory Rules of Northern Ireland No. 482 Water Abstraction and Impoundment (Licensing) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 came into operation on 1st February 2007. (AQW 6941/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** Since the introduction of the Statutory Rule of Northern Ireland No. 482 Water Abstraction and Impoundment (Licensing) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 on 1 February 2007:

(i) The Department has issued **19** authorisations under the transitional provisions of the Abstraction and Impoundment Regulations and **9** licences for operating hydro-electric turbines - 4 for existing hydro-electric turbines and 5 for new hydro-electric turbines.

(ii)-(iv) The names of applicants, dates of issue and locations of licences and authorisations are detailed in the table attached below.

Name of Applicant	Location of application	Date of Issue	License/ Authorisation
Davidson	Lawrencetown (Hazelbank) Mill	21 May 2007	Authorisation
Maguire	Inver River	21 May 2007	Authorisation
Maguire	Redhall	21 May 2007	Authorisation

Name of Applicant	Location of application	Date of Issue	License/ Authorisation
Turner	19 Hall Road, Donacloney	27 June 2007	Authorisation
Frazer	Hillmount House, Cullybackey	12 October 2007	Authorisation
Frazer	Hillmount, Cullybackey	12 October 2007	Authorisation
Frazer	Hillmount, Cullybackey	12 October 2007	Authorisation
Mills	Carrickaness, Benburb	27 December 2007	Authorisation
Boyce	BallyFarlea	20 December 2007	Authorisation
Glasgow	Upperlands	25 January 2008	Authorisation
Bruce	Donaghrisk	13 February 2008	Authorisation
Robinson	Ballyrickard Beg	10 March 2008	Authorisation
Moyola	Moyola Park	20 March 2008	Authorisation
Black	Keely	20 March 2008	Authorisation
McCambridge	Ballynaglogh	20 June 2008	Authorisation
O'Neill	Ballygobby	12 August 2008	Authorisation
Morrison-Lyons	Aghadowey	28 August 2008	Authorisation
Mills	Salmon Leap - Blackwater	4 February 2009	Authorisation
Mills	Carrickaness, Benburb	5 February 2009	Authorisation
Macnaghten	Ballyness	9 July 2007	Licence
Murphy	Glehygolgan	23 August 2007	Licence
McGuigan	Omagh College, Camowen	23 August 2007	Licence
Connolly	Glen River	4 December 2007	Licence
Cunningham	Ballyrobin	12 June 2008	Licence
O'Neill	Shanes Castle Hydro - River Maine	3 September 2008	Licence
McBurney	Tircreven	30 June 2008	Licence
McBurney	Mettican River	3 September 2008	Licence
Johnston	Letteran	5 February 2009	Licence

### Hydro-Electric Turbines

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of the Environment what is the maximum penalty that can be imposed on an operator of a hydro-electric turbine found not complying with the Statutory Rule of Northern Ireland No. 482 Water Abstraction and Impoundment (Licensing) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006. (AQW 6942/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** Article 25 of the Statutory Rule of Northern Ireland No. 482 Water Abstraction and Impoundment (Licensing) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 states that:

A person guilty of an offence shall be liable:-

**(a) on summary conviction:**

- (i) to a fine not exceeding £20,000 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months, or to both; and
- (ii) in the case of a continuing offence, to a further fine not exceeding £200 for every day during which the offence is continued after conviction.

**(b) on conviction on indictment:**

- (i) to a fine or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding five years, or to both; and

- (ii) in the case of a continuing offence, to a further fine for every day during which the offence is continued after conviction.

### Hydro-Electric Turbines

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of the Environment how much time an unlicensed operator has to submit an application for a licence to operate a hydro-electric turbine since the making of Statutory Rule of Northern Ireland No. 482 Water Abstraction and Impoundment (Licensing) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 came into operation on 1st February 2007. (AQW 6943/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** The Water Abstraction and Impoundment (Licensing) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 do not prescribe a time limit for submission of an application for a licence. However, the Regulations do state that it is an offence to operate without a licence.

### Cavanacaw Gold Mine

**Mr Doherty** asked the Minister of the Environment if he will agree to reject any planning applications for the removal of material from Cavanacaw goldmine until the project is nearing completion and all possibilities for the storage of waste material on site have been investigated. (AQW 6946/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** My Department is obliged by statute to process all valid planning applications submitted to it. It is also required to process such applications without a pre-determined outcome in view and to treat every application on its individual merits.

I can, however, assure you that in dealing with the current application for the removal of material from the Cavanacaw Gold Mine, the Department will have regard to the development plan, in so far as it is material to the application, and to any other material considerations including the amount of material available for restoration and on site storage. For this purpose the Department has sought the services of colleagues in the Department of Finance and Personnel's Central Procurement Directorate to survey the site and material stored on site before making a decision on the planning application.

This information and any information provided by the applicant will be made publicly available under the Department's normal open file procedures.

### Decline in Number of Cuckoos

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of the Environment what assessment his Department has made whether there has been a significant drop in the number of cuckoos this spring; and what steps he can take to address this matter. (AQW 6972/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** The Cuckoo is a migratory bird and typically arrives in Northern Ireland during the second week of April. There is therefore no information available on population figures for 2009.

Historic information on breeding Cuckoo, supported by more recent observations, indicate that the Cuckoo is declining in Northern Ireland and has disappeared from many former haunts.

The main causes of this decline are thought to be due to land use changes leading to loss of preferred habitats. Changes in its wintering grounds in sub-Saharan Africa are also likely to be a factor.

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency is supporting work to monitor bird populations in Northern Ireland, including the Cuckoo, through the British Trust for Ornithology's Atlas programme (due for completion in 2011) and the Ulster Museum's Cuckoo recording scheme (operated each year since 2007).

Agri-environment schemes operated by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development include measures for the protection and management of important habitats for the Cuckoo such as wetlands, heathland and species-rich grassland.

Several Northern Ireland Habitat Action Plans provide actions relevant to the conservation of Cuckoo habitat.



## Road Safety

**Mr McClarty** asked the Minister of the Environment what plans he has to increase road safety awareness to both pedestrians and drivers across Northern Ireland and in particular the Coleraine area, following the recent deaths from road accidents. (AQW 6975/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** One of my Department's key responsibilities is to work towards further reducing the number of people killed or seriously injured on our roads each year.

Some of the ways in which we work towards this are to make all road users, drivers and pedestrians alike, aware of their vulnerability on our roads, their responsibilities towards themselves and other road users and to influence their attitudes and behaviours when using, or thinking of using, the roads.

The road safety advertising and publicity strategy will continue to deliver a broad mix of messages to all road users, with both existing and new campaigns throughout 2009. Along with traditional methods such as television, radio, cinema and posters, we will also explore increasing our use of newer technologies such as online games environments and social networking systems.

An essential element in educating the public and influencing its attitudes and behaviours towards road safety is instilling good road user attitudes and behaviours in children. What is learnt and put into practice in childhood forms the basis of adult behaviour and delivery of a road safety education programme for children is key to achieving this.

My Department's Road Safety Education Officers will therefore continue to promote and deliver road safety education in all nursery, primary and post-primary schools throughout Northern Ireland in line with the Department for Transport's 'best practice' guidelines.

My Department attempts to identify the most cost effective ways of promoting road safety and improving road user attitudes and behaviours to everyone in Northern Ireland. Limited resources mean that we have to make difficult decisions and decide what advertising will have the greatest impact and reach the largest audiences. As road safety is a common issue right across Northern Ireland, the campaigns are generic and delivered NI wide rather than to specific areas.

## Wind Turbines

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of the Environment how many planning applications for wind turbines (i) have been received; (ii) have been approved; and (iii) have been refused, in each of the last three years. (AQW 6986/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** Over the last three years my Department has received 419 planning applications for wind turbines. 379 were granted planning permission and 23 were refused planning permission. The breakdown of planning applications in each of the last three years is as follows:

Year	Applications received	Applications approved	Applications refused
2006/2007	113	67	6
2007/2008	117	147	7
2008/2009 — 1 April – 31 Dec	189	165	10

It should be noted that applications received in the year may not have had a decision issued within the same time period and applications decided in the year may not have been received in the same period.

## Working Group on PPS21

**Mr McGlone** asked the Minister of the Environment how often his officials met with the independent working group on PPS21. (AQW 7013/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** Departmental officials have met the Independent Working Group once.

## ASSI Property

**Mr Bresland** asked the Minister of the Environment what action can the Department take to assist landowners if an Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) property has a negative impact on non-ASSI property.

(AQW 7015/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** Article 34 of the Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002 (the Order) empowers the Department to enter into a management agreement with the owner or occupier of lands included in an ASSI to ensure that they are managed in a manner that will secure or enhance its special scientific interests. Financial assistance is provided by the Department in respect of these agreements.

Article 43 of the Order enables the Department to enter into agreements on lands adjacent to an ASSI in order to conserve or enhance the features by reason of which the ASSI has been declared.

## DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

### Investment for Infrastructure

**Mr Savage** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what projects will benefit from the £1.46bn investment for infrastructure, to which he referred on 4 February 2009.

(AQW 4873/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr N Dodds):** In the Department of Finance and Personnel News Release of 4 February 2009, which highlighted the importance of the investment strategy to the local construction industry, I advised that during this financial year alone, it is expected that Government will spend in excess of £1.4 billion on infrastructure works. This represents a significant increase from 2003 when Government spending was only £676 million.

The £1.4 billion figure is based on the latest Forecast Outturn returns from Northern Ireland Departments regarding the expected level of net capital investment for the 2008-09 financial year.

Whilst expenditure on large construction projects typically spans a number of financial years, Departments have indicated that some of the main projects that will benefit from this year's spend include:-

DEPARTMENTS / PROJECTS
<b>DRD - main projects include:-</b>
DBFO 1 Westlink / M2.
DBFO 2 A1 Beechill-Cloghogue, Newry & A4 Dungannon-B'gawley.
Rail-Infrastructure incl Ballymena-L'derry Track Life Extension.
NI Water - Belfast Sewers Project plus 22 waste water treatment plants in other areas.
<b>DSD - main projects include:</b>
Urban Regeneration Public Realm Programme incl Belfast Streets Ahead, NW-Londonderry and Regional Towns.
Social Housing Development Programme.
<b>DHSSPS - main projects include:</b>
Royal Group of Hospitals – Critical Care, Belfast.
Royal Group of Hospitals – Pharmaceutical Services, Belfast.
Altnagelvin Re-development, Londonderry.
Ulster Hospital Redevelopment, Belfast.
Downe Hospital, Downpatrick.
SW Acute Hospital, Enniskillen.
Omagh Local Hospital, Omagh.

<b>DEPARTMENTS / PROJECTS</b>
Health & Well Being Centres
<b>DE - main projects include:</b>
Abbey Grammar School, Newry.
Pond Park Primary School, Lisburn.
Banbridge Academy, Banbridge.
Bangor/Nendrum – Bangor Academy.
Holy Cross College, Strabane.
<b>DE Cont'd</b>
Drumragh Integrated College, Omagh.
<b>DEL - main projects include:</b>
South Eastern Regional College – Bangor & Newtownards
South West College, Enniskillen
<b>DFP - main projects include:</b>
NICS Residual Office Estate Capital Building Projects
<b>DARD - main projects include:</b>
Farm Nutrient Management Scheme, Various locations.
Environment and Renewable Energy Centre, Hillsborough.
<b>DCAL - main projects include:</b>
Ulster Museum Refurbishment, Stranmillis, Belfast
PRONI New Headquarters, Titanic Quarter, Belfast.
Waterways Ireland Headquarters, Enniskillen
<b>DETI - main projects include:</b>
Derry Playhouse
Titanic Signature Project incl Thompson Dock and Pump House Restoration

### Central Car Pool

**Mr Savage** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to list the (i) name; (ii) model; and (iii) engine size of the official cars, excluding Ministerial vehicles; broken down by (a) the Department to which they belong; (b) the purchasing cost; (c) the number and cost of chauffeurs; (d) the cost of petrol; and (e) the cost of maintenance, in each of the last two years. (AQW 5549/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel:** There are five non-ministerial cars in the DFP's Central Car Pool. These are detailed below:

2 x Toyota Prius T Spirit 1500 cc (Petrol)

2 x Skoda Superb Elegance TDI 2000 cc (Diesel)

1 Volkswagen Caravelle Executive TDi 2461cc (Diesel)

All the above cars are owned by the Department of Finance and Personnel.

The 2 Toyota Prius T Spirit 1500 CC each cost £15,462.24. The 2 Skoda Superb Elegance TDI 2000 CC each cost £14,249.29. The Volkswagen Caravelle 2461 Executive cost £26,455.28. These costs exclude VAT.

There are four drivers in the Central Car Pool and it is estimated that this costs the Department a total of £119,000 per year.

The gross amount of fuel (petrol and diesel) used was £11,095.73 from 1st April 2007 until 31st March 2008 and £12,236.43 from 1st April 2008 to date.

The costs for maintenance of the cars over the last two years are set out in the table below:

Car	Maintenance Cost	
	07/08	08/09
Toyota Prius 1	£673	£500.40
Toyota Prius 2	£500	£418
Skoda Superb 1	£235.42	£235.42
Skoda Superb 2	£271.17	£235.42
Volkswagen Caravelle	zero	£40.78

### Civil Service Computer Systems

**Mr Burns** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the total number of recorded security breaches on computer systems in the Civil Service; (ii) the systems which were breached; (iii) the nature of each breach; (iv) the severity of the breach; (v) whether the security breaches were from an internal or external source; (vi) if the perpetrators of the breaches were identified; and (vii) the sanctions that were imposed on those perpetrators, for each of the last five years. (AQW 5851/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel:** A very limited number of non-significant security incidents involving computer systems in the NICS in the last 5 years have originated from external sources. No perpetrators have been identified and as such no sanctions could be imposed.

The recourse has been to review our efforts to protect our online sites.

### Civil Service

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of vacancies in the Northern Ireland Civil Service in the Londonderry/Derry City Council area at (a) Administrative Officer grade; (b) Executive Officer II grade; (c) Executive Officer I grade; and (d) Staff Officer grade, broken down by Government Department. (AQW 6404/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel:** The number of vacancies in permanent posts, located in the Council area, in each Northern Ireland Civil Service Departments at the grades of (a) Administrative Officer; (b) Executive Officer 2; (c) Executive Officer 1; and (d) Staff Officer is set out in the attached table.

Department	Number of vacancies			
	(a) AO	(b) EO 2	(c) EO 1	(d) SO
Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD)	2	2	0	0
Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL)	0	0	0	0
Education (DE)	0	0	0	0
Employment and Learning (DEL)	4	1.23	0	0
Enterprise, Training and Investment (DETI)	0	0	0	0
Finance and Personnel (DFP) 1	0.57	0	1	0
Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS)	0	1	0	0
Environment (DOE)	0	1	0	0



Department	Number of vacancies			
	(a) AO	(b) EO 2	(c) EO 1	(d) SO
Regional Development (DRD)	0	0	0	0
Social Development (DSD)	9.69	5.48	4	0.20
Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM)	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>16.26</b>	<b>10.71</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0.20</b>

1 DFP: Latest figures available at 12 March 2009.

## Birth Figures

**Mr Buchanan** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many children have been born to people originally from outside of Northern Ireland, in each of the Health and Social Care Trust areas, in each of the last five years. (AQW 6519/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel:** The table below give the number of births registered in each Health and Social Care Trust area, broken down by mother's country of birth, for the registration years 2004 to 2008.

**BIRTHS BY MOTHER'S COUNTRY OF BIRTH GROUPING AND HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE TRUST BY REGISTRATION YEAR 2004 TO 2008<sup>p</sup>**

Registration Year	Mother's Country of Birth	Health and Social Care Trust					Total
		Belfast	Northern	South Eastern	Southern	Western	
2004	Northern Ireland	3,433	4,995	3,484	4,036	3,108	19,056
	Rest of UK	197	382	314	237	278	1,408
	Irish Republic	77	91	65	213	243	689
	All Other Countries <sup>1</sup>	429	229	206	196	105	1,165
	<b>Total</b>	<b>4,136</b>	<b>5,697</b>	<b>4,069</b>	<b>4,682</b>	<b>3,734</b>	<b>22,318</b>
2005	Northern Ireland	3,401	4,934	3,387	4,100	3,218	19,040
	Rest of UK	190	375	322	278	298	1,463
	Irish Republic	84	89	71	201	260	705
	All Other Countries <sup>1</sup>	336	225	204	234	121	1,120
	<b>Total</b>	<b>4,011</b>	<b>5,623</b>	<b>3,984</b>	<b>4,813</b>	<b>3,897</b>	<b>22,328</b>
2006	Northern Ireland	3,468	4,991	3,571	4,197	3,384	19,611
	Rest of UK	227	384	343	253	270	1,477
	Irish Republic	87	105	71	215	258	736
	All Other Countries <sup>1</sup>	365	301	255	373	154	1,448
	<b>Total</b>	<b>4,147</b>	<b>5,781</b>	<b>4,240</b>	<b>5,038</b>	<b>4,066</b>	<b>23,272</b>
2007	Northern Ireland	3,646	5,152	3,866	4,289	3,372	20,325
	Rest of UK	225	371	332	275	253	1,456
	Irish Republic	82	75	74	243	249	723
	All Other Countries <sup>1</sup>	514	423	256	555	199	1,947
	<b>Total</b>	<b>4,467</b>	<b>6,021</b>	<b>4,528</b>	<b>5,362</b>	<b>4,073</b>	<b>24,451</b>

Registration Year	Mother's Country of Birth	Health and Social Care Trust					Total
		Belfast	Northern	South Eastern	Southern	Western	
2008 <sup>P</sup>	Northern Ireland	3,861	5,352	3,941	4,395	3,546	21,095
	Rest of UK	219	375	324	263	229	1,410
	Irish Republic	103	87	85	230	274	779
	All Other Countries <sup>1</sup>	570	527	321	705	224	2,347
	<b>Total</b>	<b>4,753</b>	<b>6,341</b>	<b>4,671</b>	<b>5,593</b>	<b>4,273</b>	<b>25,631</b>

<sup>1</sup> Includes a small number of births where the mother's country of birth was not known.

<sup>P</sup> Provisional data

### Central Procurement Directorate

**Mr Savage** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what the yearly cost was of the Central Procurement Directorate, in each of the last five years. (AQW 6809/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel:** The cost of the Central Procurement Directorate in each of the last five years was as follows.

Year	Salary Expenditure £000	Non – Salary Expenditure £000	Total £000	Income £000	Net Total £000	Capital Expenditure £000
2007/08	12,390	3,919	16,309	-10,580	5,729	589
2006/07	12,072	2,582	14,654	-9,466	5,188	469
2005/06	15,673	3,619	19,292	-13,852	5,440	339
2004/05	15,872	3,021	18,893	-12,534	6,359	530
2003/04	16,495	2,102	18,597	-13,734	4,863	406

#### Notes

1. The above figures show budget outturn for CPD for financial years 2003/04 to 2007/08. Outturn for 2008/09 is not yet available. Non - salary expenditure includes non - cash items.
2. Prior to 1 April 2006, Properties Division formed part of Central Procurement Directorate. Properties Division is now contained within the Department of Finance and Personnel Core Department.

The Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) is funded, in the main, through hard charging of client organisations. In addition, it receives an allocation of baseline funding in respect of its “common good” activities such as policy and strategy development.

CPD recently published the sixth annual report to the Procurement Board setting out progress against the targets set out in the Board's Strategic Plan. A key target for the three years 2005 - 08, for CPD and the other Centres of Procurement Expertise, was to deliver £250m of value for money gains from procurement. £254m of gains were actually delivered providing clear evidence of reform and the added value delivered by professional procurement practices. CPD's contribution to the total was £58.9m.

### Lords Barnett Formula Select Committee

**Mr McNarry** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what representations he has made to the Lords Barnett Formula Select Committee. (AQW 6953/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel:** The Head of the Civil Service formally submitted evidence to the Lords Barnett Formula Select Committee. This evidence was prepared by DFP officials and formally approved by me as Minister.

Furthermore, my officials gave oral evidence to the Select Committee when it visited Belfast on the 27th March.

### Transition of Projects

**Mr McNarry** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel in relation to the Executive's access to capital end of year flexibility stock, how are Department funding the transition of projects between financial years. (AQW 6984/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel:** The funding implications of slippage in capital projects from one year to the next are a matter for the respective departments to address from within their existing budget allocations in the first instance.

However, departments are able to submit any residual funding pressures as spending bids for consideration by the Executive as part of the in-year monitoring process.

## DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

### Regional Hospital for Children and Women

**Mr Adams** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what the proposed date is for the completion of the Regional Hospital for Children and Women. (AQW 6467/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr M McGimpsey):** Due to funding constraints, consideration is being given to the scheme going forward as two separate hospital projects. Current planning assumptions, which are constrained by my Department's budgetary allocation, mean that site enabling works are due to start in 2011, with construction of the Women's Hospital beginning in 2015/16 and completing in 2017/18. Under the current capital profiles, construction of the Children's Hospital is not anticipated to start until 2017/18 with completion expected in 2021/22.

### Regional Hospital for Children and Women

**Mr Adams** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what the proposed date is for the award of the contract for the construction of the Regional Hospital for Children and Women. (AQW 6469/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** Timescales for the award of contract for this project can only be determined following approval of the business case and confirmation of availability of funding.

Under current funding constraints, construction of the Women's hospital is not due to begin until 2015/16 with commencement of the Children's in 2017/18.

### Therapy Provision

**Dr McDonnell** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what consultation has taken place between his Department and Fleming Fulton School in relation to any possible changes in therapy provision in the school as a result of the implementation of the Review of Public Administration in Health and Social Care Trusts. (AQW 6474/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** To date, there has been no formal consultation between my Department and Fleming Fulton School in relation to possible changes to therapy provision as a result of the Review of Public Administration. However, I have asked the Trust to meet with the school as soon as possible to address any concerns around this issue.

## Dental Services

**Mr McGlone** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what provision is being made for improved access to Health Service dental services in the (i) Dungannon; (ii) Cookstown; and (iii) Magherafelt districts. (AQW 6483/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** In response to the demand for greater access to Health Service dentistry, my Department and the HSS Boards tendered for additional dentists to provide Health Service dentistry throughout Northern Ireland. The dentists will be based in areas of need including the Mid-Ulster area.

I intend to make an announcement in respect of the above in the near future.

## Hip Operations

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in relation to the delay in carrying out hip operations, (i) how many people were involved; and (ii) what the reason was for funding not being available. (AQW 6489/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** There has not been any delay in the provision of elective orthopaedic procedures or fracture treatment for patients.

At 31 December 2008, the most recent quarter for which official waiting time data are available, there were 614 patients, recorded on the DHSSPS Inpatient Waiting Times Dataset, as waiting for a hip replacement operation. The average waiting time for a hip replacement was 55 days.

At 31 December 2008, two patients were waiting for hip arthroscopy. I am advised that hip arthroscopy is a relatively new procedure for the treatment of some hip conditions and the Health Boards have not yet agreed to commission it on a routine basis. The Health Boards have however asked clinicians to submit an evidence based business case for the development of a hip arthroscopy service and the Boards will wish to consider this in full before making decisions on the recurrent funding of a hip arthroscopy service in Northern Ireland.

In the interim, where this procedure is recommended on clinical grounds, the Health Boards will consider funding the treatment of individual patients through their standard procedures for extra-contractual referral. The alternative treatment is physiotherapy and medical therapy and this may be offered where it is considered clinically appropriate.

## Dental Treatment

**Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what criteria do dentists use for dropping patients from the Health Service list if they have not required dental treatment over a five year period. (AQW 6507/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** Registration with a dentist lapses automatically after a 15 month period in cases where the patient has not seen the dentist during the registration period. If a dentist wishes to terminate a patient's registration they should provide 3 months notice. My Department is currently taking forward the measures necessary to increase the registration period to 24 months for all patients in Northern Ireland.

Dentists will advise on the most appropriate recall period, depending on the individual dental health needs of the patient.

## Royal Victoria Hospital

**Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans there are to provide additional seating for visitors in the corridors of the Royal Victoria Hospital cardiac wards. (AQW 6508/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The capacity within the corridors to hold further seating is restricted. The Trust however is to scope the potential for increased seating and will consult with



Patient and Client Support Services and Estates Services to determine whether an increase in seating can be organised.

### Funding Allocated to Hospices

**Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how much funding; and (ii) and for what purposes funding, has been allocated, to each of the hospices, in the 2009/10 financial year. (AQW 6533/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** Figures relating to the funding of individual hospices in Northern Ireland for the 2009/10 financial year are not yet available. Statutory funding to support hospices in their role of providing support for patients with life limiting or terminal illness for the 2008/09 is expected to amount to £5.32m. Health and Social Services Boards, acting as health service commissioners, provide 50% funding per adult cared for in Northern Ireland. In addition to this, £500,111 was spent on community palliative care services over the same period.

Hospice	Contributory body	Total statutory funding 2008/09
Northern Ireland Hospice (Adult)	EHSSB	£1,478,364
	DHSSPS	£130,000
	NHSSB	£527,543
Northern Ireland Children's Hospice	DHSSPS	£200,000
	Northern Trust	£40,000
	South Eastern Trust	£40,000
Marie Curie	EHSSB	£1,527,588
	NHSSB	£146,000
Southern Area Hospice	SHSSB	£937,000
Foyle Hospice	WHSSB	£297,650
<b>Total</b>		<b>£5,324,145</b>

### Autism

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action is being taken to identify adults who suffer from autism but have yet to be diagnosed. (AQW 6564/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The need for more detailed information of adults affected by Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is widely accepted. This information can only be gathered over time, by compiling information from a wide range of services, even then there will always be adults who will not come forward unless and until they need help.

The newly established Regional ASD Group will oversee the implementation of the ASD Strategic Action Plan, to be published in April. This multi disciplinary, multi agency group will develop and implement plans for the collection of data on all those affected by ASD including adults.

### Autism

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people were diagnosed with autism as adults, in each of the last three years. (AQW 6565/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The information requested is not collected centrally, and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

### Autism

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much of his learning disability budget is being allocated to people with autism. (AQW 6566/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** This information is not available centrally and could only be identified at disproportionate cost.

### Autism

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why there are no family support workers for people with autism in the (i) Southern; and (ii) South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust areas. (AQW 6567/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The Southern Health and Social Care Trust currently offers a range of dedicated core services to support families who care for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder and agreement has been reached with Commissioners to provide additional Family Support Workers with 2009/10 funding.

The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has developed a range of pre-diagnostic, diagnostic and treatment services to support people with autism which includes support for families and carers in clinic settings and the family home. The Trust also employs Autism Intervention workers whose role is to support families post diagnosis. Whilst the South Eastern Trust does not directly employ staff with the job title of “Family Support Worker”, it is contracting with voluntary organisations to establish a Family Support Service across the three localities in the South Eastern Trust. This service is currently being recruited in partnership with Autism NI and the South Eastern Trust.

### Autism

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action is proposed under his Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Strategic Action Plan to meet the needs of adults with autism. (AQW 6568/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The Autism Spectrum Disorder Strategic Action Plan is currently being developed and will address the needs of people of all ages who are affected by autism. Given the importance of the issues involved together with the broad range of services which adults need, this issue will be addressed throughout the lifespan of the Action Plan at both Regional and Local Levels.

### Attacks on Hospital Staff

**Mr Burns** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to his answer to AQW 4811/09, how many of these attacks were alcohol or drug related. (AQW 6585/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** Violent attacks against healthcare staff have been formally monitored by my Department since April 2004 and are recorded on a 6 monthly basis. At present, Trusts do not record whether attacks are alcohol or drug related. However, data collection is currently under review.

### Disposal of Vaccines

**Mr Burns** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the quantities and types of vaccines his Department has disposed of because they were past their ‘use by’ date; and (ii) the estimated financial loss to his Department from the expiration and disposal of these vaccines, in each of the last five years. (AQW 6588/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** There is an ongoing programme of review and destruction of vaccines as use-by dates are reached. Every effort is made to limit amounts destroyed.

Year	Type of Vaccine	Number of Doses	Cost
2008	Seasonal Influenza	107,620	£372,685
2007	Seasonal Influenza	101,905	£304,512
2006	Seasonal Influenza	47,992	£144,176
	Civil contingency vaccine	*	£750,000 est.
2005	Central procurement of seasonal flu vaccine started in 2005. Figures before this date are not available.		
2004			

\* For national security reasons the amounts and types of vaccine held cannot be disclosed.

## Alcohol and Drug Dependent Parents

**Mr Burns** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many children are living with (i) alcohol or (ii) drug dependent parents, broken down by Council area. (AQW 6589/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The information requested is not available.

## Health Service Dentists

**Mr T Clarke** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many Health Service dentists have stopped providing services in each Health and Social Services Board area, in each of the last five years. (AQW 6616/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The information requested is shown in table 1 below. This dental practitioner data is only available for the last four years.

TABLE 1: NUMBER OF DENTISTS<sup>1</sup> WHO HAVE STOPPED PROVIDING HS DENTAL SERVICES BY HSS BOARD<sup>2,3</sup>

	March 05 – March 06	March 06 – March 07	March 07 – March 08	March 08 – March 09
EHSSB	24	29	26	22
NHSSB	14	14	13	13
SHSSB	6	9	10	8
WHSSB	8	15	9	10
Northern Ireland <sup>4</sup>	51	64	57	52

**Source:** Central Services Agency

**Notes:**

- Figures include Principal dentists only - excludes assistants and Vocational Dental Practitioners.
- In order to obtain a split by Board, dentist numbers are taken from the list of dentists who have Health Service contracts with the HSS Boards.
- The statistics represent dentists who have ceased their contract with a Health Board during the year specified. This includes dentists who have left the Health Service completely for example due to retirement, maternity, moving solely into private practice, or leaving Northern Ireland to work elsewhere. It also includes dentists who may have ceased work in one Health Board area, but continue to practice Health Service work within another Board area.
- Dentists may work in more than one HSS Board therefore the total for all HSS Boards may not equal the Northern Ireland figure.

In order to address the problem of dentists who have stopped providing health service dentistry, my officials are currently evaluating a tender which will result in additional dentists providing full time health service dentistry in areas where difficulty is being experienced.

### Health Service Dentists

**Mr T Clarke** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of dentists providing Health Service dental care in each Health and Social Services Board area, in each of the last five years. (AQW 6617/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The information requested is shown in table 1 below.

TABLE 1: NUMBER OF DENTISTS<sup>1</sup> REGISTERED TO PROVIDE HEALTH SERVICE DENTAL SERVICES BY BOARD<sup>2</sup>

	March 05	March 06	March 07	March 08	March 09
EHSSB	325	328	334	349	366
NHSSB	187	189	191	193	201
SHSSB	140	151	155	164	172
WHSSB	114	123	121	122	120
Northern Ireland <sup>3</sup>	725	748	764	793	829

**Source:** Central Services Agency

**Notes:**

1. Figures include Principal dentists only - excludes assistants and Vocational Dental Practitioners.
2. In order to obtain a split by Board, dentist numbers are taken from the list of dentists who have Health Service contracts with the HSS Boards.
3. Dentists may work in more than one HSS Board therefore the total for all HSS Boards may not equal the Northern Ireland figure.

My officials are currently evaluating a tender which will result in additional dentists providing full time health service dentistry in areas where difficulty is being experienced.

### Health Service Dentists

**Mr T Clarke** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what actions his Department is taking to make Health Service dental care more widely available. (AQW 6618/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** My Department has worked closely with the HSS Boards to recruit additional dentists to provide Health Service dental care in areas where access is limited.

To provide longer term stability, my Department is currently negotiating a new contract with the dental profession. This will allow services to be commissioned in areas where access is currently problematic, target groups and areas which have the highest need, fairly remunerate dentists for the services they provide and provide stable and sustainable dental services. This will ensure that everyone in Northern Ireland has access to high quality effective dental care.

### Royal Victoria Hospital

**Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he has any plans to alleviate traffic congestion at peak times at the Royal Victoria Hospital by reviewing current parking arrangements. (AQW 6648/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The Belfast Trust is continually reviewing how traffic flows at the Royal Group of Hospitals site can be improved and is currently in discussions with the Car Parking provider, Car Parking Solutions, about increasing the level of car parking capacity at the hospital that would help alleviate the current traffic congestion that occurs at peak times.

### Healthy Start Food Outlets

**Ms S Ramsey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) to provide a list of retailers who are registered as a Healthy Start food outlet, in each constituency; and (ii) what incentives are offered to retailers to become a Healthy Start food outlet. (AQW 6664/09)



**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The Department is unable to provide this information in the format requested.

The Healthy Start website [www.healthystart.nhs.uk](http://www.healthystart.nhs.uk) includes a facility to enter individual postcodes to locate nearby participating retailers.

No incentives are offered to retailers to become a Healthy start food outlet. However there are a number of advantages in joining the scheme and these are highlighted on the Healthy Start website.

### Rise in Obesity

**Ms S Ramsey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of achieving the PFG target to halt the rise in obesity by 2011; and to outline how he plans to achieve this. (AQW 6666/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** In respect of the target to stop the rise in obesity in children and young people by 2010, which is shared by the Department of Education and the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, recently collected data indicates a slowing down in the rate of obesity in Primary One children. However at this stage we are unable to forecast confidently what the position will be in 2010. In respect of adult obesity the data collected to date does not suggest a slowing down in the rate of adult obesity.

My Department is addressing obesity across the life-course though the development of an obesity prevention strategic framework, this includes ongoing work on implementing the Fit Futures report.

### Intensive Care Beds

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the (i) number of referrals to; and (ii) overnight rates charged by; (a) Mater Private Hospital, Dublin; (b) Blackrock Hospital, Dublin; and (c) Guys Hospital, London, which were used because of a lack of available intensive care beds in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 6674/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** Information on the number of referrals to the Mater Private Hospital, Dublin, Blackrock Hospital, Dublin and Guys Hospital, London, because of a lack of available intensive care beds in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust during 2008/09, is not available.

In 2008/09, the Belfast HSC Trust was contracted to provide 1,000 elective cases in cardiac surgery. The Trust delivered these 1,000 cases in addition to its emergency workload. Due to increased demand for surgery however, there was a need to access treatment for an additional 411 elective patients as follows:

Referral Hospital	Number referred
Mater Private Hospital, Dublin	349
Blackrock Hospital, Dublin	24
Guys Hospital, London	38

**Source:** Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

While these patients were transferred due to capacity related issues, it is not possible to determine how many, if any, were transferred specifically due to a lack of available intensive care beds.

The overnight rate charged by each of these providers varies depending upon the reason for the patient's stay. Provision of data reflecting the full scope of overnight rates charged by each provider for patients transferred from the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust would incur a disproportionate cost.

### Neurologists

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to confirm when a second neurologist is to be appointed by the Western Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 6675/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** I am advised by the Western Trust that the consultant neurologist post has been advertised twice without successful recruitment. The Trust plans to advertise again within the next 3 months, taking account of doctors completing the relevant specialist training programme.

### Nurse Practitioners

**Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his understanding of the Nurse Practitioners' role in the Health Service. (AQW 6685/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** Nurse Practitioners are nurses who have undertaken additional training to allow them to practice with a higher level of autonomy within a defined role. Nurse practitioners operate within a number of fields of practice including: Accident and Emergency Units; Neo Natal Units; Community and Primary Care. They are employed to deliver services to patients and clients in both community and secondary care settings working in conjunction with multi-disciplinary teams.

### Nurse Practitioners

**Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the future of Nurse Practitioners. (AQW 6686/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The future of any role within health and social care is driven by the needs of patients and clients. The role of the nurse practitioner has successfully evolved to meet the needs of patients within emergency care, neonatal care and primary care. I would anticipate that the role of Nurse Practitioner will continue to evolve and expand to meet the changing demands of our population as the review of public administration challenges providers to deliver services that are responsive to local needs.

### Nurse Practitioners

**Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he supports Nurse Practitioners' aspirations to be recognised as a separate entity on the Nurse and Midwifery Council register. (AQW 6687/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The issue of annotations or marks on the professional register of the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) is the responsibility of the regulatory body and as such is outside of the remit of my Department.

### Nurse Practitioners

**Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he supports Nurse Practitioners' aspirations to be able to sign Medical Certificates and referrals. (AQW 6688/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** Extending the role of Nurse Practitioners must be set against an identified service need as well as being supported by appropriate education, training and assessment of competence; it must also meet the standards and code of practice set out by the regulator, the Nursing and Midwifery Council. I am in support of any healthcare professional developing their role in a way that supports access or provision of services to meet the changing needs of patients. Such an extension of practice will require governance processes such as clinical protocols and standards. It should be noted that there are some initiatives that may require legislative amendment to enact.

### Nurse Practitioners

**Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what his Department is doing to promote the work of Nurse Practitioners. (AQW 6689/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** In September 2006, Modernising Nursing Careers; Setting the Direction was launched as a UK wide initiative to modernise nursing careers. Through the office of

the Chief Nursing Officer, my department has been working with colleagues locally and nationally on a range of initiatives that encompass all nursing roles within four priority areas:

- Develop a competent and flexible nursing workforce
- Update career pathways and career choices
- Preparing to lead in a changed health and social care system
- Modernise the image of nursing and nursing careers

### Efficiency Savings

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when he will be assessing the Health and Social Care Trusts' proposals for efficiency savings. (AQW 6698/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** I have received proposals from four of the Health and Social Care Trusts.

I have made my decisions and announced them in relation to the proposals for residential care homes and further decisions will follow in the near future, after I have considered the Trust proposals further.

### Health Budget

**Mr Burns** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) to detail how much has been saved in relation to the health budget as a result of the temporary cut in VAT; and (ii) how much has been saved by his Department as a result. (AQW 6703/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The cut in the VAT rate has had minimal impact on the health service and the Department of Health Social Services and Public Safety, since VAT paid on goods and services by government departments in Northern Ireland may be refunded. This exemption also extends to health and social care bodies not classed as non-departmental public bodies.

Some savings have been made by those HSC bodies classed as non-departmental public bodies. However, the value of these savings cannot be quantified without disproportionate time and cost.

### Public Health

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the impact that climate change will have on public health. (AQW 6723/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The scientific community has expressed in no uncertain terms that climate change is the biggest environmental concern facing the world today. With rising temperatures, changing sea levels, and extreme weather patterns, it presents a major threat to public health. Globally, climate change is expected to have consequences on economic development, food production, access to water, migration patterns and has the potential to affect transmission patterns of communicable diseases. These effects will be felt more strongly in some countries than in others. The forthcoming review of the Investing for Health Strategy is likely to highlight the need to consider how to address the public health challenges of climate change in a cross-cutting way.

Reports from the Department of Health in 2002 and from the Health Protection Agency in 2007 have helped us to begin to understand the likely health effects of climate change. Locally, the report "Preparing for a changing climate in Northern Ireland" produced by the Scotland and Northern Ireland Forum for Environmental Research (SNIFFER) in February 2007 has been a helpful addition to this analysis.

Not all the effects will be negative. Overall, the reports suggest generally that with adequate planning, the Health and Social Care system should cope well with the impacts of climate change.

### Love for Life Programme

**Mr Storey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the feedback his Department has received from schools that use the 'Love for Life' programme to complement the relationships and sexuality education in the personal development scheme. (AQW 6735/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** My Department has not received detailed feedback from schools that use the 'Love for Life' programme to complement the relationships and sexuality education in the personal development scheme.

### Health and Social Services Board Jobs

**Mr Hilditch** asked Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many Health and Social Services Board jobs there are in the East Antrim area. (AQW 6748/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** This information is not available centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

### Polycythaemia

**Mr Hilditch** asked Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why chemotherapy is no longer the recommended treatment for those patients who suffer from Polycythaemia; and why drugs are prescribed instead. (AQW 6749/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** I can confirm that chemotherapy remains a treatment option for patients suffering from polycythaemia who meet certain clinical criteria.

Patients with polycythaemia in Northern Ireland are treated as per the national guidelines from the British Society of Haematology on the diagnosis, investigation and management of polycythaemia.

It is a matter for clinicians to decide on the most appropriate form of treatment for individual patients.

### Polycythaemia

**Mr Hilditch** asked Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action his Department is taking to help patients with Polycythaemia. (AQW 6751/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** Patients with polycythaemia are referred to the haematology service in their Trust area. More complex cases can be referred to a specialist clinic at Belfast City Hospital.

### Independent Sector Providers

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for the cost of using independent sector providers for the 2007/08 and 2008/09 period. (AQW 6755/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** I refer the Member to the answer I gave to AQW 4342/09.

### Agency Staff

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for the cost of using agency staff for the 2007/08 and 2008/09 period. (AQW 6756/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** I refer the Member to the answer I gave to AQW 4343/09 on 6 February 2009. Information on the use of Agency staff is published on a bi-annual basis on the departmental website at [www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/hrd/wpu/wpu-monitoring.htm](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/hrd/wpu/wpu-monitoring.htm)



The cost of agency staff for 08/09 is not yet available however the information relating to the first half of the 08/09 year will shortly be placed on the website, following internal validation of the figures.

### Consultant Posts

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many consultant posts are vacant. (AQW 6757/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** Information on the number of consultant vacancies can be found in the latest Northern Ireland Health and Social Care Workforce Vacancies Report at 30th September 2008, which is on the DHSSPS website at:

[http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/vacancy\\_survey\\_september\\_2008\\_web\\_report.pdf](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/vacancy_survey_september_2008_web_report.pdf)

### Appointments at Outpatients

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many appointments at outpatients were seen within waiting times, and how many appointments were not, in 2008/09. (AQW 6758/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The 2008/09 Priority for Action target relating to waiting times for a first outpatient appointment states that 'Trusts should ensure that, from April 2008, no patient waits longer than 13 weeks for a first outpatient appointment, reducing to 9 weeks by March 2009.

Information on the number of outpatients seen for the first time, and the number of patients waiting for a first outpatient appointment is collected by the Department on a quarterly basis.

The number of (i) outpatients seen for the first time and (ii) the number waiting more than the maximum waiting time of 13 weeks are outlined in the table below, for the first three quarters of 2008/09.

Quarter Ending	Total Outpatients seen for the first time	Total waiting more than 13 weeks
30th June 2008	121,470	82
30th September 2008	117,976	317
31st December 2008	124,284	239

Source: Departmental Returns CH3 and CH4.

### Royal Victoria Hospital

**Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) to provide the results of the hygiene audits for theatre 1 at the Royal Victoria Hospital since 1 November 2008; (ii) what impact these results have had on cleaning procedures; and (iii) what changes are planned as a result of these audits. (AQW 6759/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:**

- (i) The environmental cleanliness audit results for Theatre 1 at the Royal Victoria Hospital since 1 November 2008 are as follows:
- |                  |     |
|------------------|-----|
| 8 December 2008  | 86% |
| 19 January 2009  | 91% |
| 16 February 2009 | 87% |
| 16 March 2009    | 90% |
- (ii) These results have not impacted on cleaning procedures however the Hospital management recognise that continual improvement must be maintained.
- (iii) Changes planned for the Royal Group of Hospitals cleaning service include:
- the use of microfiber dusting for very high and high risk areas;

- increased supervision;
- investment in new cleaning equipment.

### Royal Victoria Hospital

**Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) to provide the results of the hygiene audits for ward 4F at the Royal Victoria Hospital since 1 November 2008; (ii) what impact these results have had on cleaning procedures; and (iii) what changes are planned as a result of these audits.

(AQW 6760/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:**

- (i) The environmental cleanliness audit results for Ward 4F at the Royal Victoria Hospital since 1 November 2008 are as follows:
- |                  |     |
|------------------|-----|
| 25 November 2008 | 39% |
| 11 December 2008 | 74% |
| 10 March 2009    | 77% |
- (ii) The result for November 2008 has resulted in remedial action being taken by the Trust as evidenced by the measured improvements in the December and March results.
- (iii) As a result of audit scores in respect to the condition of the environment and the cost of the necessary upgrades, the Trust is considering closing the kitchen in Ward 4F. In addition, the Trust is planning for the use of microfiber dusting for very high and high risk areas, increasing supervision and investment in new cleaning equipment.

### Listeria Outbreak

**Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how a copy can be obtained of the independent report into the listeria outbreak in the Belfast Trust in 2008. (AQW 6761/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The report of the investigation into this outbreak is being drafted and is due to be published by the end of June. My Department will advise closer to the publication date how the report can be obtained.

### St Luke's Hospital, Armagh

**Mr Irwin** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to confirm whether a section of the St Luke's Hospital site in Armagh is being prepared for sale, if so, to provide the reasons for the sale. (AQW 6776/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** I can confirm that no portion of the St Luke's Hospital site in Armagh is currently being prepared for sale.

### Prescription Charges

**Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in light of the recent announcement on prescription charges, if people who have made an annual pre-payment for their prescriptions, will be entitled to any refund. (AQW 6781/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** There is no provision under the relevant regulations, the Charges for Drugs and Appliances Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1997, for entitlement to a refund as a result of the reduction in prescription charges since 1st January 2009. However, a full or partial refund of a Pre-payment Certificate can be considered if a person fits the exemption criteria covered in these regulations. Further details on refunds can be found in the booklet HC11 "Are you entitled to help with health costs?" available on the Departmental website

[http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/hc11\\_help\\_with\\_health\\_costs.pdf](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/hc11_help_with_health_costs.pdf)

### Dental Practices

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps can people take in North Down to find a dental practice that accepts Health Service patients. (AQW 6798/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** In the first instance members of the public seeking a dental practice should contact practices in their area to enquire whether any are taking on health service patients. In the event of difficulties, the Dental Directorate for the Health and Social Care Board will be happy to assist people to find a Health Service dentist in their area. They can be contacted on 028 9055 3780 or in writing at Health and Social Care Board Headquarters, 12-22 Linenhall Street, Belfast, BT2 8BS.

### Family Support Workers

**Mr Craig** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many family support workers are in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust area. (AQW 6811/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has advised that as at March 2009, there are 16 (12.0 Whole-Time Equivalent) Family Support Workers employed in the South Eastern HSC Trust area. Recruitment is currently ongoing for an additional 3 (2.0 WTE) Family Support Workers within Children's Services.

### Children on the 'at risk' Register

**Mr Craig** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many children in the Lagan Valley constituency are on the 'at risk' register. (AQW 6814/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The information is not available in the form requested.

### Residential Homes

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what are the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust's alternative efficiency plans after the announcement that Ravara House Residential home will not be closing. (AQW 6823/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust will be developing alternative proposals to ensure its efficiency target can be met.

### Residential Homes

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what are the Southern Health and Social Care Trust's alternative efficiency plans after the announcement that two residential homes will not be closing. (AQW 6824/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The Southern Health and Social Care Trust will be developing alternative proposals to ensure its efficiency target can be met.

### Clinical Physiologists

**Mrs O'Neill** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what discussions he has had with his counterpart, Ben Bradshaw MP, about implementing a statutory regulation for clinical physiologists. (AQW 6837/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** Statutory regulation of clinical physiologists, like most healthcare professionals, will be on a UK-wide basis.

Consequently the Department of Health (DH) in England will be taking the lead in bringing forward legislation which will lead to the statutory regulation of clinical physiologists. DH recently provided a timeline to the Registration Council for Clinical Physiologists (RCCP), the profession's leadership body, for the development of this UK-wide legislation.

While I have not had discussions with my counterparts in DH on this matter I have been fully briefed by my officials on the progress towards statutory regulation for clinical physiologists and I fully support work in this area.

### Clinical Physiologists

**Mrs O'Neill** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is his position on implementing statutory regulation for clinical physiologists. (AQW 6838/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The purpose of regulation of healthcare professionals is to secure safe, effective, respectful and high quality care for individuals who depend on health and social care staff for their health and well-being. Regulatory systems need to be proportionate to risk and need to secure the confidence of the public. Since many people have interaction with healthcare professionals when they are unwell and more vulnerable I fully support adequate regulation of those operating in healthcare.

My Department is currently heavily involved in the out workings of the White Paper, "Trust, Assurance and Safety – The Regulation of Health Professionals in the 21st Century". Officials are developing a range of measures which will lead to better regulation across a range of healthcare professions in Northern Ireland.

The need for statutory regulation of clinical physiologists was identified some time ago and I fully support the implementation of this regulation. I am aware that the Department of Health in England, who will take the lead in preparing the legislation, have recently provided a timeline for this legislation.

### Mid-Ulster Hospital

**Mr Molloy** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) if the Northern Health and Social Care Trust will ensure that the acute and accident and emergency provision in the Mid-Ulster Hospital remains open until a new ward is built; and (ii) if he can guarantee the safety of patients who will be using an overcrowded and diluted service. (AQW 6842/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** I am advised that, following extensive consultation final proposals for the future provision of healthcare, including hospital services, in the Northern Trust area were agreed at the Trust Board meeting on Thursday 26 March 2009. These proposals will now be referred to me for consideration.

I will give these proposals my fullest consideration before determining the most appropriate way forward.

In the meantime, I would restate my commitment that there will be no significant changes to services provided at the Mid-Ulster until appropriate and robust alternatives are in place, subject to any clinical risk and patient safety issues which may emerge.

### Dental Practices

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to his answer to AQW 6228/09, to list the dental practices in North Down that have accepted Health Service patients, in the last year. (AQW 6845/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** A list of practices in North Down who have registered new Health Service patients at any time during 2008/09 year is provided below.

A new Health Service patient is defined as a patient who is registered with a Health Service dentist employed in a given surgery at March 2009, but the patient was not registered there at April 2008. It should be noted that Health Service registered patients may be registered for emergency treatments only.



Address 1	Address 2	Postcode
32 Abbey Street	Bangor	BT20 4JA
29a Hamilton Road	Bangor	BT20 4LF
109g Clandeboye Road	Bangor	BT20 3JW
38 Brunswick Road	Bangor	BT20 3DU
4 Hamilton Road	Bangor	BT20 4LE
25 Hamilton Road	Bangor	BT20 4LF
107 Hamilton Road	Bangor	BT20 4LN
16 Hamilton Road	Bangor	BT20 4LE
4 Bingham Street	Bangor	BT20 5DW
38 Hamilton Road	Bangor	BT20 4LE
Springhill Surgery	Bangor	BT19 1NB
97 Brunswick Road	Bangor	BT20 3DW
1 Moira Drive	Bangor	BT20 4RN
Bloomfield Surgery	Bangor	BT20 4XA
22a Groomsport Road	Bangor	BT20 5LN
64 Donaghadee Rd	Bangor	BT20 4QX
13 The Parade	Donaghadee	BT21 0AE
55/57 High Street	Donaghadee	BT21 0AQ
1a Station Road	Helens Bay	BT19 1TN
116 High Street	Hollywood	BT18 9HW
128 High Street	Hollywood	BT18 9HW
32 Shore Road	Hollywood	BT18 9HX

Source: Central Services Agency

### Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service

**Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he will consider the appointment of an independent special adviser to assist him with all matters pertaining to the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service. (AQW 6849/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** No. I do not consider it necessary to appoint a special adviser to assist me with Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service matters.

### Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service

**Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to his answer to AQW 6452/09, how impartial the advice of the Chief Fire Officer and the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service Board can be, since they take the decisions to which Assembly questions refers. (AQW 6850/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** I rely on the advice provided by the Chief Fire Officer and the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Services Board to be objective and professional on all operational matters.

### Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service

**Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to his answer to AQW 6452/09, if he will review all decisions he has made about the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service, taking independent input to ensure impartiality in decision making. (AQW 6857/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** I have no plans to review decisions in relation to the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service.

### Cherry Lodge, Randalstown

**Mr Burns** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) to provide an update on the review of services at Cherry Lodge, Randalstown; and (ii) to confirm if this facility will now remain open despite being initially proposed for closure. (AQW 6871/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** Consultation on the proposals in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust closed on the 6th March 2009 and I have recently received information from the Trust on the outcome of this consultation process. I am currently reviewing this in light of responses to the consultation and will announce my decision soon.

### Health Service Staff

**Mr Burns** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail how many Health Service staff were disciplined for failing to follow hygiene procedures, in each of the last five years. (AQW 6872/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The information requested is not readily available for years prior to April 2007. However, information held by HSC Trusts since they established in April 2007 indicates that one individual has been disciplined for failing to follow hygiene procedures.

### Dental Treatment

**Mr Dallat** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) where people in Limavady can get Health Service dental treatment; and (ii) what steps he intends to take to ensure that Health Service dental treatment is available in all areas. (AQW 6915/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** I recognise that in some areas, including Limavady, it has become difficult to access Health Service dentistry. For this reason, my Department has worked closely with the HSS Boards to recruit additional dentists to provide Health Service dental care in areas where access is limited.

To provide longer term stability, my Department is currently negotiating a new contract with the dental profession. This will allow services to be commissioned in areas where access is currently problematic, target groups and areas which have the highest need, fairly remunerate dentists for the services they provide and provide stable and sustainable dental services. This will ensure that everyone in Northern Ireland has access to high quality effective dental care.

### Obstetric Services

**Mrs Hanna** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if the Lagan Valley Community Midwifery unit that will only caters for low risk births, will put further pressure on obstetric services at the Royal Victoria Hospital, Craigavon Area and Ulster Hospitals. (AQW 6919/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** Maternity services in Northern Ireland are of a high standard, professionally delivered and safe, and I am confident that the transfer of inpatient obstetrics from Lagan Valley Hospital will not affect this standard.

I have asked the Trust to work closely with other Trusts and the new Health and Social Care Board to bring forward detailed proposals for the introduction of this new service and produce an implementation plan so that the change in services can be introduced quickly.

I have also recently announced significant investments to improve capacity for maternity services at Craigavon Area Hospital and Daisy Hill Hospital, and this year an additional 12 midwives are being trained specifically for the Southern Trust area.

In addition I am investing £4.2 million at the Royal Jubilee Maternity Hospital. This resource will be used to maintain services and address issues of infection control and patient safety. It will also provide additional capacity of up to 1200 births from across the Greater Belfast area including the Lisburn area.

We will as always keep the situation in relation to capacity under review.

### Obstetric Services

**Mrs Hanna** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he has any plans to improve or enhance obstetric services at the Royal Victoria Hospital since Lagan Valley Hospital is only dealing with low risk births. (AQW 6920/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** Maternity services in Northern Ireland are of a high standard, professionally delivered and safe, and I am confident that the transfer of inpatient obstetrics from Lagan Valley Hospital will not affect this standard.

I have asked the Trust to work closely with other Trusts and the new Health and Social Care Board to bring forward detailed proposals for the introduction of this new service and produce an implementation plan so that the change in services can be introduced quickly.

I have also recently announced significant investments to improve capacity for maternity services at Craigavon Area Hospital and Daisy Hill Hospital, and this year an additional 12 midwives are being trained specifically for the Southern Trust area.

In addition I am investing £4.2 million at the Royal Jubilee Maternity Hospital. This resource will be used to maintain services and address issues of infection control and patient safety. It will also provide additional capacity of up to 1200 births from across the Greater Belfast area including the Lisburn area.

We will as always keep the situation in relation to capacity under review.

### Proposed Changes to Health Sector

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what the projected savings are for his Department from the proposed changes to the health sector under the review of public administration. (AQW 6950/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** My Department will deliver savings of £53m per annum by 2010-11 through restructuring and modernisation under the review of public administration. Over the period 2007-08 to 2010-11 total savings will be £116m.

### Investment Delivery Plans

**Mr Hamilton** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) when he plans to publish his Departments remaining investment delivery plans; (ii) what projects these plans relate to; and (iii) why they have been delayed. (AQW 6958/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The investment strategy did not deliver the level of capital investment required for Health, and as a result, I commissioned a review of capital priorities which takes account of the current budgetary constraints. I am still considering how best to address the key issue of the timing of projects within these budgetary constraints.

I hope to be in a position to publish my Department's investment delivery plan before the summer recess.

## Dental Practices

**Mr Ross** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many dental practices in East Antrim have accepted Health Service patients in each of the last three years; and to list these practices. (AQW 6962/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The number of practices in the East Antrim Constituency area which have registered new Health Service patients in each of the last three years is shown in table 1 below, and a list of these practices is shown in table 2.

A new Health Service patient is defined as a patient who is registered with a Health Service dentist employed in a given surgery at March of a given year, but the patient was not registered there at April of the previous year.

Table 1: Number of dental practices in East Antrim Constituency that have registered Health Service patients in each of the last three years.

	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Number of East Antrim practices that registered new Health Service patients	16	16	16

**Source:** Family Practitioner Services - HSC Business Services Organisation

**TABLE 2: LIST OF DENTAL PRACTICES IN EAST ANTRIM CONSTITUENCY THAT HAVE REGISTERED HEALTH SERVICE PATIENTS IN EACH OF THE LAST THREE YEARS.**

Address 1	Address 2	Postcode
1 Marine Road	Carnlough	BT44 0HE
19 St Brides Street	Carrickfergus	BT38 8AF
2 Market Place	Carrickfergus	BT38 7AW
51 Victoria Road	Carrickfergus	BT38 7JJ
22 West Street	Carrickfergus	BT38 7AR
22 North Street	Carrickfergus	BT38 7AQ
50 Station Road	Greenisland	BT38 8TP
14 Victoria Road	Larne	BT40 1RN
11 Thorndale Avenue	Larne	BT40 1QX
9/11 Glenarm Road	Larne	BT40 1BN
11 Victoria Road	Larne	BT40 1RT
137 Old Glenarm Road	Larne	BT40 1NH
105 Monkstown Road	Newtownabbey	BT37 0LG
604 Shore Road	Whiteabbey	BT37 0SN
14 Balmoral Avenue	Whitehead	BT38 9QD
14 Marine Parade	Whitehead	BT38 9QP

**Source:** Family Practitioner Services - HSC Business Services Organisation

## Heart Surgery Procedures

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety the number of heart surgery procedures carried out in the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast in the last three years. (AQW 6964/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The number of heart surgery procedures carried out in the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast in the last three years is shown in the following table:-



Year	Heart Surgery Procedures
2007/08	6,515
2006/07	6,126
2005/06	6,280

Source: Hospital Inpatient System

### Urgent Care and Treatment Centres

**Mr Buchanan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what the difference is between the level of services delivered at a Minor Injuries Unit and an Urgent Care and Treatment Centre. (AQW 6981/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** Tyrone County is the only local hospital in Northern Ireland with an Urgent Care and Treatment Centre (UCTC).

The UCTC provides treatment and care for cuts bruises, sprains or minor fractures to limbs. In addition to these services, nurse specialists at the UCTC also assess walk-in patients presenting with heart problems. Patients presenting with serious conditions and likely to require admission are normally transferred for treatment to a hospital with the appropriate range of acute services. Those patients whose condition is assessed as less serious can be appropriately managed at TCH, where they can undergo further diagnostic tests or observation.

Services at the Urgent Care and Treatment Centre are provided on a 24/7 basis.

### Altnagelvin and Erne Hospital

**Mr Buchanan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the length of time patients at (i) Altnagelvin; and (ii) the Erne Hospital are kept on trollies while waiting for a bed to become available. (AQW 6982/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** I refer the member to the answers I gave to AQW 5974/09 and 5976/09 on 12 March 2009.

### Altnagelvin and Erne Hospital

**Mr Buchanan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients in (i) Altnagelvin; and (ii) the Erne Hospital have had to spend time on a trolley, in March 2009. (AQW 6983/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** I refer the member to the answers I gave to AQW 5974/09 and 5976/09 on 12 March 2009.

### Second Fire Appliance in Portstewart

**Mr Robinson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he could confirm that he ordered the second fire appliance in Portstewart to be returned to emergency call out status until he makes the final determination about its future. (AQW 7000/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The decision to return the second appliance at Portstewart to emergency call out status was taken by the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service following discussions with my Department.

## DEPARTMENT FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### Public Transport

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Regional Development what progress has been made to increase availability to public transport for people with disabilities, particularly in terms of cost and affordability. (AQW 6412/09)

**Minister for Regional Development (Mr C Murphy):** I am told by Translink that all Metro services in Belfast are operated by low floor buses which meet Disabled Persons' Transport Advisory Committee standards. Of the Ulsterbus fleet of 1214 vehicles, 61 percent are wheelchair accessible and 48 percent have low floors. Translink has carried out work to improve station accessibility at the majority of stations to ensure they meet with the conditions set out in the Disability Discrimination Act. The scope of this work was developed in consultation with Disability Action in order to provide best value across the network for all disabled users. The cost of this work was £17million.

In addition to these public transport services, my department also provides funding to the door-to-door transport scheme which provides low cost, local transport in 29 urban areas for people with disabilities or who cannot avail of mainstream public transport due to ill health or age, and to the Rural Transport Fund which supports rural community transport groups to provide transport in rural areas to people with reduced mobility.

People who are registered blind or are war disabled are eligible for free concessionary travel on public transport. Other disabled passengers using public transport are entitled to a half fare concession.

### Northfield Road, Donaghadee

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans Road Service has to widen the Northfield Road, Donaghadee. (AQW 6510/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** My Department's Roads Service has advised me that there are no plans to widen the Northfield Road, Donaghadee.

### Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans his Department has to resurface the Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee. (AQW 6511/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that there are no plans to carry out resurfacing in the Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee. However, Roads Service will continue to inspect the roads within the estate and repair any defects identified, in accordance with road maintenance guidelines.

### Resurface Ashfield Estate, Donaghadee

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans his Department has to resurface the Ashfield Estate, Donaghadee. (AQW 6512/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that there are no plans to carry out resurfacing in the Ashfield Estate, Donaghadee. However, Roads Service will continue to inspect the roads within the estate and repair any defects identified, in accordance with road maintenance guidelines.

### Beechfield and Ashfield Estates, Donaghadee

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans his Department has to include another route into the Beechfield and Ashfield Estates Donaghadee. (AQW 6513/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that the draft Ards and Down Area Plan 2015 includes a section of land between the Newtownards Road and the Cannyreagh Road, Donaghadee, which is zoned for housing. One of the key design criteria for the development of this land is that

any developer should construct a distributor road, linking these two roads. Although no timescale can be put on its provision, as it is dependent on housing development, this link road would represent an alternative route into the Beechfield and Ashfield Estates.

### Parking Meters Scheme

**Mr Craig** asked the Minister for Regional Development what the cost of enforcing the parking meters scheme is in Lisburn City Centre. (AQW 6560/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that, since the commencement of Decriminalised Parking Enforcement, in October 2006, there have been five Traffic Attendants deployed in Lisburn City, on a daily basis, to enforce waiting and parking restrictions. The annual cost of this enforcement is approximately £160,000.

I can further advise that since the introduction of the controlled parking zone in Lisburn, in July 2008, the daily deployment levels and enforcement costs have remained unchanged.

### Shared Surface Planning Approval

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline his Department's policy on objections, lodged by residents in established housing developments with a shared surface, in relation to planning approval that is sought or granted for further housing development with access through the existing shared surface. (AQW 6569/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** When considering such objections by residents in established housing developments, my Department's Roads Service applies the guidelines of the Planning Service/Roads Service joint publication 'Creating Places'. Each objection is considered on its merits and in line with the published standards and guidance.

The 'Creating Places' publication can be accessed from the Planning Service internet site at the following web address:

[http://www.planningni.gov.uk/index/policy/supplementary\\_guidance/guides/guides\\_places.htm](http://www.planningni.gov.uk/index/policy/supplementary_guidance/guides/guides_places.htm)

### Road Repair Budget Cutbacks

**Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the extent of the road repair budget cutbacks that he is planning for (i) the remainder of this financial year; and (ii) 2009/10. (AQW 6573/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** There is no planned reduction in my Department's Roads Service budget for road maintenance in 2008/09. The Member may be interested to note that as part of the Executive's response to the current economic difficulties, an additional £2.5 million was made available in 2008/09 for this key activity.

With regard to the 2009/10 financial year, I can further advise that there are no plans to reduce the Roads Services funding for structural maintenance, which is currently estimated at £71.8 million.

### Translink

**Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister for Regional Development what action he has taken to ensure that applying value for money criteria does not adversely impact on the quality of services provided by Translink, especially in rural areas. (AQW 6574/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** The rules that govern all public sector investment decisions dictate that value for money must be demonstrated. This means delivering good quality services in a cost effective manner; it does not mean delivering poor services as cheaply as possible. Value for money involves consideration of effectiveness of services which includes quality of service.

The quality of the services provided by Translink is defined under the targets set in the Regional Transportation Strategy which cover the following areas:

- Average age of buses – to be no more than 8 years by 2012, with no bus older than 18 years or Goldline coach older than 12 years;
- 100% of buses accessible by 2012;
- All local trains replaced by new trains by 2012;
- Reliability and punctuality targets set in the Passenger's Charter i.e. 99.2% of all buses and trains to run as planned (99.5% on the Dublin line), 95% of all buses to arrive no more than 7 minutes late, 95% of local trains to arrive no more than 5 minutes late and 90% of cross-border trains to arrive no more than 10 minutes late.

These targets apply equally to rural and urban areas and are delivered through substantial DRD investment in buses, trains and road and rail infrastructure thus ensuring good quality Translink bus and rail services.

### **Gortcorbies Climbing Lane**

**Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on finding a solution to the problem of surplus material that will be generated during the construction of the Gortcorbies climbing lane on the Coleraine to Londonderry/Derry A37 road. (AQW 6575/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that they are continuing to seek a solution to the problem of surplus material that will be generated during the construction of the Gortcorbies Climbing Lane on the Coleraine to Derry A37 road. The climbing lane lies within the Binevenagh Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and it has proved to be difficult to develop a cost effective solution to dispose of the substantial volume of surplus material, in a manner which would have the least environmental and ecological effect on this area.

I have been advised by Roads Service that there are now two options being examined, which may reduce the amount of surplus material arising from the construction of the scheme. An environmental assessment and design will assist with the selection of a cost effective scheme, which best fits the topography and the environment. Appropriate disposal of the surplus material, arising from construction of the scheme, will be a vital part of the environmental assessment and environmental design.

However, some, or all, of the surplus material may have to be disposed of in licensed tips, remote from the Binevenagh Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and this would add considerably to construction costs.

### **Beechfield and Ashfield Estates, Donaghadee**

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Regional Development if his Department would do an evaluation of the condition of the roads in and around Beechfield and Ashfield Estates, Donaghadee. (AQW 6594/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that the roads in and around the Beechfield and Ashfield estates, Donaghadee, are routinely inspected under a cyclic regime. Actionable defects noted during these inspections are processed for repairs in accordance with Roads Service's maintenance guidelines.

There are no plans therefore to carry out a separate evaluation at these locations.

### **Water Supply in Portaferry**

**Mr Hamilton** asked the Minister for Regional Development what action his Department intends to take to resolve the problems with burst water main; and the resulting loss of water supply in the Portaferry area. (AQW 6633/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the incident which resulted in a disruption to the water supply for some customers in the Portaferry area is currently being reviewed together with other associated problems with the water distribution system. In view of the frequency of interruptions to the water supply in the area, NIW is investigating the possibility of implementing further infrastructure improvements to ensure continuity of the water supply.



I have asked the Acting Chief Executive of NIW, Chris Mellor, to write to you when the outcome of the investigation is known.

### Water Supply in Portaferry

**Mr Hamilton** asked the Minister for Regional Development how much has been spent on repairing burst water mains in the Portaferry area, in each of the last three years. (AQW 6634/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that it estimates that it has cost £22,000 to repair burst water mains in the Portaferry area from 2007 to date and this can be broken down as follows:-

2007	2008	2009 (To Date)
£9,000	£9,000	£4,000

### Drain Cleansing Teams

**Mr Newton** asked the Minister for Regional Development when drain cleansing teams last worked in the Orangefield area of East Belfast, in particular, Orangefield Park. (AQW 6645/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that the storm water carriageway gullies, in the Orangefield area and Orangefield Park, were last inspected and cleaned as follows:-

- Orangefield area - between mid-December 2008 and mid-February 2009.
- Orangefield Park - 10 February 2009, when all gullies were found to be operating normally.

### Road Resurfacing Projects

**Mr Newton** asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the (i) footpath; and (ii) road resurfacing projects planned for the East Belfast constituency, in the next 12 months. (AQW 6646/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that in anticipation of financial allocations being finalised, that within the East Belfast Constituency, the carriageway and footway resurfacing schemes, detailed in the table below, have been provisionally programmed for completion in the 2009/10 financial year,.

Location	Scheme Type
Knocklofty Park, Belfast	Footway resurfacing
Wanstead Avenue, Dundonald	Footway and carriageway resurfacing
Craigleith Drive, Dundonald	Footway resurfacing
Castlehill Road, Belfast (part of carriageway)	Carriageway resurfacing
Ballyhanwood Road, Dundonald	Carriageway resurfacing

### Energy Saving Light Bulbs

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans his Department has to use energy saving light bulbs for street lighting. (AQW 6650/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that it seeks to use the most suitable street lighting equipment for energy efficiency and performance. Conventional energy saving light bulbs, such as compact fluorescents, are generally not the most energy efficient choice for street lighting. Other efficient lamps, such as Light Emitting Diodes (LEDs), are likely to become viable light sources for street

lighting in the near future. Should suitable LEDs become available, Roads Service will assess their efficiency and performance, with the view to possible implementation.

### Water Mains Bursts in Portaferry

**Mr Hamilton** asked the Minister for Regional Development how many water mains bursts there have been in the Portaferry area, in the last 3 years. (AQW 6673/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that the number of incidents of burst water mains in the Portaferry area from 2007 to date is as follows:-

2007	2008	2009 (To Date)
18	18	8

### Budget for Roads in North Down

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Regional Development when he plans to reveal his Department's budget for roads in the North Down area, in the next financial year. (AQW 6697/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** My Department's Road Service budget is usually allocated to its divisions and section offices by May of each year. Roads Service will consult with district councils early in the 2009/10 financial year prior to setting out details of planned works in the spring reports to each council. Council reports can be viewed at [www.roadsni.gov.uk/index/publications/publications-council\\_reports.htm](http://www.roadsni.gov.uk/index/publications/publications-council_reports.htm).

### Homes on the Ballybryan Road, Greyabbey

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to his answer to AQW 6199/09, if he could explain how homes on the Ballybryan Road, Greyabbey have had a minimum standard, when water has not been available on 50% of the days since Christmas 2008. (AQW 6716/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the height of the properties above the stop tap at the boundary may be affecting the water supply at Ballybryan Road, Greyabbey and the issue is currently being reviewed together with other associated problems with the water distribution system in the area.

In view of the frequency of interruptions to the water supply, NIW is investigating the possibility of implementing infrastructure improvements to improve continuity of the water supply in the area.

I have asked the Acting Chief Executive of NIW, Chris Mellor, to write to you when the outcome of the investigation is known.

### Northern Ireland Water

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister for Regional Development what consultation was carried out with (i) local representatives; and (ii) business people in Rasharkin prior to the announcement that the Main Street was to be closed by NI Water; and how much notice members of the public and businesses received. (AQW 6721/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that it is investing around £1 million to improve the sewerage network in Rasharkin and this work will benefit businesses and residents in the area.

The road closure at Main Street was essential to progress this work and businesses and local residents were notified of the closure on 20 March 2009 through publication of notices in local newspapers by Roads Service. In addition, NIW commenced a letter drop on 23 March to approximately 500 properties and a representative was made available to meet anyone with queries regarding the scheme.

The work commenced on 30 March 2009 and NIW aims to keep the timescale of the road closure to a minimum to reduce any inconvenience to local businesses and residents.

## Road Openings by Utilities

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the Road Openings by Utilities: Follow-up to Recommendations of the Public Accounts Committee (NIA 19/08-09) report. (AQW 6722/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** I note publication of the report and will consider the Committee's recommendations fully.

An established parliamentary process is in place for responding to recommendations made by the Public Accounts Committee. A detailed Memorandum of Reply, setting out my Department's response to the report, will be submitted to the Chairman of the Committee by 22 May 2009.

It would, therefore, be inappropriate for me to comment in detail in advance of the issue of the Memorandum of Reply.

## A4 Realignment

**Mr Elliott** asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) when the network of minor roads adjacent to the A4 realignment will be reinstated following heavy damage from construction and diverted traffic; and (ii) to confirm if it is his Department or the contractor who is responsible for the work. (AQW 6765/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that the contractor working on the Dungannon to Ballygawley dual carriageway, currently employs a full time crew that carries out weekly inspections of the side roads, used by construction traffic, adjacent to this major scheme. Where damage has occurred they carry out repairs, including verge reinstatement and repairing pot holes. Roads Service also carries out inspections of these roads, to ensure they are kept in a safe condition.

In addition, the A4 scheme design includes upgrading various sections of the minor road network, adjacent to the new road. This will address any damage on side roads, which cross or link to the new dual carriageway. These works are being completed, on a road by road basis, as the scheme progresses.

Roads outside these upgrades will be inspected jointly, with the Design Build Finance Operate Company and Roads Service. A programme of repairs will be carried out as soon as practical, after use by construction traffic has stopped. Where it is proven that extraordinary traffic generated by the contractor has caused the damage, the contractor will be liable for the repair.

## Translink

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister for Regional Development what feasibility studies have been carried out, in the last five years by Translink regarding the placing of a bus shelter in Rasharkin. (AQW 6773/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** This is an operational matter for Translink. However, I have been informed that, on two occasions in 2005, representatives from Ballymoney Council, the Department of the Environment and Translink carried out an assessment of Rasharkin with a view to erecting a bus shelter. One possible site was considered but planning permission was refused. There were also objections received from residents.

More recently Translink considered another potential site but has concluded that no suitable site exists.

## Translink

**Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister for Regional Development what cuts Translink is planning that will affect the East Londonderry constituency. (AQW 6784/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** The plans that Translink provided to my Department indicate that within Derry there will be no bus service withdrawals and that geographical coverage of the city will be maintained. There will be revisions to the frequencies of very low use routes but alternatives should be provided. There will be some frequency reductions on evenings and Saturday mornings.

There are no plans to change rail services or timetables but as part of general efficiency there may be some curtailment of station opening hours across the North. It is not possible at this time to detail these by constituency.

### Translink

**Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister for Regional Development what cuts Translink is planning that will affect the Limavady Council area. (AQW 6785/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** The plans that Translink provided to my Department indicate that within Limavady there will be no bus service withdrawals and that geographical coverage will be maintained. There will be revisions to the frequencies of very low use routes but alternatives should be provided.

Services between Limavady and Belfast/Belfast and Limavady will be provided by connecting services between Limavady and Dungiven, with travel between Dungiven and Belfast by service 212. The number of such connections will be substantially increased.

Outside Limavady one bus service will be withdrawn, service 148b from Dungiven/Ballymonie Estate to Derry, which has less than 2 passengers per trip. The main 148 service will continue to run and can be used as an alternative to the withdrawn service.

There are no plans to change rail services or timetables but as part of general efficiency there may be some curtailment of station opening hours across the North. These plans are still being developed and it is not possible to detail these by constituency at this time.

### Translink

**Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister for Regional Development what cuts Translink is planning that will directly affect rural services. (AQW 6787/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** The plans that Translink provided to my Department indicate that bus service withdrawals are few in number and will concentrate on town services rather than rural services.

There are no plans to change rail services or timetables but as part of general efficiency there may be some curtailment of station opening hours.

### Translink

**Mr McQuillan** asked the Minister for Regional Development how long it takes for the schedules inspector in the Coleraine depot of Translink to (i) process; (ii) discuss; and (iii) implement any proposals to changes in the town bus route services. (AQW 6819/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** This is an operational matter for Translink. However, I have been advised that any proposal for a change to existing bus service(s) involves a review of existing provision, consideration of passenger requests/needs, consultation with key stakeholders and if necessary a road service licence application. There is no set period of time for completion of this process.

### Roads Service

**Mr McGlone** asked the Minister for Regional Development what remedial measures will be taken by Roads Service to address the deteriorating condition of roads in the Ardboe, Ballinderry, Stewartstown, Rock, Pomeroy and Coalisland areas. (AQW 6829/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that the 2009/10 resurfacing programme for the Cookstown area includes schemes planned for the Drumenny Road, Ballinderry Bridge, Brigh Road and North Street, Stewartstown and Main Street, Ballyronan. A programme of edge strengthening work at various locations along the Shore Road between Ballinderry Bridge and Ballyronan is also planned for the 2009/10 financial year.



In the Coalisland area, Roads Service has resurfaced two stretches of the Moor Road, Coalisland, during March 2009. During the 2009/10 financial year, Roads Service plans to resurface stretches on the Mountjoy Road, Moor Road and Ballynakelly Road. Surface dressing is also planned to be undertaken on the Stewartstown Road, and part of the Moor Road, during the summer period.

Roads Service's surface dressing programme also includes a number of roads within the areas highlighted by the Member. These roads include sections of the Drumenny Road, Cavanakeeran Road, Slatequarry Road, Tandragee Road, Annaquinn Road and Clougfin Road.

### Roads Service

**Mr McGlone** asked the Minister for Regional Development what remedial measures will be taken to address the deteriorating condition of Drumenny Road from Ballinderry Bridge to its junction with Battery Road, Ardboe in the Cookstown district. (AQW 6834/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that, in the 2008/09 financial year, it carried out substantial edge strengthening work on this section of the Drumenny Road.

This preparatory work was undertaken to improve the effectiveness of the final road surface that Roads Service plans to lay during this summer. This should address the worst affected section of this road.

### Magherafelt Bypass

**Mr Molloy** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the proposals for a road to bypass Magherafelt. (AQW 6840/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** My Department's Roads Service is continuing to progress the development of the proposed A31 Magherafelt Bypass.

The Preferred Route for the bypass has been selected, and a Public Inquiry, to hear objections to the Preferred Route, is scheduled for 29 April to 1 May 2009. Further progress of the scheme will depend on the outcome of the Public Inquiry that is expected in the autumn of this year, the completion of the statutory procedures and the availability of funding.

### Half Price Smart Pass Scheme

**Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to his answer to AQW 5708/09, (i) why a half fare SmartPass holder can only buy a return ticket to the value of two singles rather than the half return fare; and (ii) is this in line with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, about the equality agenda for people with a disability. (AQW 6848/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** The half fare concession for bus and rail journeys is based on the cost of a single ticket. The decision to allow the purchase by half fare SmartPass holders of return tickets on rail journeys was taken in view of the fact that rail travellers are generally expected to purchase tickets before boarding the train. It represents a reasonable adjustment for people with disabilities and means that they only need to queue once when making a return journey.

The concessionary fares scheme was subjected to an equality impact assessment in 2004 which concluded that the scheme did not adversely impact on the equality of opportunity of any of the nine section 75 groups.

### Half Price Smart Pass Holders

**Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to his answer to AQW 5708/09, if he will review the decision and grant equality of fares to Half Price SmartPass holders in relation to return fares. (AQW 6856/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** I can confirm that my Department has no plans at present to make any further change to the arrangements relating to the purchase of concessionary journeys by Half Fare SmartPass holders.

## Translink

**Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline (i) the rationale for redundancies in Translink in the Foyle constituency; and (ii) how the redundancies will impact on transport services.

(AQW 6864/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** Translink operates under a commercial remit and, in order to keep fares increases to a minimum, constantly faces the challenge of keeping costs under control. In this context Translink has had to look at low use bus services and decide whether or not to continue running them. Low use public transport services do not represent good value for money to the taxpayer nor is it environmentally friendly to run buses which are largely empty particularly where alternatives are available. A small number of low use bus services have been identified in Derry.

### Bus

Across the whole of Ulsterbus and Metro operations it is anticipated that some 50 job losses will be required during 2009/10. This represents approximately 1.5% of the total number of staff employed in the two bus companies. I have actively engaged with the Translink unions on this issue and a joint statement was issued on 18 March as a result. This welcomed the undertaking by Translink that numbers would be reduced through natural wastage and that there would be no compulsory redundancies. Translink have informed me that they have started the process of identifying ways of reducing staff numbers including seeking voluntary redundancies but this process is not complete.

In terms of the impact on transport services, the plans that Translink provided to my Department indicate that within Derry the geographical coverage of the city will be maintained. There will however be minor revisions to the frequencies of very low use routes as part of a schedule of service alterations and consolidations. This will impact on six services in total. There will be some frequency reductions on evenings and Saturday mornings. Any rural service alterations will be made to very low use routes and geographical coverage will be maintained.

### Rail

There are no plans to change rail services or timetables but as part of general efficiency programmes there may be some curtailment of station opening hours across the North. It is expected that there could be 25 job losses in NIR but this cannot be broken down by constituency at this time.

## Public Transport

**Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline any plans to introduce public transport to the Culmore Road area of Londonderry/Derry.

(AQW 6865/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** The provision of public transport in the Culmore Road area is currently subject to a licence held by the Lough Swilly Bus Company. However, I have been advised by Translink that, on 26 March 2009, it submitted an application to the Department for the Environment for a licence to operate services to Culmore Point.

## Translink

**Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) to outline what initiatives have been undertaken to increase Ulsterbus passenger count in the Foyle constituency; and (ii) whether a comparative analysis has been carried out to examine the cost per journey of public transport compared to private car or taxi services, for family transport in particular.

(AQW 6866/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** This is an operational matter for Translink. However, I have been informed that following a strategic review of bus operations a number of initiatives were introduced in the Derry City and County areas. These initiatives include enhancements to schedules, simplified timetables and the introduction of additional express services.

Additionally, in September 2006, Derry City Services were rebranded as Ulsterbus Foyle and a simplified modern network of routes was introduced. This has greatly improved safety, access and hours of operation and I am pleased to say has resulted in a 38% increase in passengers.

I understand that Translink has carried out a comparative analysis of the cost of public transport compared to the private car on several typical commuter routes to and from Derry. In each case, commuters fare much better with public transport, with considerable savings to be made in the course of a year. I will ask Translink to send a copy of this analysis to you.

### Road Service and NI Water

**Mr Burns** asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the work that will be carried out by Roads Service and NI Water, in the South Antrim constituency, in April 2009. (AQW 6874/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that in addition to the ongoing M2 Improvements Scheme, between Sandyknowes and Greencastle junctions, the following work will be undertaken in the South Antrim Constituency during April 2009:

- completion of footway links at the junction of Ballyquillan and Diamond Roads;
- completion of resurfacing at Ballyquillan Road;
- completion of resurfacing at Castleton, Templepatrick;
- work will continue on the environmental improvement scheme at The Square, Ballyclare; and
- carriageway resurfacing is programmed to start after Easter on the A57 Templepatrick Road, Ballyclare.

Routine maintenance work, which will also be carried out on roads in the South Antrim constituency during April 2009 includes:

- gulley and manhole cleaning, sweeping, litter picking and grass cutting;
- routine maintenance repairs to the road network (as required);
- emergency telephone and communications cabinet cleaning; and
- Ragwort treatment.

NI Water has advised of the following work to be carried out in the South Antrim Constituency during April 2009:

- replacement watermain - Birchill Road, Antrim;
- rehabilitation work - Rashee Service Reservoir;
- service reservoir enhanced security work, telemetry work at divisional sites - Newtownabbey, Antrim;
- replacement of Joints - Hyde Park Service Reservoir;
- reservoir rehabilitation - Ballyvaston Service Reservoir;
- foul sewer upgrade - Aldergrove Sewerage Scheme, Antrim Road;
- installation of Storm Tank - Roughfort Wastewater Treatment Works;
- upgrading of existing works - Milltown Wastewater Treatment Works, Antrim;
- construction of pumping stations - Masserene, Antrim and Randalstown;
- laying of sewers - Main Street and New Street, Randalstown;
- installation of gravity sewer, pumping main and two pumping stations - Creevery Sewerage Scheme Phase II; and
- ongoing investigation work, consisting of bore holes, trial pits and slit trenches – no road closures are planned - Whitehead, Ballystrudder and Ballycarry.

This work is in addition to the day-to-day maintenance and repair required to the water and sewerage network.

### Mobile Telephone Masts

**Mr Moutray** asked the Minister for Regional Development what his Department's policy is regarding the sale of land for mobile telephone masts. (AQW 6876/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that it has no policy, specific to the sale of land for mobile telephone masts. Any surplus land is disposed of by my Department, in line with the DFP Guidance "Disposal of Surplus Property in Northern Ireland".

## Traffic Calming Measures

**Mr Moutray** asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to his answer to AQW 6147/09, whether he intends to introduce traffic calming measures in the Upper Bann area, in the next 12 months. (AQW 6886/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** My Department's Roads Service receives many requests for traffic calming schemes and, as demand greatly exceeds the capacity to supply these measures, all proposals are required to be assessed, scored and prioritised within each Council area. Works programmes are then drawn up on an annual basis, and published each year in the Autumn Roads Service Report to Councils. This programme may be subject to change, depending on the assessed priority of new requests for traffic calming.

In my reply to the Member's previous Assembly Question, AQW 6886/09, I advised that the Upper Bann constituency covers areas from both Craigavon and Banbridge Councils.

In relation to the 2009/10 financial year, the tables below provide the location of proposed traffic calming schemes, and school travel and safety projects for the Craigavon and Banbridge Council areas:

Traffic Calming Schemes	
Banbridge Council area	Craigavon Council area
Dromore Street, Banbridge	North Circular Road, Lurgan
Huntly Road	Ballynamoney Road, Aghacommon
Ballygowan Road	Mill Hill, Waringstown
Seapatrick Road, Seapatrick	Lower Toberhewny Lane, Lurgan
Newry Street, Rathfriland	
School Travel and Safety Projects	
Banbridge Council area	Craigavon Council area
Banbridge Academy	Portadown Integrated Primary School
St Matthew's, Leitrim	Eglis Primary School

## Management of Bonfires

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister for Regional Development what Roads Service states the minimum distance is that a bonfire should be from a public road. (AQW 6899/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that it does not set down prescribed distances that a bonfire should be from a public road.

The Member may be aware that, while bonfire management is an inter-agency issue, Roads Service has the power, under the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993, to remove any bonfire material near or on a public road, which may constitute a danger to road users.

The support, co-operation and involvement of local communities are important factors in addressing this issue, as was recognised in the report of the inter-agency group, which produced guidelines on bonfire management. A copy of the report can be found on the Northern Ireland Environment Agencies website, at the following web address:

[http://www.ni-environment.gov.uk/bonfires\\_report.pdf](http://www.ni-environment.gov.uk/bonfires_report.pdf).

## Management of Bonfires

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister for Regional Development how many times has Roads Service removed bonfire material that was on or near a public road in (i) 2005; (ii) 2006; (iii) 2007; and (iv) 2008. (AQW 6900/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** The information requested by the Member is not maintained by my Departments Roads Service.



## Car Parking Charges

**Mr Butler** asked the Minister for Regional Development for a breakdown of car parking charges in (i) Belfast; (ii) Coleraine; (iii) Lisburn; (iv) Newry; (v) Omagh; (vi) Newtownards; (vii) Dungannon; (viii) Londonderry/Derry; and (ix) Enniskillen. (AQW 6902/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that charges for car parking within the North incorporate both on-street and off-street parking.

Off-street car parking tariffs are reviewed annually and the rate of the tariff is set based on a matrix of local factors, such as, local market and traffic conditions in that particular town or city. Currently tariffs range in the North from 30p/hr to £1/hr, with the most common tariff being 30p/hr.

Information in relation to charges that apply to specific Roads Service off-street car parking in Belfast, Coleraine, Lisburn, Omagh Newtownards, Dungannon, Londonderry/Derry and Enniskillen is contained in the Road Traffic and Vehicles Off-Street Parking Order (Northern Ireland) 2000 as amended.

I am further advised that on-street car parking charges are only applicable to the cities of Belfast, Lisburn and Newry. The current tariffs in these cities are:

- £1.00 per hour, in Belfast
- £0.60 per hour, in Lisburn; and
- £0.40 per hour, in Newry.

Information regarding on-street parking charges is contained in the Road Traffic and Vehicles On-Street Parking Order (Northern Ireland) 2000 as amended.

Copies of the aforementioned legislation and amendments are available in the Assembly Library.

## Road Closure

**Mr P J Bradley** asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the contingency arrangements that will be put in place during the closure of the Sheepbridge Road, Newry that will permit farmers to cross the A1 main road; and (ii) what measures will be introduced to limit the time and distance for drivers of heavy farm machinery who will have to use the main Dublin to Belfast Road to access the Corcreechy or Turmore Road. (AQW 6913/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** Firstly, I should explain that the closure of the Sheepbridge Road, Newry, is required to facilitate construction work associated with the provision of a new bridge and completion of a stretch of new dual carriageway for the A1 Beech Hill to Cloghogue Dual Carriageway scheme.

My Department's Roads Service has advised that Lagan Ferrovial, the Construction Contractor, plans to commence a ten month closure of the Sheepbridge Road in approximately three weeks time. Given the layout of the minor road network in the area, the shortest diversion route, which will be signposted, will be via the Sheepbridge Road, Glen Road and the A1 Belfast Road.

I understand that the Construction Contractor has carried out consultation with the local communities regarding this road closure, and agreed details of the diversion route and the duration of the closure with Roads Service and the PSNI.

On completion, the new bridge will link directly between Sheepbridge Road and Corcreechy Road and onwards to Turmore Road via the remaining section of the former A1 single carriageway, which extends southwards from the new bridge. Roads Service has asked Lagan Ferrovial to keep them updated, as to when the Sheepbridge Road to Corcreechy Road link, via the new bridge, will become available for use by local traffic.

Access to and from both Turmore Road and Corcreechy Road onto the existing A1 single carriageway will remain unaffected for the time being.

### Potholes

**Mr Dallat** asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the number; and (ii) the value of claims, made by motorists for damage to motor vehicles caused by potholes etc, in each of the last five years. (AQW 6914/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** The number of compensation claims made against the Department for Regional Development and the amount of compensation paid in each of the last five financial years in respect to damage to motor vehicles caused by potholes is as follows:-

	Number of Claims Received	Total Compensation Paid to Date	Number of claims outstanding
2004/05	610	£65,730.96	0
2005/06	652	£65,619.40	0
2006/07	910	£88,482.09	1
2007/08	891	£76,663.20	3
2008/09	1,355	£65,253.71	625

It is not possible to provide the total value of the claims received because that information is not always provided with the claim and, if the claim is turned down, there is no point in pursuing that information. The total amount of compensation paid in respect of all the successful claims has been provided instead.

### Northern Ireland Railways

**Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to his answer to AQW 6766/09, if he will consider starting urgent work on the disabled access to Bellarena Northern Ireland Railways halt, to alleviate the current disabled access difficulties. (AQW 6924/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** Translink state that they are unaware of any urgent work that is required at Ballarena and they have no current plans to undertake any works at this location until 2012. The reason for this is that the platform at Ballarena may need adjusting as part of a planned re-lay of the track between Coleraine and Derry and as such it would make sense to do all necessary work at the same time.

### Northern Ireland Water

**Mr Beggs** asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the reasons for a deterioration in samples from the public water supply at Northern Ireland Water's Killylane Reservoir in relation to levels of Trihalomethanes. (AQW 6930/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that trihalomethanes (THMs) arise from the reaction of chlorine, used for disinfection of the drinking water supply, with natural organic material present in water from surface sources such as Killylane Reservoir. There has been an increase in natural organic matter in raw water over the past 2 years, particularly following periods of intense rainfall, which has resulted in an increase in the level of THMs in the area supplied by Killylane Water Treatment Works. NIW has taken all appropriate steps to reduce the level of THMs in order to secure compliance with the water quality regulations and there have been no regulatory exceedences in the level of THMs in water supply zones supplied by Killylane Water Treatment Works in 2009.

### Northern Ireland Water

**Mr Beggs** asked the Minister for Regional Development, (a) what matters are covered in enforcement notices for (i) Killylane Water; and (ii) Dorisland Water Treatment Works; and (b) what action is being taken by Northern Ireland Water to meet the requirements of the notices. (AQW 6931/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the enforcement actions taken by the Drinking Water Inspectorate (DWI) in respect of Killylane Water Treatment Works and Dorisland Water Supply Zone related to trihalomethane and iron parameters respectively.

In both cases NIW has given an undertaking to secure compliance to the satisfaction of the Drinking Water Inspectorate. Details of the issues covered by the enforcement notices and the actions that NIW will take to rectify the position are available on the DWI website at [www.ni-environment.gov.uk/water/drinkwater/public\\_water](http://www.ni-environment.gov.uk/water/drinkwater/public_water).

### Car Parking Charges

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) for a breakdown of car parking charges in (a) Bangor; and (b) Holywood; and (ii) how these charges compare with the rest of Northern Ireland. (AQW 6948/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that car park tariffs are reviewed annually and the rate of the tariff is set based on a matrix of local factors. The tariffs in specific car parks across the North cannot be compared directly, as the tariff will be set based on the local market and traffic conditions in that particular town or city. Currently tariffs range across the North range from 30p/hr to £1/hr, with the most common tariff being 30p/hr.

Information in relation to charges that apply to specific Roads Service off-street car parking in Bangor and Holywood is contained in the Road Traffic and Vehicles Off-Street Parking Order (Northern Ireland) 2000 as amended.

Copies of the aforementioned legislation and amendments are available in the Assembly Library.

### Installation of Footways

**Mr Burns** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the installation of footways on the Diamond Road, Crumlin. (AQW 6968/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that the footway works at the Diamond Road area, near Crumlin, are being carried out in five separate phases. Work has just been completed on the section near Aldergrove Chapel where, in addition to the construction of new footway links, improvements to the existing bus stop have also been included.

The next phase is on Ardmore Road, near the cottages, and is being considered for inclusion in the programme for pedestrian improvements for the incoming financial year. The remaining phases will be considered for future programmes, should finance become available.

### Road Safety

**Mr McClarty** asked the Minister for Regional Development what measures his Department will take to assess the safety of the road junction at Railway Road, leading to Circular Road in Coleraine since there were several accidents and a fatality there. (AQW 6973/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** The PSNI provide my Department's Roads Service with copies of records of all collisions involving injuries. These records indicate that there have been no injury collisions, at this junction, in recent years, prior to the recent tragic fatal collision.

Following this collision, Roads Service has carried out an initial investigation of the junction, in conjunction with the Road Policing Unit of the PSNI. Roads Service will, in due course, receive a report from the PSNI giving details of the collision, allowing a more detailed assessment to take place. This will include vehicle and pedestrian surveys at the junction.

### Translink

**Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister for Regional Development what is the number of buses on order for Translink, broken down by (i) single and double deckers; (ii) the depots to which they are destined; and (iii) whether they are for Ulsterbus or Metro Services. (AQW 7001/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** The Department has agreed funding for 69 buses for 2009/10. Under this approval, Translink already has 60 high-capacity single deck buses on order. They have no double deckers on order or planned for this year.

All the new vehicles on order are destined for Ulsterbus depots.

Due to the fact that initial deliveries of the new buses will not commence until December 2009 the exact depots and services to which they will be allocated cannot as yet be determined. These allocations vary regularly due to operational issues and travel patterns, however they will replace life-expired vehicles in the depot to which they are utilised.

### Dungiven Bypass Road Scheme

**Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline (i) the planning stage of a bus stop in Dungiven for the use of the 212 Londonderry/Derry to Belfast Express in the Dungiven by-pass road scheme; and (ii) if it will include a park and ride facility. (AQW 7003/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that bus stops on the Dungiven Bypass have not yet been identified. These will be subject to consultation with Translink, as the design for the scheme progresses.

Roads Service will consider the feasibility of a park and ride facility, on the Dungiven Bypass, as part of the design for the scheme.

The Member will also be aware from my answer to his previous Assembly Question, AQW 1250/09, that Roads Service is considering a Park and Ride car park facility at the former Dungiven Primary School site. This would provide 140 parking spaces, but the success of this proposal will be dependent on the availability of funding.

### Translink

**Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister for Regional Development what assurance he can give that passengers transferring from the 246 Limavady to Dungiven Express bus to the 212 Londonderry/Derry Express Service and vice versa, will not have to wait on the roadside until they transfer. (AQW 7008/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** This is an operational matter for Translink which has advised me that the stop at which passengers will transfer is situated in a bus lay-by with bus shelter facilities. Translink has also confirmed that journeys are co-ordinated and that buses will wait for the arrival of the connecting service before departing.

### Translink

**Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister for Regional Development what assurance he can give that the proposed extension to Limavady's town service bus route will be fast tracked through all necessary processes to protect employment in the Limavady Translink depot. (AQW 7009/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** This is an operational matter for Translink who has advised me that it is currently considering extensions to the existing Limavady town service. Any changes will be subject to the normal licensing approval procedures.

### Management of Bonfires

**Dr Farry** asked the Minister for Regional Development to report on the policy and responsibilities of Roads Service in relation to '11th Night' bonfires on public highways. (AQW 7019/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** I can advise the Member that under the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993, my Department has the power to remove any bonfire material near, or on a public road which may constitute a danger to road users. However, bonfire management is an inter-agency issue and it is often difficult to find solutions acceptable to the interested parties, when problems arise. The support, co-operation and involvement of local communities is an important factor and this was recognised in the inter-agency group report,



which produced guidelines on bonfire management. In these circumstances, my Department's Roads Service will continue to take a joint approach with the other agencies in the management of bonfire sites.

Roads Service experience has been that many of the complaints received from the public are related to the stockpiling of materials on sites adjacent to public roads, which are not owned by Roads Service. On occasions where the overspill from bonfire stockpiles obstructs a public road or footway, Roads Service will, in consultation with the police and local communities, remove it or arrange for it to be pushed back off the road onto the bonfire site. However, Roads Service has a duty of care to its staff and the immediate and ongoing safety of personnel tasked with removal work must be taken into consideration.

In the relatively few instances where bonfires are actually brought onto public roads for lighting, Roads Service will arrange for burnt out debris to be removed and will carry out any repairs to carriageways, footways and street lights that may be needed.

## DEPARTMENT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

### Housing Executive Staff

**Mr P Maskey** asked the Minister for Social Development if her Department has any concerns in relation to Housing Executive staff in the West Belfast district and the contract for repairs with Red Sky. (AQW 6376/09)

**Minister for Social Development (Ms M Ritchie):** I have no particular concerns about Housing Executive staff. I am aware that some aspects of delivery of contracts in the West Belfast area are currently being examined.

However, as the Northern Ireland Audit Office is investigating this matter I am unwilling to comment further until I receive their report.

### Energy Efficiency Savings

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister for Social Development if Eaga has the capabilities to respond to all of the enquiries for Energy Efficiency Savings that have been lodged. (AQW 6578/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** I have been advised by Eaga that they do not record details of energy efficiency enquiries and can therefore only report on actual referrals recorded.

The Warm Homes Scheme has been hugely popular and oversubscribed. The budget for 2008/09 has been exhausted and the Public Service Agreement target was exceeded.

Currently there are 5,858 expressions of interest for the Warm Homes Scheme, of which, approximately 3,167 should receive insulation measures when the new scheme managers are appointed and the new scheme introduced.

My officials have been working with Eaga to identify people on the waiting list whose heating system is broken down beyond repair and I am pleased to confirm that all those households will have heating measures installed in April. The remaining applicants have functioning heating systems and although they may be inefficient, they are still working. If these people believe that they meet the new criteria they are welcome to apply to the new scheme when it opens for applications.

### Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Social Development to confirm her commitment to the new heating scheme for Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee in the new financial year. (AQW 6590/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The Housing Executive has proposed a heating scheme for the Beechfield estate in Donaghadee to include 112 dwellings at a total cost of £493k. The Housing Executive can not yet confirm the upcoming programme of improvement and maintenance schemes which is currently being formulated.

### Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Social Development to confirm her commitment to the maintenance scheme for Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee, in the new financial year. (AQW 6591/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The Beechfield External Cyclical Maintenance Scheme proposes external repair works to include 220 dwellings at a cost of £320k. The Housing Executive can not yet confirm the upcoming programme of improvement and maintenance schemes which is currently being formulated.

### Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Social Development when will the area around the community flat in Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee be tarmaced, as agreed by the Housing Executive. (AQW 6592/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The proposed works are to be carried out as part of the Beechfield External Cyclical Maintenance scheme. The Housing Executive can not yet confirm the upcoming programme of improvement and maintenance schemes which is currently being formulated. A start date is not yet available.

### Social Housing

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister for Social Development what enquiries the Minister has received about thermally efficient energy schemes for social housing. (AQW 6659/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** My department receives many approaches about potential energy efficiency schemes. These approaches are considered by officials, however quite often more development work is required and schemes need to be fully tested in the market place.

### Removal of Paramilitary Murals

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Social Development when will funding plans be agreed for the removal of paramilitary murals in the North Down area, in partnership with the Intensive Change and Control Programme. (AQW 6700/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** Neighbourhood Renewal funding has been made available for a programme of re-imaging work in the Kilcooley Estate - including the removal of a number of paramilitary murals - identified by the Intensive Change and Control Programme in partnership with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. Officials are liaising with community representatives to determine how and when the work will commence.

### Youth Workers in Dunclug

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister for Social Development why funding from his Department for youth workers in Dunclug is being cut; and if she will look into the possibility of continuing to provide funding for youth workers in the area. (AQW 6746/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** Funding for the NEELB's current Youth Project in Dunclug was provided through the DSD Areas at Risk programme, which funded a full time dedicated Youth Worker and 5 part-time Apprentice Youth Workers from 2007-2009.

The Department is unable to provide any further grant assistance for the Youth Project as intervention through the Areas at Risk programme is specifically limited to a 2 year period.

The Department has no other funding programmes through which this project can be supported and, therefore, its continuation depends on funding being secured from other sources.

You should note that to date, the Areas at Risk Programme has committed total funding of £347,989 to projects in Dunclug. This is the largest amount provided to any community through this programme.

### Dunclug Action Plan

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister for Social Development if her Department will ensure that whilst the Dunclug Action Plan work is taking place around Durlston House, that the area is kept clean, safe and secure as children play in this area. (AQW 6747/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The delivery of any programme of improvement works will involve some level of disruption to the local environment. However, the Housing Executive will require the relevant contractor to ensure that the area is made safe both during working hours and after. If any issues arise during the course of the improvement works, the Housing Executive will of course review the arrangements made.

### Homeless Figures

**Mr Newton** asked the Minister for Social Development how many people were registered as homeless in East Belfast in (i) 2006/07; (ii) 2007/08; and (iii) 2008/09. (AQW 6777/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The following figures show the number of households found to be homeless and awarded Full Duty Applicant status for the years requested.

- (i) 2006/07 - 432
- (ii) 2007/08 - 380
- (iii) 2008/09\* - 274

\*This relates to the period 1 April to 31 December 2008. The Housing Executive is currently collating waiting list information for the end of the financial year 2008/09.

### Co-Ownership Applications

**Mr Newton** asked the Minister for Social Development, how many co-ownership applications were made in East Belfast in 2008/09, and how many were successful. (AQW 6778/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** Co-Ownership Housing has advised me that it records statistics on a full local council area basis. Since the Scheme reopened in November 2008, a total of 29 applications have been received by people seeking to purchase a home in the postcode areas of BT4, BT5 and BT6, which are recognised as mainly covering the East Belfast area; all of these are currently being considered.

### Social Housing

**Mr Ross** asked the Minister for Social Development how much money her Department has spent on (i) newbuilds; and (ii) repairs and maintenance work of social housing, for each month, over the past three years. (AQW 6782/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The table below details the monthly expenditure for the past three years with regard to the Social Housing Development Programme along with maintenance and improvement work to Northern Ireland Housing Executive dwellings.

#### HOUSING EXECUTIVE EXPENDITURE BY MONTH 2005/06 – 2008/09

Month	Maintenance			Improvements			Social Housing Programme		
	2008/09 £'000	2007/08 £'000	2006/07 £'000	2008/09 £'000	2007/08 £'000	2006/07 £'000	2008/09 £'000	2007/08 £'000	2006/07 £'000
April	8,617	7,882	7,021	8,062	6,418	6,254	36,913	38,323	59,715
May	9,005	8,788	8,356	6,442	7,536	7,700	11,724	6,190	2,787
June	8,453	10,213	10,064	7,924	9,091	9,349	7,099	3,933	2,822
July	8,659	8,406	7,402	7,082	7,435	7,490	6,440	5,020	5,458

	Maintenance			Improvements			Social Housing Programme		
Month	2008/09 £'000	2007/08 £'000	2006/07 £'000	2008/09 £'000	2007/08 £'000	2006/07 £'000	2008/09 £'000	2007/08 £'000	2006/07 £'000
August	7,737	9,129	9,121	4,998	7,036	7,704	12,019	6,971	252
September	8,248	9,147	9,360	7,302	8,120	8,172	9,654	5,545	3,979
October	9,489	9,564	9,238	6,770	9,775	9,926	2,286	2,437	4,351
November	8,113	10,032	9,527	6,676	8,487	8,638	8,296	6,577	2,981
December	7,743	8,719	8,927	4,508	7,204	7,001	5,760	9,328	4,670
January	9,017	7,447	7,424	5,172	7,005	7,756	4,927	16,701	4,287
February	10,587	9,644	9,506	2,752	7,423	7,883	7,591	12,932	11,102
March	n/a*	7,775	12,077	n/a*	9,689	12,680	29,943	58,366	13,921
	95,668	106,746	108,023	67,688	95,219	100,553	142,652	172,323	116,325

**Note:**

\* Figures for 2008/09 are not yet available.

## Social Housing

**Mr Ross asked** the Minister for Social Development how much her Department has spent on (i) newbuilds; and (ii) repairs and maintenance work of social housing in the Monkstown estate, for each month, in the last three years. (AQW 6783/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** During the period 2005/06 – 2007/08 no newbuild activity has taken place in the Monkstown estate. The table below details the Housing Executive's expenditure with regard to maintenance and improvement activities for the period requested.

Housing Executive expenditure in Monkstown

	Improvement			Maintenance		
	2006/07 £k	2007/08 £k	2008/09 £k	2006/07 £k	2007/08 £k	2008/09 £k
April	85	87	40	7.6	12	37.6
May	212	92	48	11.3	9.1	15.7
June	181	84	37	12	10.5	14.9
July	167	24	96	6.6	10.6	25.6
August	187	61	0	6.6	12.6	14.6
September	152	209	280	12.8	11.6	11.5
October	136	231	115	11.9	15.7	21
November	169	85	92	13	19.4	12.5
December	94	88	60	12	15.7	24
January	89	137	74	18.4	18.7	17
February	89	117	106	17.9	15.7	17
March	98	80	366	21.3	6.3	14
Total	1659	1295	1314	151.5	158.3	226.7



### Repairs to Homes in the Churchill Area of Bangor

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Social Development when her Department will complete repairs to residents homes that are leaking, in the Churchill Area of Bangor. (AQW 6826/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The Housing Executive is aware of reports of water penetration affecting several flats within Churchill Park and has previously completed a number of remedial repairs. The Housing Executive, in consultation with the relevant contractor, has sought to identify the underlying cause of the problem and the necessary remedial works to eradicate this problem will be completed within the next few weeks.

### Corporate Responsibility Issues

**Dr Farry** asked the Minister for Social Development to outline what discussions have taken place with (a) colleagues in other jurisdictions; (b) the local business community; and (c) local trade unions regarding corporate responsibility issues. (AQW 6831/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** My Department places a lot of emphasis on Corporate Responsibility as well as encouraging social responsibility in the context of building communities and tackling disadvantage. Our business aims to ensure that any actions we take have a positive impact on society.

The table below gives details of various meetings at which Corporate Responsibility issues were discussed; Corporate Responsibility issues would also have featured during other discussions, although it would not have been the main purpose of the meeting.

Other jurisdictions	Local business community	Local trade unions (representative bodies)
<b>Liquor licensing legislation</b> – Discussions regarding corporate responsibility issues around retail or supply of alcohol were held as follows:		
<b>Minister</b> Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform – 22 July 2008  <b>Officials</b> Department of Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform – 9 September 2008 Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and Scottish Government Alcohol Team – 23 September 2008 Whitehall Departments & Scottish and Welsh administrations – 6 March 2009		<b>Minister</b> Federation of Retail Licensed Trade – 14 June 2007; 17 November 2008 NI Federation of Clubs – 6 August 2007 NI Independent Retail Association – 17 December 2007  <b>Officials</b> Federation of Retail Licensed Trade – 17 October 2007; 6 November 2008; 5 February 2009
<b>Gambling</b> – Discussions on a voluntary code of responsibility in relation to gaming machines were held as follows:		
		<b>Minister</b> NI Turf Guardians Association – 20 June 2007 NI Amusement Caterers Trade – 7 January 2009  <b>Officials</b> NI Turf Guardians Association - 3 October 2008 NI Amusement Caterers Trade -17 April 2008 NI Federation of Clubs - 11 March 2009
<b>Charities</b> – discussions relating to the regulation and governance of charities		

Other jurisdictions	Local business community	Local trade unions (representative bodies)
<b>Officials</b> Department for Community Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs - 25 April 2008 (also Charity Regulator Forums held quarterly since October 2008) Irish Revenue Commissioners – January 2008 Scottish Executive – 20 March 2007 Office of the Third Sector, Treasury Department, England – 15 October 2008 HM Revenue and Customs – February, June and December 2008 Ministry of Defence – 3 April 2009 Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator – forums held quarterly since October 2006 Charity Commission for England and Wales – forums held quarterly since October 2006		
Other jurisdictions	Local business community	Local trade unions (representative bodies)
Business in the Community – promotion of Employer Supported Volunteering, supporting local communities and developing staff.		
	<b>Minister</b> Event at Hillsborough in February 2009, hosted by Business in the Community	

## Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

**Mr Craig** asked the Minister for Social Development, in relation to matters affecting the remit of her Department, what recognition is given to fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue syndrome/M.E. (AQW 6835/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** Depending on the individual circumstances a range of social security benefits is available to people with fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue syndrome/Myalgic Encephalomyelitis including employment and support allowance, incapacity benefit, disability living allowance, attendance allowance and income-related benefits, such as income support and pension credit.

The following groups received small grants during 2007/2008 financial year through the Community Volunteering Scheme which is funded by my Department and administered by the Volunteer Development Agency: Portadown ME Support Group, Fibromyalgia Support North Down and Southern Area Fibromyalgia Support Group.

## Crisis Loans

**Mr Molloy** asked the Minister for Social Development how much money has been paid out through the Social Fund in the form of crisis loans to people waiting for their claims to be processed. (AQW 6839/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** Crisis Loan alignment payments are made to people awaiting their first payment of benefit, which is paid in arrears. Crisis Loan payments made in these circumstances are intended to cover the day to day living expenses until the first benefit payday, following which full payments of benefit can be made. The total amount paid under these alignment arrangements over the last 3 years is given in the table below.

Year	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
Total amount paid £m	1.629	1.431	1.576*

\* information currently only available up to the end of February 2009

## Pension Credit Applications

**Mr Molloy** asked the Minister for Social Development what measures are being put into place to ensure that pension credit applications that are in the system for more than six months are being (i) followed up; and (ii) completed. (AQW 6841/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The Pension Service takes active steps to ensure that all Pension Credit applications are finalised as quickly as possible once all the evidence has been received. In cases where the customer has supplied wrong or incomplete information these are followed up through issuing reminders as appropriate. More recently the Pensions Transformation Programme has introduced enhanced IT systems which enables management to monitor work in progress to make certain that all claims particularly the older cases are being managed effectively and in a timely manner bearing in mind that the rules governing the benefit stipulate that the responsibility for providing the necessary evidence rests with the customer.

The completion of all State Pension Credit new claims is monitored against an Actual Average Clearance Time target measured from the point at which claimants have supplied all necessary information. The target for 2008-09 is 15 days and the latest available monthly performance figure for February 2009 is 7.7 days.

## Social Housing

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the proposed social housing scheme for Rasharkin; and whether she can give a date for the commencement of the scheme. (AQW 6844/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** An application for planning approval has been submitted by Triangle Housing Association and they are continuing to work with the Planning Service to resolve issues around site layout and car parking provision.

NI Water, however, has currently imposed an embargo on all new connections to the existing sewerage disposal system in Rasharkin as it is operating at full capacity. No new connections will be permitted until the sewerage infrastructure improvement works complete. Obviously Planning Approval for the scheme will not be granted until an acceptable sewerage disposal solution is provided.

I am aware that NI Water is currently onsite in Rasharkin, however I understand that this scheme will not provide the necessary system upgrade to allow new connections to the sewer. The Housing Executive has written to

NI Water requesting a commencement date for the infrastructure improvement works and will continue to work with Triangle Housing Association and the other agencies involved to achieve an on-site start as early as possible.

## Housing Executive

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister for Social Development on what grounds would the Housing Executive not carry out occupational therapy recommendations for an accommodation for a disabled person in relation to a (i) toilet; (ii) bedroom; and (iii) hand wash basin. (AQW 6859/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The only circumstances under which the Housing Executive would not carry out a disabled adaptation recommended by an Occupational Therapist would be if the adaptation was not technically feasible or if the tenant refused the work.

## House Maintenance Budget

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister for Social Development if she would provide figures for the (i) House Maintenance Budget; and (ii) general maintenance budget for 2008/09, compared to the budgets for the preceding three years. (AQW 6861/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The information is not available in the format requested. However, the table below details the Housing Executive's expenditure for response maintenance and planned improvements for the financial years 2005/06 to 2008/09.

Response Maintenance				Planned Improvements			
*2008/09	2007/08	2006/07	2005/06	*2008/09	2007/08	2006/07	2005/06
£95.6m	£106.7m	£108m	£99.1m	£67.6m	£95.2m	£100.5m	£106.2

\* These figures are to the end of February 2009.

### House Maintenance Budget

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister for Social Development if she could confirm figures for the (i) House Maintenance Budget; and (ii) general maintenance budget for 2008/09 for (a) Ards Borough Council; (b) Down District Council; and (c) Castlereagh Borough Council for this financial year. (AQW 6862/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The information is not available in the format requested. However, the table below details the Housing Executive's expenditure for response maintenance and planned improvement expenditure in 2008/09 for the Council areas requested.

	Response Maintenance £k	Planned Improvements £k
Ards Borough Council	1730	4006
Down District Council	1589	1099
Castlereagh Borough Council	1999	4475

### Travellers' Sites

**Mr Moutray** asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to her answer to AQW 6142/09, why the Housing Executive places Travellers' sites mostly in Craigavon and does not use it's discretion to spread them throughout Northern Ireland. (AQW 6887/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** There is no question that the Northern Ireland Housing Executive locates Travellers' sites primarily within the Craigavon area. There are a number of other Housing Executive owned sites currently available to Travellers located in the Belfast, Derry, Strabane, and Dungannon council areas.

### Travellers' Sites

**Mr Moutray** asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to her answer to AQW 6142/09, for her assessment of the impact that the number of Travellers' sites in Craigavon has on community relations. (AQW 6888/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The Northern Ireland Housing Executive has worked closely with the Good Relations officers from Craigavon Borough Council to address issues raised by members of the settled community relating to Travellers. A series of meeting have been also been held with all residents groups in the Brownlow Area to discuss current and future plans for Traveller Accommodation in the wider Craigavon area.

### Travellers' Sites

**Mr Simpson** asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to her answer to AQW 6142/09, for her assessment of the environmental impact of each of the Travellers' sites in Craigavon. (AQW 6894/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The environmental impact of permanent camp sites and caravan sites which include Travellers' sites in all areas of Northern Ireland may in certain circumstances be subject to the 1999 Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Regulations. EIA is the process by which the environmental effects of a project are collected, assessed and taken into account by the Planning Service in reaching a decision on whether the proposed development should be granted planning permission.



Those camp or caravan sites which exceed one Hectare in size are likely to require such an assessment but this is a planning requirement and one which the Northern Ireland Housing Executive who have responsibility for Traveller specific accommodation has little or no control over. Environmental impact assessments (EIA) are major pieces of work that would only be carried out at the request of the Planning Service.

You may wish to seek further clarification from Planning Service which is an Executive Agency within the Department of The Environment regarding this issue.

### Social Housing

**Mr A Maskey** asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of households that have been permanently housed in social housing in the Botanic ward of South Belfast since April 2007 and who have been awarded intimidation points. (AQW 6901/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** Twenty-one households who have been awarded intimidation points have been permanently housed in social housing in Botanic ward of South Belfast.

### Social Housing

**Mr Butler** asked the Minister for Social Development how many social houses will be built in the Dairyfarm Housing District in the next financial year. (AQW 6905/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** This information can not currently be provided as the new 5 year Social Housing Development Programme (2009/10 – 2013/14) is currently being formulated and, pending appropriate approvals, will be published on the Housing Executive's website at [www.nihe.gov.uk](http://www.nihe.gov.uk). I will place a copy in the Assembly Library.

### Social Housing

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Social Development how many social houses were built in 2008/9; and how this compares with each of the last five years. (AQW 6927/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The information is not available in the format requested. However, the table below details the number of social houses starts for the period requested. It should be noted that the starts includes newbuild, acquisitions and rehabilitated properties.

Year	Units Started
2003/04	1526
2004/05	1317
2005/06	1519
2006/07	1032
2007/08	1595
2008/09	1136
<b>Total</b>	<b>8125</b>

### Social Housing

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Social Development how the delivery of social houses in 2008/09, compares with the projected target. (AQW 6929/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The target for our Social Housing Development Programme during 2008/09 was to start 1500 new homes. Despite the loss of over £70m from my budget last year as a result of the

collapse of the land and property market, I am pleased to note that by the end of the 2008/09 year we had started 1136 new homes, with the outstanding programmed houses expected to start in the first weeks of 2009/10.

### Social Security Offices

**Mr Gardiner** asked the Minister for Social Development what the average waiting time is for a job interview at Social Security Offices. (AQW 6936/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The Jobs and Benefits Service is jointly delivered by the Social Security Agency (SSA) and the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) in 25 offices throughout Northern Ireland. An initial new claim interview comprises two parts:

1. A claim form check undertaken by SSA staff
2. A work focussed interview (WFI) carried out by DEL staff.

The new claim process in the remaining 10 Social Security Offices is carried out entirely by SSA staff.

The average waiting times for a first interview for the 4 week period ended 27 March 2009 across the 35 offices was 5.74 days.

### Housing Executive Waiting List

**Mr Hamilton** asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the number of people on the Northern Ireland Housing Executive waiting list; and how this compares with the previous year. (AQW 6937/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The number of people on the social housing waiting list at 31st December for the past two years was:-

- 31 December 2007 - 38332
- 31 December 2008 - 38828

The Housing Executive is currently collating waiting list figures for the financial year ending 31st March 2009.

### Housing Association

**Mr Hamilton** asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the size of the cash reserves of each Housing Association. (AQW 6938/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The total cash reserves held by Housing Associations is £29,513,537. A breakdown of each Association's cash reserve is outlined in the table below.

#### CASH BALANCE DETAILS FOR EACH REGISTERED HOUSING ASSOCIATION

Abbeyfield	£238,331
Abode	-£62,962
Ark	£1,176,064
Ballynafeigh	£70,090
Belfast Community	-£1,571,323
BIH	£427,133
Broadway	£497,309
Clanmil	-£328,138
Clonard	£665,735
Co-Ownership	-£1,080,012
Connswater	£63,381

<b>Abbeyfield</b>	<b>£238,331</b>
Covenanter	£178,187
Craigowen	£2,239,662
Donacloney	£390,004
Dungannon & District	-£667,299
Filor	£426,880
Flax	-£2,374,547
Fold	£7,705,383
Gosford	£581,889
Grove	£362,392
Habinteg	-£3,897,063
Hearth	£166,978
Newington	£1,590,435
North & West	£10,034,705
Oaklee	-£3,717,074
Open Door	£2,156,996
Presbyterian	£46,265
Rural	£64,289
SHAC	£1,131,984
South Ulster	-£2,202,186
St Matthews	£1,077,201
Triangle	£1,549,325
Trinity	-£82,582
Ulidia	£4,328,574
Wesley	£3,944,901
Woodvale & Shankill	£4,517,584
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£29,513,537</b>

Data taken from each Housing Association's most recent set of annual accounts

The level of cash reserves held by Housing Associations fluctuates dramatically on a daily basis given the nature of their business thus a snap shot can be misleading. Explanations of these fluctuations can range from:

- A grant tranche payment being received and the payment to a developer not being made;
- A Housing Association has just drawn down long term private finance and the final costs of a development scheme are still outstanding;
- A Housing Association maybe in an overdraft situation as it arranges longer term private finance or awaits a grant tranche payment.
- In light of these fluctuations the cash reserves of a Housing Association should not be viewed in isolation from other financing issues.

## Social Housing

**Mr McNarry** asked the Minister for Social Development for her assessment of meeting her target of 10,000 social and affordable housing units by 2013. (AQW 6954/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The Programme for Government commits my Department to delivering 10,000 social and affordable homes by 2013. I am satisfied that these can be delivered providing the resources are made available during that time.

### Warm Homes Scheme

**Mr Hilditch** asked the Minister for Social Development how many homes are waiting on the warm homes scheme in the Larne area. (AQW 6959/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** There are currently 77 households in the Larne post code area waiting for assistance.

### Home Maintenance Budget

**Mr Ross** asked the Minister for Social Development what money is available to the home maintenance budget for Executive homes in (i) Newtownabbey; (ii) Larne; and (iii) Carrickfergus areas. (AQW 6963/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The Housing Executive was notified of its budget allocation for 2009/10 on 1 April 2009 and is currently finalising its programme of improvement and maintenance schemes.

The Housing Executive District Plans are due for publication during summer 2009 and will contain relevant scheme information.

### Business and Resource Centre in Rathenraw

**Mr Burns** asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to her answers to AQW 592/09 and AQW 3640/09, to provide an update on the project to build a Business and Resource Centre in Rathenraw, Antrim. (AQW 6966/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** Construction of the new family and resource centre is progressing well since the appointment of a new contractor in January 2009. The estimated completion date for the project is now October 2009.

### Home Repossessions

**Mr Burns** asked the Minister for Social Development to detail how many home repossessions have occurred in each of the last 5 years, broken down by socio economic group or social class. (AQW 6967/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** My Department does not hold the information requested. Details of the number of Actions for Repossession are published in quarterly Housing Statistics Bulletins, which are compiled by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. The table below details the number of Actions sought in the last five years.

Financial Year	Number
2004/05	2,188
2005/06	2,614
2006/07	2,413
2007/08	2,401
April – September 2008	1,935

I understand that not all of the Actions will result in actual repossession. Indications are that the level of Actions are increasing and, consequently, that a considerable number of people are at risk of losing their home. These reasons mean that obtaining the funding to fully launch my Mortgage Rescue Scheme is so important. My officials will continue to make bids to obtain the funding required during in year monitoring rounds.



### Social Housing

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister for Social Development when the work to install new kitchens at Riverdale in Rasharkin, which was due to start in January, will commence. (AQW 6996/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The scheme commenced on 26 January 2009 and the Housing Executive anticipates that it will be completed in summer 2009.

### Repair Schemes

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister for Social Development how many refurbishment/repair schemes that were due to start in the last 12 months, have been postponed. (AQW 6997/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** There were 233 schemes initially included in the Housing Executive's draft programme of improvement schemes for 2008/09, of which 82 schemes started onsite.

Each scheme within the Housing Executive's planned improvement and maintenance programme is assigned an estimated start date but this is only indicative, as the actual start date for any scheme is subject to the availability of finance, acceptable tender prices and other statutory approvals.

### Social Housing

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister for Social Development how many houses will her Department build in financial year 2009/10. (AQW 6999/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** During 2009/10, I have allocated £154.75m to the Social Housing Development Programme and expect this to deliver at least 1750 new homes for those in greatest need.

### Jobseeker's Allowance

**Miss McIlveen** asked the Minister for Social Development how many people are claiming Jobseeker's allowance in the Ards Borough. (AQW 7002/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** Information presently available shows that there were 1337\* people claiming Jobseeker's allowance in the Ards Borough at 13 March 2009.

\* The information provided is derived from a 100% un-validated Jobseeker's allowance scan and the verified data is not available until August 2009.

### Social Housing

**Miss McIlveen** asked the Minister for Social Development how many are currently on the waiting list for social housing in the Ards District. (AQW 7004/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** At 31 December 2008, 1644 applicants were on the waiting list for social housing in the Housing Executive's Ards District Office.

### Jobseeker's Allowance

**Miss McIlveen** asked the Minister for Social Development how many people are claiming Jobseeker's allowance in the Strangford constituency. (AQW 7006/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** Information presently available shows that there were 1600\* people claiming Jobseeker's allowance in the Strangford constituency at 13 March 2009.

\* The information provided is derived from a 100% un-validated Jobseeker's allowance scan and the verified data is not available until August 2009.

### Social Housing.

**Miss McIlveen** asked the Minister for Social Development how many of those currently on the waiting list for social housing in the Ards District have been designated as homeless. (AQW 7007/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** At 31 December 2008, 366 applicants on the Housing Executive's Ards District Office waiting list were designated as homeless.

### Social Housing

**Mr A Maskey** asked the Minister for Social Development (i) how many social housing tenants awaiting essential improvement and maintenance work in the South Belfast constituency will be affected by the latest budget announcement; and (ii) how many of these have been deemed essential as a result of a recommendation by an occupational therapist. (AQW 7010/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** This information is not available in the format requested. All repairs are prioritised into emergency, urgent or routine repair categories and the Housing Executive is currently carrying out all repair work within the targets set. The only circumstances under which the Housing Executive would not carry out a disabled adaption as a result of a recommendation by an Occupational Therapist would be if the adaption was not technically feasible or if the tenant refused the work. The Housing Executive is currently considering its budget allocation for 2009/10 and finalising details of its programme of activities.

### Social Housing

**Mr A Maskey** asked the Minister for Social Development (i) how many social housing tenants awaiting essential improvement and maintenance work in the East Belfast constituency will be affected by the latest budget announcement; and (ii) how many of these have been deemed essential as a result of a recommendation by an occupational therapist. (AQW 7012/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** This information is not available in the format requested. All repairs are prioritised into emergency, urgent or routine repair categories and the Housing Executive is currently carrying out all repair work within the targets set. The only circumstances under which the Housing Executive would not carry out a disabled adaption as a result of a recommendation by an Occupational Therapist would be if the adaption was not technically feasible or if the tenant refused the work. The Housing Executive is currently considering its budget allocation for 2009/10 and finalising details of its programme of activities.

### Management of Bonfires

**Dr Farry** asked the Minister for Social Development to report on the policy and responsibilities of the Housing Executive in relation to '11th Night' bonfires on its property. (AQW 7018/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The management of bonfires is an interagency issue with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive working in partnership with the PSNI, Fire Service, Councils and local communities.

The Housing Executive adopts a good relations and community led approach to best manage bonfires, reduce the number and reduce the cost to reinstate sites. Local bonfire management initiatives are monitored by the Housing Executive's Community Cohesion Unit, which is charged with translating its good relations duties under Section 75 (part 2) and community relations policy into actions on the ground through a partnership approach. This work supports local communities to focus on more acceptable expressions of culture which extends to the control of bonfires by way of local agreements.

In addition the Housing Executive provides an estate warden service which monitors the condition of bonfire sites in a number of its estates.

## NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY COMMISSION

### Energy Saving Light Bulbs

**Mr Ross** asked the Assembly Commission how many lights there are in Parliament Buildings; and how many energy saving bulbs are in use. (AQW 6598/09)

**The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr S Neeson):** The Assembly Commission can confirm that there are approximately 6-7,000 fixed light fittings in Parliament Buildings.

The Assembly Commission are committed to reducing the amount of energy that we use and to that end energy saving bulbs are used wherever feasible throughout Parliament Buildings and in all cases where new light fittings are being installed.

Where possible, energy saving light bulbs are also used when replacing lamps in movable light fittings such as desk lamps and uplighters,

I would refer the Member to AQW 2922/09 which details the use of energy saving light bulbs. (Please see attached copy of AQ 2922/09)

### Committee Visits

**Mr Boylan** asked the Assembly Commission to detail the costs of (i) Committee visits; and (ii) overnight stays since the restoration of devolution, broken down by Committee including (a) transportation; and (b) hotels. (AQW 6933/09)

**The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr Maginness):** The table below details the costs as requested broken down to show (a) travel, (b) hotels and (c) other costs:-

		Travel	Hotels	Other Costs	Totals
<b>2007/2008</b>					
2050	Social Development Committee	£754.32	£97.45	£32.81	£884.58
2060	Regional Development Committee	£3,526.23	£3,118.75	£50.18	£6,695.16
2070	Employment and Learning Committee	£200.00	£0.00	£0.00	£200.00
2080	Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee	£80.00	£0.00	£0.00	£80.00
2100	Agriculture and Rural Dev Committee	£6,419.24	£2,105.17	£756.25	£9,280.66 <sup>1</sup>
2110	Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee	£3,057.90	£621.67	£0.00	£3,679.57
2120	Education Committee	£2,629.70	£0.00	£5.00	£2,634.70
2140	HSSPS Committee	£7,219.21	£4,373.17	£927.99	£12,520.37 <sup>2</sup>
2150	Public Accounts Committee	£249.92	£0.00	£55.00	£304.92
2160	Standards and Privileges Committee	£3,077.35	£1,210.00	£324.11	£4,611.46
2170	OFMDFM Committee	£7,872.90	£1,204.92	£35.20	£9,113.02
2180	Procedures Committee	£3,787.62	£3,999.40	£1,066.40	£8,853.42 <sup>3</sup>
		<b>£38,874.39</b>	<b>£16,730.53</b>	<b>£3,252.94</b>	<b>£58,857.86</b>

1 Includes £397.50 Committee travel not previously quoted, as procurement card journal incorrectly posted to Secretariat staff travel.

2 Includes £856.09 Hospitality expenditure which related to Committee visits.

3 Includes £559.87 Hospitality and Souvenir expenditure which related to Committee visits.

		Travel	Hotels	Other Costs	Totals
<b>2008/2009</b>					
2050	Social Development Committee	£23,640.69	£9,562.75	£1,874.19	£35,077.63
2060	Regional Development Committee	£2,892.19	£1,489.98	£100.00	£4,482.17
2070	Employment and Learning Committee	£1,224.87	£305.60	£0.00	£1,530.47
2080	Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee	£498.92	£0.00	£13.90	£512.82
2100	Agriculture and Rural Dev Committee	£6,572.47	£1,848.88	£357.23	£8,778.58
2110	Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee	£1,751.48	£109.95	£88.24	£1,949.67
2120	Education Committee	£559.00	£793.85	£15.00	£1,367.85
2130	Environment Committee	£1,555.73	£1,067.54	£46.12	£2,669.39
2140	HSSPS Committee	£4,215.08	£789.00	£454.37	£5,458.45
2150	Public Accounts Committee	£1,089.52	£1,557.81	£439.05	£3,086.38
2160	Standards and Privileges Committee	£2,909.43	£1,260.00	£285.30	£4,454.73
2170	OFMDFM Committee	£13,436.81	£4,894.49	£171.17	£18,502.47
2180	Procedures Committee	£148.98			£148.98
		<b>£60,495.17</b>	<b>£23,679.85</b>	<b>£3,844.57</b>	<b>£88,019.59</b>

In the above analysis:

“Travel” consists of – mileage allowance, passenger allowance, airfares, coach hire, car parking, public transport costs and taxis

“Other costs” consists of:- day subsistence, meals, hospitality, souvenirs and personal allowance.

The breakdown provided includes both Assembly Members and Committee support staff. Due to the reporting structure in place at the time of processing these transactions, it is not possible to differentiate between staff costs and Members’ costs. However this analysis will be available from 1 April 2009.

### Committee Visits

**Mr Boylan** asked the Assembly Commission to detail the cost of travel for staff who accompany Committee members on visits, broken down by Committee. (AQW 6934/09)

**The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr A Maginness):** As noted in the response to AQW 6933/09, due to the reporting structure in place at the time of processing these transactions it is not possible to differentiate between staff travel costs and Committee Members’ travel costs. This analysis will be available from 1 April 2009.

### Committee Visits

**Mr Boylan** asked the Assembly Commission what mechanisms are in place to ensure responsible use of public funds when planning Committee and/or staff travel. (AQW 6935/09)

**The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr Maginness):** Provision for Members travel is made in The Northern Ireland Assembly (Members’ Allowances) Determination 2000. This Determination informs the travel policies which are operated by the Assembly for all Members travel. The current NICS travel policy applies to all Secretariat staff, who travel on Assembly business.

Travel arrangements for the Assembly are co-ordinated through the central travel desk. This enables greater control, and ensures that both policies are administered correctly and that there is a responsible use of public funds when planning all Assembly travel.



# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 24 April 2009

## Written Answers to Questions

### OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

#### Planning Appeals Commission

**Mr Elliott** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what percentage of the current appeal cases that are being addressed by informal hearing does the Planning Appeals Commission believe could be addressed through written representation. (AQW 6491/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mr P Robinson and Mr McGuinness):** The Planning Appeals Commission is an independent tribunal Non-Departmental Public Body. Given its independent tribunal status, its Chief Commissioner has been asked to provide a response directly to you, and we understand that she has written to you in the following terms:

“I have been asked to provide you with information requested in the above Assembly Question.

The Planning Appeals Commission is not in a position to state what percentage of its current appeals could have been addressed by Written Representation instead of by the Informal Hearing procedure. This information is currently unavailable however, the Planning Appeals Commission intend capturing this data commencing from 1st April 2009.

I would be happy to provide any further information you require arising out of this response or to meet with you to discuss the matter if that would be more suitable.”

#### Barnett Formula Select Committee

**Mr McNarry** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what representations it has made to the Lords Barnett Formula Select Committee. (AQW 6955/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** The First Minister and the deputy First Minister made no representations to the Lords Barnett Formula Select Committee, however the Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service, Bruce Robinson, submitted written evidence and DFP Officials gave oral evidence to the committee.

#### British-Irish Council: Work Streams

**Dr McDonnell** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the work streams/programmes which have been added to the work of the British-Irish Council since restoration of devolution. (AQO 2472/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** The strategic review of the British-Irish Council is currently underway aimed at ensuring that the Council operates in the most efficient and effective manner to deliver on its mandate to promote relationships among the people of these islands. Society has changed since the original work programmes were established and it is important to ensure that these are relevant to the priorities of the member administrations. The review is focusing on the work programmes, working methods and support arrangements.

The Council decided at the Edinburgh Summit meeting held on 26 September 2008 that the Knowledge Economy and Tourism work streams should come to an end as work in those areas had reached a natural conclusion. In addition, it concluded that in the e-Health work stream as the EU had become increasingly active in this area BIC work had been largely superseded and should end.

At the Edinburgh Summit the Council agreed to adopt an Early Years Policy work stream, with Wales leading. At the Cardiff Summit, held on 20 February 2009, four new work stream proposals were agreed by the Council. They included a proposal on Energy from Scotland, which comprises two distinct elements, namely marine renewables and grid issues which will be led by the Scottish and UK Governments respectively. The second proposal was for a Digital Inclusion work stream which will be led by the Isle of Man. The final two proposals were from Northern Ireland. They were for work streams on Collaborative Spatial Planning and Housing which will be led by Northern Ireland.

In total five new work streams have been adopted whilst three have come to an end since restoration of devolution. There are now ten BIC work streams operational.

### Investment Strategy

**Mr Ross** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for its assessment of how the investment strategy is assisting the Executive to mitigate the impact of the economic downturn. (AQO 2473/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** The priority of the Programme for Government and the investment strategy is to grow a dynamic and innovative economy, and notwithstanding the challenges of the current financial climate, the Executive remains fully focused on delivering its commitments as published.

The past year has seen departments achieve a record level of capital investment – expected to total some £1.5 billion, over double what was spent only 5 years ago and 30% higher than in 2007/2008.

Over 40% of construction work in Northern Ireland is public sector related.

At a time when the construction industry is suffering a decline in private sector demand, particularly from private sector housing projects, record investment strategy funding is providing a much needed boost for local companies. Indeed as the Minister of Finance and Personnel announced last month, 90% of government procurement contracts in the past year have been secured locally, mainly by small and medium sized enterprises.

The opportunity for local firms to contribute real, long-term benefits for our people through large scale transport, health, education and other investment strategy projects has and will continue to enhance the competitiveness of our construction companies.

It is important that we continue to ensure that the investment strategy provides opportunities for local business so that our firms can take advantage of not just our own record levels of capital spend, but also develop their competitiveness to take advantage of opportunities internationally in order to bring additional benefit to our economy.

### Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy

**Mr Cobain** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister when it will publish its cohesion, sharing and integration strategy. (AQO 2474/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** Improving relationships between and within communities in Northern Ireland and building a shared and better future remains a high priority for our Department and the Executive. We are continuing to develop and refine the programme for cohesion, sharing and integration to examine how we can build on the achievements of previous initiatives and programmes.

Our work at Ministerial level in OFMDFM as well as throughout the Department at all levels, has demonstrated our commitment to building cohesive, inclusive communities. The fact that we have been delivering substantial additional funding secured in the Executive's budget is just one of our achievements. We have increased funding by a third for the period 2008-2011, from £21 million in the previous CSR period to almost £30 million in the current one. That means that vital work on the ground and with both existing and new communities is better resourced than ever. We also want to ensure that these resources are used in an effective way, so we have been assessing existing programmes and considering new approaches to ensure tangible outcomes from our funding and actions.

We have increased funding to minority ethnic groups by two-thirds and increased funding for youth and interface workers by one-quarter. Statistics show that the work that we fund and resource, is delivering real and meaningful outcomes. There has been a 13.2% reduction in sectarian motivated crimes and three out of five young people in 2007 reported that relationships between Protestants and Catholics were getting better.

However, we are not complacent – we are leading and driving change in our society and in our work – through the Department and the Executive to deliver a shared and better future for all our people.

The delay in producing the programme for sohesion, sharing and integration is an indication of the depth of consideration that it has been given. We are still determined to bring the programme forward as soon as possible, but not before we are satisfied that we have got the detail right.

### International Relations Strategy

**Mr Weir** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what plans it has to bring forward an International Relations Strategy. (AQO 2475/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** The Programme for Government identified an action to develop an International Relations Strategy with OFMDFM being the lead department.

The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister is currently drafting an Executive International Relations Strategy and following consultation with Departments and Departmental Committees, we hope to bring this to the Executive in the coming months.

### Cross-Sectoral Advisory Group

**Miss McIlveen** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister when the cross sectoral advisory group will next meet. (AQO 2476/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** The first meeting of the Cross Sector Advisory Forum took place on the 6 April 2009; this meeting was primarily used to discuss the impact of the economic downturn and agree the terms of reference, topics for further discussion and future working arrangements of the Forum.

It is envisaged that the next meeting will take place before the summer recess.

### NICCY: Formal Investigations

**Mr Beggs** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many formal investigations have been conducted by the Commissioner for Children and Young People; and what assessment it has made of any investigations that have been conducted. (AQO 2477/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** The Commissioner for Children and Young People has not conducted any formal investigations.

### Child Poverty

**Ms S Ramsey** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what consideration it has given to enshrining in legislation the targets contained within the Programme for Government to eradicate child poverty. (AQO 2478/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** Ministers for Department of Children and Family Services, Department of Work and Pensions and HM Treasury recently wrote to us as Chairs of the Executive, seeking support for their proposal to place child poverty targets for the UK on a legislative footing and requesting our views on an associated consultation paper.

We intend to issue a formal response on behalf of the NI Executive, having taken the views of Executive colleagues, our Departmental Committee and closely considered the proposals and their potential impact.

Our officials will continue to liaise with their colleagues in Britain throughout the consultation process and when specific legislation proposals emerge we would intend to consult further with Executive colleagues and our Departmental Committee and, if appropriate, seek any necessary consent from the Assembly.

### Bill of Rights UK

**Mr Moutray** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether it has been consulted in relation to a UK Bill of Rights. (AQO 2479/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** Officials from our department met with Ministry of Justice officials on two occasions in recent months to discuss the forthcoming UK Bill of Rights Green Paper. These discussions were about the generalities of the Green Paper and were arranged by the Ministry of Justice to help it in the development of its proposals.

### Long Kesh Site

**Mr McLaughlin** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the development of the Long Kesh site given the current economic climate and the need to create employment opportunities. (AQO 2480/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** We believe that the former Maze/Long Kesh prison and security site is a most valuable asset that can serve as a driver for international as well as local investment, employment and prosperity. As we announced on 8 April, the 360 acre site, which remains in public ownership, is a site of regional significance. We fully recognise the economic development potential of this site and we are committed to exploiting this potential to the full, particularly given the economic climate we now find ourselves in. In order to do so, we will establish a Development Corporation which will take this project forward and will build on the work previously undertaken by OFMDFM and the All-Party Maze/Long Kesh Consultation Panel and which will have regard to all the elements of the site including any listed buildings. As we seek to maximise the economic, historical and reconciliation potential of the site we will continue to work with all those bodies interested in contributing to the development of the site.

### Victims Commissioners

**Mr Elliott** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what communication it has had with the Victims Commissioners in pursuance of section 8 of the Victims and Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2006. (AQO 2481/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** The Department has been working closely with the Commission for Victims and Survivors on the development of its work programmes and officials are in regular contact with the Commission. We have approved the Commission's 2008/09 work programme.

The Commission is currently working on its draft 2009-2010 work programme, which will build on the current approved programme. We expect to receive the draft from the Commission shortly.

### Climate Change and Sustainable Development

**Mr O'Loan** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister the reasons for the delay in publishing a strategy on climate change and sustainable development. (AQO 2482/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** We are currently considering a draft of a new Sustainable Development Strategy. We wish to ensure that the new document is closely aligned with our plans and priorities. The cross-cutting nature of sustainable development has necessitated a thorough examination of complementary Plans and Strategies, to better inform our deliberations. Following engagement with the OFMDFM Committee, and approval by the Executive, we intend to publish our Sustainable Development Strategy for consultation in the near future. This will acknowledge tackling climate change as a factor in sustainable development.



## Race Forum

**Ms Lo** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether it would consider reconvening the Race Forum in the absence of a Racial Equality Strategy. (AQO 2483/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister is giving consideration to reconvening the Racial Equality Forum. Our Officials are considering the structure and remit of the Forum to help ensure it is fit for purpose in the context of devolution. Officials will seek the views of the sector on this. When all the options have been considered, we will undertake to reconvene the Racial Equality Forum.

We would also take the opportunity to make clear that, although the Forum has not met for some time, the Racial Equality Strategy 2005-10 remains current and we are committed in the Programme for Government to its implementation. We consider that the six shared aims of the Racial Equality Strategy remain robust and comprehensive, especially in light of the increasing diversity of our population in recent years.

Practical work to improve racial equality and create good race relations has also continued. For example, the Migrant Workers thematic sub-group has continued to operate, and its work has been widely welcomed, including the Migrant Workers Strategy and Action plan. And we have increased the resources for our Department's Minority Ethnic Funding Scheme to £1 million per annum.

We are committed to the partnership process which developed the six shared aims and the Strategy originally, and the Racial Equality Forum will be a key mechanism in this partnership.

We are continuing to develop detailed proposals for a programme to promote cohesion, sharing and integration, including good race relations.

## Victims Groups: Funding

**Mr D Bradley** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister when core funding and development grants, including the additional 10% financial resources, will be provided to Victims Groups. (AQO 2484/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** Arrangements for funding the work of victims and survivors groups, including making additional resources available, are already in place for the 2009/2010 financial year, and the groups have been notified accordingly.

## DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

### Tony McCoy's Record National Hunt Wins

**Mr P J Bradley** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what his plans are to recognise Tony McCoy's record 3,000 National Hunt wins. (AQW 5046/09)

**Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr Campbell):** I am aware of the recent achievement of Mr A P McCoy in attaining 3,000 National Hunt wins and I have asked my officials to bring forward proposals for the most appropriate way to recognise this achievement.

I will be writing to Tony McCoy to congratulate him on this remarkable achievement.

### Ulster American Folk Park

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what action does the Ulster American Folk Park take to encourage educational tourists to visit every year. (AQW 5137/09)

**Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** The Ulster American Folk Park attracts a wide and diverse audience. The Museum has a marketing strategy which targets a number of key markets including people who are motivated by continuous learning about Northern Ireland's history and traditions. Marketing activity includes

targeted mail drops, conference attendance to showcase programmes, liaison with relevant education bodies and communication through educational journals.

The Museum also works with the Centre for Migration Studies to attract educational tourists. The Centre provides emigration history through books and periodical resources; an emigration database; lectures; a masters programme and international student programmes. Educational tourism is also encouraged through conferences such as the Ulster American Heritage Symposium and the Annual Literature of Irish Exile Autumn School.

The Ulster American Folk Park attracts approximately 20,000 formal learners to the site each year. Tailored educational programmes support the school curriculums in both Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic. The museum also offers learning and information facilities online. Children are also encouraged to visit the museum during the summer months through youth groups and summer schemes bookings.

### Ulster American Folk Park

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what action the Ulster American Folk Park is taking to increase the number of visitors it receives from (i) the Republic of Ireland; (ii) the United States of America; and (iii) Europe. (AQW 5147/09)

**Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** The Ulster American Folk Park has an effective marketing strategy to raise awareness and encourage visitors from out-of-state markets in line with National Museums Northern Ireland Business Plan. A dynamic and participative Events and Exhibitions programme and tailored service for international tour operator's helps the museum achieve approximately 30% out-of-state visitors.

Targeting of the Irish Republic market is achieved through an integrated communications programme of advertising, PR and promotions particularly in the border counties. This strategy is to be developed further in 2009/2010 to take advantage of the economic climate including the strength of the Euro against Sterling.

The museum also works with key tourism partners such as Tourism Ireland and Regional Tourism Partners to maximise opportunities to encourage visitors from the United States of America and Europe. This includes attendance at shows where networks and contacts are developed. The quality of the visitor experience onsite continues to drive repeat visitation.

### Traditional Arts Associated with Ulster Scots

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what action it is taking to support and promote the traditional arts associated with Ulster Scots. (AQW 5149/09)

**Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** DCAL funding for arts is disbursed by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. The Arts Council seeks to promote access to all artforms, including those associated with Ulster-Scots.

Although there is no specific funding programme dedicated to promoting the traditional arts associated with Ulster Scots, funding is available through a range of programmes including the Support for Individual Artists Programme, the Annual Support for Organisations Programme (which incorporates the Cultural Traditions Programme), the Arts Development Fund, and Lottery funding.

The Arts Council is currently providing funding to the Ulster-Scots Heritage Council for a salary for an arts officer. This is the second year in which support has been provided for this post, which has been effective in generating co-operation within the sector and stimulating new arts practice. For the first time, the Ulster-Scots community has a dedicated arts officer, working among the full range of organisations with an investment in 'Ulster-Scots'.

The Arts Council has also provided funding to the Ulster-Scots Heritage Council for other projects, including a project in Scottish Country Dance. The organisation engages in a variety of arts activity including verbal arts, music and dance, and produces materials for use by teachers and youth leaders.

The Arts Council has awarded £662,140 for Ulster-Scots related projects since 1 April 2004.

The Arts Council is currently restructuring its Arts Development Department and intends to advertise for a part time Traditional Arts Officer in the next six months. Support for the traditional arts is currently provided by a number of Arts Development Officers with relevant knowledge of the sector.

## Broadcasting: Devolution

**Mrs Hanna** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what consideration his Department has given to the possible devolution of Broadcasting. (AQO 2513/09)

**Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** Broadcasting responsibilities and powers remain a reserved matter. However, I am committed where possible, to ensuring that the specific characteristics and needs of Northern Ireland are fully considered in the development of broadcasting policy.

For example, my Department has responded to the consultation process on the Ofcom Review of Public Service Broadcasting. I am pleased to advise that Ofcom has listened to our representations and subsequently amended the original proposals for Northern Ireland in its final recommendations to the UK Government. The recommendations were published on 21 January 2009.

I have also written to Lord Carter, the Minister for Communications, Technology and Broadcasting, who is responsible for the Digital Britain Review. I have asked him to engage directly with the Northern Ireland broadcasting community in order to ensure that the views of key stakeholders here are clearly articulated to the Review team. I understand that Lord Carter has agreed to host a round table discussion on Digital Britain in Northern Ireland on 23rd April which I will be attending.

I have also agreed to a joint meeting with my counterparts in the Scottish Executive and the Welsh Assembly, to discuss the future of broadcasting and how the needs of our nations are fully taken into account by the UK Government. A suitable date for this meeting is being arranged.

I will continue to ensure that Northern Ireland's position is considered and reflected in the development of broadcasting policy. I consider that the devolution of broadcasting would be difficult and would be a major drain on the resources of the devolved administrations, with the need to introduce parallel legislation in each jurisdiction. Also in the current economic situation and the resultant pressures on Public Service Broadcasters, devolution of broadcasting could result in further fragmentation of commercial broadcasting sector.

## Ulster Museum

**Mr B McCrea** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for his assessment of the progress in refurbishing the Ulster Museum. (AQO 2514/09)

**Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** Refurbishment work on the Ulster Museum is on schedule and progressing well, with the reopening planned for Autumn 2009. This is a major landmark project which will see the Ulster Museum entirely revitalised with additional gallery space and state-of-the-art visitor facilities. Construction work for the project is on the verge of completion and fit-out of the galleries has already commenced.

## Stadia Development

**Mr Ross** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for his assessment of the importance of the contract between the Irish Football Association and Linfield Football Club in relation to stadia development. (AQO 2515/09)

**Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** The present lease and financial agreement between the Irish Football Association (IFA) and Linfield Football club currently enables all of the Northern Ireland international football team's competitive home international games to be played at Windsor Park. Windsor Park is presently Northern Ireland's largest football stadium and I understand that the lease and financial agreement imposes obligations on both the IFA and Linfield to maintain the stadium in good order, repair and condition. I have made it clear to both the IFA and Linfield that any development at Windsor Park which involved significant public expenditure would be conditional on the current contractual arrangements being replaced.

## Film Industry: Economic Contribution

**Mr Poots** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for his assessment of the contribution that development of the film industry can make to the economy. (AQO 2516/09)

**Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** Northern Ireland Screen has been proactive in securing major productions for Northern Ireland which include *City of Ember*, *Closing the Ring* and *Five Minutes of Heaven*.

I am pleased to note the First and deputy First Ministers recent announcement that Northern Ireland Screen has secured the production of the major Hollywood film 'Your Highness' at the Paint Hall, in Belfast's Titanic Quarter. It is expected that the film could mean as much as £10 million to the Northern Ireland economy, employing hundreds of Northern Ireland cast, crew and extras.

Provisional figures indicate that the sub-sector accounted for 2,437 employee jobs (0.3% of total employee jobs in NI) in 2007. The film industry provides many skilled jobs in NI. Furthermore, Northern Ireland Screen estimates that film and television drama production, which are supported through the same funding package, generated around £30m expenditure to the Northern Ireland economy in the last three years.

Films contribute substantially to the cultural life of a country and are a key means of expressing our identity and cultural diversity. Films depicting Northern Ireland are also responsible for attracting tourism and promoting the image of Northern Ireland internationally.

### John Calvin

**Mr Simpson** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if his Department recognises the importance of the 500th anniversary of the birth of John Calvin to cultural life. (AQO 2517/09)

**Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** I recognise John Calvin's contribution to Reformed Christian theology, through both his writing and preaching.

This contribution has significantly informed the life of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches both here and further afield.

### Public Money: Arts Spend

**Mr Burns** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure why his Department has not made an assessment of the social and/or economic return to the economy per pound of public money spent on the arts. (AQO 2518/09)

**Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** It is relevant to note here that employment in the creative industries is around 34,600 (4.7% of the workforce) and that this accounts for around 3.8% of the value of the Northern Ireland economy. This area of the economy has been growing rapidly in recent years.

In 2007, DCAL commissioned a study into the social and economic value of public libraries, museums, art and sport in Northern Ireland (known as the ValCAL research project). This research looked in detail at the available data and identified a range of social and economic benefits. However, it was not possible to make a reliable assessment of the economic return per pound spent on the arts.

The challenge of quantifying the economic return on public money spent on the arts is universal and not unique to Northern Ireland.

### Arts Funding

**Ms Lo** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for his assessment of funding for the arts. (AQO 2519/09)

**Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** In the Budget 2008 – 11 £55.5m revenue funding has been allocated over three years to the arts. A further £31.6m capital funding has been awarded to the arts bringing the total figure for the three years to £87.1m.

These revenue allocations reflect an increase of £9.75m over the 3 years. This is a very significant uplift which was allocated following the public consultation on the Draft Budget. The increase reflects the Executive's appreciation that investment in the arts can generate significant economic, cultural and social benefits.

Despite this increase, the Arts Council has not been able to meet the very high levels of demand for funding through its various funding streams. I am also aware that the current economic climate is having an adverse impact on the amounts of private sponsorship and philanthropic donations to the arts.



I am committed to the development of the Arts and Creativity sector. However, Members will be aware that, we are facing a much more challenging expenditure environment which will put increasing pressure on all areas of expenditure.

The CAL committee is currently carrying out an inquiry into funding of the arts in Northern Ireland. My Department has responded to the inquiry and I am aware of the input provided by the Arts Council. I very much welcome the inquiry and look forward to its conclusions and recommendations, which I will consider carefully when received.

### Windsor Park

**Mr Butler** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail his proposed remedial programme of work at Windsor Park, so that international football matches can continue to be played there. (AQO 2520/09)

**Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** Responsibility for developing proposals for a remedial programme of work at Windsor Park so that international football can continue to be played there rests with the Irish Football Association (IFA), the governing body of football in Northern Ireland, and Linfield FC, the owners of the ground. I am aware that the IFA, in conjunction with Linfield, is currently developing such proposals and Sport Northern Ireland (SNI), which is responsible for the development of sport including the distribution of funding, is assisting the IFA and Linfield in that process. Obviously, any proposal for remedial and health and safety work at Windsor Park would need to be viewed in the context of the IFA's long-term stadium development plans.

### Creative Industries Innovation Fund

**Mr Cree** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the Creative Industries Innovation Fund. (AQO 2521/09)

**Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** I launched the £5m Creative Industries Innovation Fund on 17 October 2008 to support Northern Ireland's creative sector and am committed to ensuring that all creative businesses have the opportunity to benefit from the Fund.

An initial call for applications from sectoral bodies was issued with the launch of the Fund and 8 organisations submitted applications to the Arts Council.

Following the assessment process funding of £283,560 has been awarded for the delivery of 12 projects.

The projects include international showcasing, a creativity conference, a high definition video content website and the development of marketing plans. I believe that these projects will strengthen the creative sector as a whole.

A second call for applications from creative enterprises opened on 5 January 2009 and closed on 5 February. The Arts Council has advised that 352 applications have been received and these are currently being assessed.

Due to the considerably higher level of interest than originally anticipated, it is likely that decisions on these applications will not be finalised until at least June 2009.

A further call for applications will take place in September 2009 with a closing date of 8 October.

Through the Fund £2m will be made available in each of the years 2009/10 and 2010/11.

### Language Development

**Mr Attwood** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline any recent discussions he has had with counterparts in Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland on language development in other regions; and what lessons he has learned in relation to models of good practice. (AQO 2522/09)

**Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** I have discussed language issues with my counterparts in Scotland, Wales and the Irish Republic on several occasions.

I met former Minister Fabriani on 8 September 2008 and Minister O'Cuiv on 4 July 2008 and 16 January 2009. I also met my Scottish, Welsh and Irish Republic counterparts at the meeting of the British Irish Council on 19 and 20 February when language issues were on the agenda.

I have found these meetings to be valuable in demonstrating alternatives to language legislation and providing models of good practice for language protection and development.

## Health and Well-Being

**Mr McCallister** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail what discussions he has had with the Scottish Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing. (AQO 2523/09)

**Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** I have not had any discussions, nor have I received any requests to meet, with Nicola Sturgeon the Scottish Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing.

## Irish Language

**Mr Brolly** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure why he did not detail his strategy to promote and enhance the Irish language at the last meeting of the British Irish Council where language issues featured on the agenda. (AQO 2524/09)

**Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** The meeting of the British Irish Council on 19 and 20 February 2009 was principally concerned with Social Inclusion.

As the Strategy for Indigenous or Regional Minority Languages has not yet been considered by the Executive I did not think it was appropriate to raise the issue at this time.

## Maze Stadium

**Mr McClarty** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what plans he has to reallocate funds from the Maze stadium project to the IFA or football clubs. (AQO 2525/09)

**Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** I have indicated my intention to defer major stadium expenditure and to bring forward a number of other high priority sports capital programmes. I am currently considering the scope to re-allocate some of the funding originally allocated for stadium development in 2009/10 and 2010/11, by way of re-profiling the capital programme.

This will include the consideration of a range of competing pressures in my Department's capital programme, such as stadia safety issues and the Elite Facilities Programme.

In seeking to access funding, re-allocated or otherwise, the IFA along with other sports governing bodies and individual clubs may apply to Sport NI and its capital programmes.

## DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

### Voluntary Grammar Sector

**Mr O'Dowd** asked the Minister of Education what financial accountability mechanisms are in place to ensure public funds are properly managed and audited in the voluntary grammar sector. (AQW 6453/09)

**Minister of Education (Ms Ruane):** Éilíonn an Roinn ar gach Scoil Dheonach Ghramadaí (VSGanna) a bhíonn á maoiniú aici, glacadh le Meabhrán Airgeadais a leagann amach na freagrachtaí airgeadais a bhíonn ar Bhoird Ghobharnóirí agus ar Phríomhoidí.

The Department requires all Voluntary Grammar Schools (VGS) it funds to agree to a Financial Memorandum which sets out the financial responsibilities for Boards of Governors and Principals. A key element of the Financial Memorandum is compliance with the requirements included in the Financial and Audit Arrangements Manual for Voluntary Grammar Schools (FAAM) produced by the Department. This document specifies the standards required in respect of financial management and accountability and is supplemented from time to time by the Department with any current guidance or requirements issued by the Department of Finance and Personnel in respect of relevant financial issues for all public bodies. Additionally, a requirement in FAAM is the submission for analysis of in-year financial returns by all VGS and follow-up by the Department as may be required. All Voluntary Grammar schools funded by the Department are also required annually to be subject to both internal and external audits by professionally qualified auditors (in a format designated by the Department within the

FAAM) in respect of their financial management and financial accountability with the results of these audits submitted for analysis and evaluation by the Department. A further mechanism in respect of evaluating financial management and accountability is performed by NIAO who conduct an annual audit on the DE Accounts which include funding provided to the Voluntary Grammar Sector. I am however concerned that we have the correct approach to financial accountability and therefore I look forward to discussing these issues with representatives of all VGS at meetings to be arranged over the coming months.

### Asbestos Risk Assessments

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Education (i) to detail the asbestos risk assessment for each school, broken down by parliamentary constituency; (ii) to outline the criteria by which risk is assessed; (iii) if guidance is available to schools on dealing with asbestos; and (iv) if she has any plans to reform the policy on asbestos in schools. (AQW 6663/09)

#### Minister of Education:

NIA 115/08-10	Financial Auditing and Reporting 2007-08
NIA 116/08-11	The Administration & Management of Disability Living Allowance Reconsideration & Appeals Process
NIA 117/08-12	General Report on the Health & Social Care Sector by the Comptroller & Auditor General for Northern Ireland 2008

### Primary Schools

**Mr Gardiner** asked the Minister of Education (i) which primary schools of all management types underspent their budgets; (ii) how much underspend there was; and (iii) what happened to the underspend, broken down by Education and Library Board area, in each of the last three years. (AQW 6786/09)

**Minister of Education:** Details of year end surpluses on primary schools budgets in each of the last three years (2005/06, 2006/07, 2007/08), are contained in the schools LMS Outturn Statements for each individual school which have been deposited in the Assembly Library. A summary of the amount of year-end surplus in each of the last three years for primary schools of all management types, broken down by Education and Library Board area is provided at Annex A.

Under the Local Management of School (LMS) arrangements, a school may accumulate savings over a period of several years, however these should not be in excess of 5% or £75,000, whichever is the lesser, of their delegated budget unless they are being accumulated for specific purposes and are detailed in the school financial plans.

Tá na barrachais chinn bhlíana ar fad leithdháilte ar scoileanna aonair agus tá sé de dhualagas ar na Boird Gobhanóirí scoile cinntí a dhéanamh ar cén dóigh a úsáidfear na barrachais seo, laistigh de théarmaí na Foirmle Có-mhaoinithe do scoileanna.

All year-end surpluses remain committed to individual schools and the decisions on how the surpluses are utilised are for the schools' Board of Governors to determine within the terms of the Common Funding Formula for schools.

#### ANNEXE A

#### PRIMARY SCHOOL SURPLUS BY EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD AREA

	2005/06		2006/07		2007/08	
	No of Schools	(£000s)	No of Schools	(£000s)	No of Schools	(£000s)
Belfast	35	1,808	47	2,763	54	4,126
North Eastern	128	2,914	158	5,719	180	6,780
South Eastern	89	4,846	101	5,556	120	7,834
Southern	119	3,398	145	5,202	168	7,094
Western	141	4,461	131	6,774	137	7,800

### Teaching Vacancies

**Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Education how many teaching vacancies there are in each school in the Upper Bann area. (AQW 6885/09)

**Minister of Education:** Bíonn an Roinn ag iarraidh eolais ar fholúntais mhúinteoirí ó gach scoil dheontaschúnta ar bhonn bhliantúil. Soláthraíonn an t-eolas “griangraf” ar na folúntais atá ar fáil ar dháta áirithe gach bliain. Leagtar amach thíos na sonruithe a bhaineann le togcheantar na Banna Uachtar:

The Department seeks information on teacher vacancies from all grant-aided schools on an annual basis. The information provides a “snapshot” of vacancies at a specific date each year. Details for the Upper Bann parliamentary constituency are set out below:

#### NUMBER OF VACANCIES STILL TO BE FILLED DURING THE 2008/09 ACADEMIC YEAR AT 3RD NOVEMBER 2008 IN SCHOOLS IN THE UPPER BANN PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY

School Name	Permanent		Temporary		Total
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	
Edenderry PS	1	0	0	0	1
Craigavon PS	0	1	0	0	1
Ballyoran PS	1	0	0	0	1
St Mary's PS	1	0	0	0	1
St John The Baptist PS	1	0	0	0	1
Ceara Special School	1	0	0	0	1
Banbridge Academy	1	1	0	0	2

### Newbuild Schools

**Mr McCartney** asked the Minister of Education (i) if the use of renewable energy was considered in the plans for the newbuild schools St Mary's College and St.Cecilia's College; and (ii) if it is departmental policy that projects favour the use of renewable energy sources. (AQW 6932/09)

**Minister of Education:** Tugadh mar chomhairle dom gur bhreathnaigh Comhairle na Scoileanna Caitliceacha faoi Chothabháil (CCMS) ar úsáid an fuinnimh in-athnuaite nuair a bhí an tógáil nua ar na scoileanna le haghaidh Coláiste Muire agus Coláiste Cecilia á pleanáil acu, cé gur shocraigh siad gan dul ar aghaidh léi sa chás seo.

I have been advised that the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) considered the use of renewable energy in the planning for the newbuild schools for St Mary's College and St Cecilia's College though it was not pursued in this case.

The departmental policy is that renewable energy sources should be considered for all school newbuild projects. Procurement of school buildings takes account of the Government Estate Sustainable Procurement Action Plan and the department's Sustainable Operations on the Government Estate Action Plan in relation to renewable energy sources. The Department of Education also contributes to Government renewable energy targets.

### Teaching Vacancies

**Mr Ross** asked the Minister of Education how many teaching vacancies there are in each school in the East Antrim constituency. (AQW 6961/09)

**Minister of Education:** Bíonn an Roinn ag iarraidh eolais ar fholúntais mhúinteoirí ó gach scoil dheontaschúnta ar bhonn bhliantúil. Soláthraíonn an t-eolas “griangraf” ar na folúntais atá ar fáil ar dháta áirithe gach bliain. Leagtar amach thíos na sonruithe a bhaineann le togcheantar an Aontroma Thiar:



The Department seeks information on teacher vacancies from all grant-aided schools on an annual basis. The information provides a “snapshot” of vacancies at a specific date each year. Details for the East Antrim parliamentary constituency are set out below:

**NUMBER OF VACANCIES STILL TO BE FILLED DURING THE 2008/09 ACADEMIC YEAR AT 3RD NOVEMBER 2008 IN SCHOOLS IN THE EAST ANTRIM PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY**

School Name	Permanent		Temporary		Total
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	
Olderfleet PS	1	0	0	0	1
Moyle PS	1	0	1	0	2
Linn PS	0	0	1	0	1
Silverstream PS	2	0	0	0	2
St Anthony's PS	0	0	0	1	1
St Nicholas' PS	1	0	0	0	1
Carnlough Controlled Integrated PS	1	0	0	0	1
Monkstown Community School	1	0	0	0	1

### Broughshane Primary School

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Education if her Department has any plans to provide a new building for Broughshane Primary School. (AQW 7037/09)

**Minister of Education:** Is féidir amharc ar an fhreagra a thug mé ar cheist chomhchosúil leis seo a d'fhiafraigh Mervyn Storey MLA díom – in AQW 6731/09. Tá fáil air seo sa Thuairisc Oifigiúil dar dáta 17 Aibreán 2009

I refer you to my answer to the similar question from Mervyn Storey MLA - AQW 6731/09 refers. This can be viewed in the Official Report of 17 April 2009.

## DEPARTMENT FOR EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING

### Major Retail Investments

**Mr Hamilton** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if his Department or its agencies have worked with large retailers and community groups/associations to train people for major retail investments, in the last three years. (AQW 5214/09)

**Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey):** The Employment Service role is to assist employers to fill vacancies and to assist individuals to move into work. A vacancy service is provided to thousands of employers across Northern Ireland, including in the retail sector. The Employment Service has worked closely with a number of employers in the retail sector and including retail developments such as the Victoria Square and Outlet developments.

Through the Bridge to Employment Programme, my Department participated in a project led by the Local Employment Access Partnership to train staff for IKEA. Two groups of 15 trainees were recruited through community organisations.

In addition, Further Education Colleges have collaborated with a number of major employers and with Skillsmart, the sector skills council, on the development and delivery of training programmes for the retail sector.

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**DEPARTMENT OF ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT****Project Kelvin**

**Ms Anderson** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to confirm that the Telehouse announced for Londonderry/ Derry will be marketed as the Project Kelvin Telehouse by Invest NI when seeking Foreign Direct Investment. (AQW 7147/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs A Foster):** Invest NI will promote Project Kelvin and the benefits it brings to the whole of Northern Ireland. The project currently consists of 8 Points of Presence, one of which is the telehouse in Londonderry.

Invest NI will integrate the benefits of Project Kelvin into its Northern Ireland sales proposition. This will help in its efforts to secure quality mobile foreign direct investment from companies that need an excellent telecommunications infrastructure as part of their overall solution.

**DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT****Management of Bonfires**

**Dr Farry** asked the Minister of the Environment to report on his Department's obligations in relation to the regulation of '11th Night' bonfires. (AQW 7017/09)

**Minister of the Environment (Mr S Wilson):** My Department's obligations, and powers in relation, to '11th Night' bonfires are limited, being only one of a number of public authorities with an interest in this area.

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) has neither the regulatory powers nor sufficient operational resources to remove waste from bonfire sites. This is the responsibility of either the Housing Executive, should they own the land, or district councils, which are also responsible for the control of smoke emissions, under the Clean Air (NI) Order 1981.

NIEA's focus is on commercial, large scale dumping and our investigations focus on those businesses and transporters who allow waste to be deposited illegally. Agency staff can pursue incidents of wastes being illegally deposited on bonfires if they have evidence of the company, or the carrier, responsible. If there is sufficient evidence then NIEA will prepare a file for the Public Prosecution Service (PPS).

In respect of controlling air pollution arising from bonfires, district councils are the lead enforcement authority and the primary legislation is the Clean Air (NI) Order 1981. Article 4 of the Order prohibits the emission of dark smoke from industrial or trade premises, or other premises on which waste originating from a trade source is burned. Article 23 provides that where a nuisance is caused by smoke emitted from premises, then action can be taken under the Public Health (Ireland) Act 1878 for 'statutory nuisance.'

In terms of guidance, NIEA officials maintain regular liaison with tyre dealers in the lead-up to bonfires being built to ensure that they are aware of their responsibilities with regard to Duty of Care and that appropriate procedures are being followed.

My Department is also obliged to monitor, and encourage, Northern Ireland's adherence to targets within the EU Waste Directive, which stipulates percentages of waste to be recycled by certain years.

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## DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

### Civil Service

**Mr Burns** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the total number of Civil Servants who have been supplied with job-related mobile phones; and (ii) how much money his Department has spent paying the bills for these phones, in each of the last five years. (AQW 6311/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr N Dodds):** It is not possible to supply all of the information requested for the last 5 years.

As of 31st March 2009 5848 Civil Servants were supplied (of which 601 were DFP staff) with job-related mobile phones and other mobile technologies and the total spend for DFP staff in 08/09 was £111,646.45.

Please note that there is a requirement on staff to pay for any personal calls made on NICS-provided mobile phones.

### VAT Paid by Departments

**Mr McNarry** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much has each of the Departments paid in VAT to other (i) Departments; and (ii) UK Departments, over the last three years. (AQW 6497/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel:** In the case of departments in Northern Ireland and certain public bodies, an agreement has been reached, with HM Revenue and Customs, that Value Added Tax (VAT) paid on goods and services may be refunded. This was done, at the introduction of VAT in 1973, on the basis that many of the services administered by Central Government in Northern Ireland would be regarded as local authority functions in Great Britain and there is a single VAT registration number covering all participants in this arrangement. All VAT paid by NI Departments to other NI Departments and GB Departments for the last three years has been reclaimed.

It is not possible without disproportionate effort to quantify the amount of VAT paid.

### Civil Service

**Mr McQuillan** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to the answer to AQW 5594/09, whether he will fill the 1067.8 vacancies across the Civil Service, that are currently filled by temporary staff, with pensionable appointed civil servants. (AQW 6596/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel:** The 1067.8 NICS posts identified in the previous answer as being filled by temporary workers were a mixture of permanent and temporary posts. It is intended that less than 50% will subsequently be filled by permanent staff.

The use of temporary arrangements allows management greater flexibility in meeting business needs in terms, for example, of running projects of limited duration or dealing with temporary pressures in staffing levels

### Concessionary Travel Pass Applications

**Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) how many days does it take to process an application for a Concessionary Travel Pass for Civil Service employees; (ii) how many Concessionary Travel Pass applications have not been processed and are still outstanding; and (iii) what is the average waiting time from the date of application for the Concessionary Travel Pass to its receipt. (AQW 6656/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel:** The average time taken to process concessionary travel claims, known as excess fares allowance, depends on the circumstances of the particular application. Payroll cut off for salaries is usually on the 12th of the given month. All applications completed before this date will be included in that month's salary.

There are currently 32 concessionary travel applications to be processed.

The average waiting time from the date of application for excess fares allowance to its receipt cannot be determined. Applications are through an automated system which is not designed to track the initial date of application against the excess fares that are recorded on the system.

### Investment Planned for East Antrim

**Mr Hilditch** asked Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the (i) projects; and (ii) amount of investment planned for the East Antrim constituency, for each of the next two financial years. (AQW 6750/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel:** The Department of Finance and Personnel currently has no investment projects planned for the East Antrim constituency in the financial years 09/10 and 10/11.

### Government Construction Contracts

**Mr Savage** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in relation to his statement that in excess of 90% of government construction contracts were awarded to local companies during the financial year 2008/9, to list (i) the contracts; (ii) the value of the contracts; and (iii) the companies awarded the contracts. (AQW 6807/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel:** The information required to provide a comprehensive reply to your question is not held centrally in DFP.

However, Government construction clients have recently advised the Central Procurement Directorate that, up to January 2009, 324 construction works contracts, valued at £250k or above, were awarded by Government construction clients. The aggregated value of these contracts was approximately £575m. Of these, 318, (approximately 98%), with an aggregated value of approximately £571m, were awarded to local construction companies.

The ISNI Information Portal, when available, will provide access to information on individual projects.

### Water Infrastructure Projects

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel the financial implications of slippage in the timing of capital schemes for water infrastructure projects. (AQW 6949/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel:** At present, there is almost £200 million capital allocated for waste infrastructure projects in the Budget period 2008-2011. Should there be slippage in these projects, thus necessitating spend beyond the Budget period, DOE, as the sponsoring Department, would bid for the relevant amounts in the years beyond the budget period. Such bids would be considered by the Executive in the light of all the competing pressures and in the context of the resources available.

### Reclassification of Resource Expenditure

**Mr McNarry** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what impact reclassification of resource expenditure will have on the Northern Ireland Block Grant in the next Comprehensive Spending Review. (AQW 6952/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel:** The reclassification of resource expenditure as capital investment by the Executive, as part of the in-year monitoring process, will not impact on the opening baseline position for the Northern Ireland Block in the next Spending Review.

### Civil Service

**Mr Burns** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of civil servants who have taken early retirement in each of the last five years, broken down by gender and retirement age. (AQW 6969/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel:** The number of civil servants who have taken early retirement in each of the last five years, broken down by gender and retirement age, is set out in the attached table.



## NUMBERS OF NICS EARLY RETIREMENTS IN YEARS 2004/5 TO 2008/9

## BROKEN DOWN BY AGE AND GENDER

Age	2004/05		2005/06		2006/07		2007/08		2008/09	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
28	1									
30							2			
31		1								
33		1			1					
34	1							1		
35		1	2		1					1
36	1	1	1	1		1				
37		1		2	2			1		
38	1	1					1	2		
39		2		1	1	1	1			1
40			1	1		2				
41	1	3	3	3	2	2	1	1		
42	2		1			1	1	2		
43	1	1	1	1		3	3	2		
44	2	1	2			1		3	2	
45	1	2	2	2	1	1	3	4	1	1
46	1	3		7	1	5	1	1	2	
47	1	3			2	5	1	3		
48	1	5		6		7	2	1	1	4
49	5	4		4	8	3	2	4	2	3
50	5	6	3	3	9	3	10	3	2	2
51	5	4	7	1	3	5	3	2	1	1
52	5	2	3	7	4	1	2	2	3	2
53	2	3	3	7	6	4	4	5	2	4
54	5	4	9	2	6	7	6	6		3
55	4	8	5	4	6	4	7	4	6	2
56	5	2	4	3	7	3	5	6	6	2
57	5	10	9	5	7	5	10	6	7	2
58	12	7	15	11	10	6	11	9	5	12
59	11	8	20	13	20	15	33	16	13	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Annual Total</b>	<b>162</b>		<b>175</b>		<b>182</b>		<b>193</b>		<b>100</b>	

## Energy Performance Certificates

**Mr Buchanan** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel when his Department will impose fines on individuals and businesses who fail to have, or display, an energy performance certificate in their premises. (AQW 6980/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel:** The Department is currently pursuing an enforcement regime based on Trading Standard's best practice, which recognises that enforcement is measured by compliance rather than the number of fines imposed. Each case will be considered on its own merit, and fines will be imposed on the relevant person when the Department is satisfied that all other routes to encourage compliance have been exhausted.

## DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

### Arthritis Care Report

**Mr Storey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) what measures his Department is taking in response to the Arthritis Care Report in which many respondents described the dismissive attitude of medical professional, during diagnosis and treatment; (ii) if his Department maintains complaints statistics; and (iii) to breakdown the number of complaints by Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 4887/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr McGimpsey):**

- (i) My Department is already taking steps which address the issues raised in the Arthritis Care Report. Additional funding has been made available for services for people with arthritis and waiting times for anti-TNF treatment and hospital appointments have been reduced. The report is critical of the attitude of medical professionals. This is very disappointing and needs to be addressed, and we are doing so. For example, this is one of the key areas covered in the GP Patient Experience Survey currently being undertaken by the Department. Over 50,000 replies to the survey questionnaire have been received and I will ensure that action is taken to address areas of concern identified in the survey.
- (ii) My Department's Hospital Information Branch maintains health and social care complaints statistics.
- (iii) The following table presents a breakdown of the total number of complaints received by Health and Social Care Trusts (in each of the last three years):

HSC Trust	Total number of complaints received		
	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
Belfast Trust	1762	2118	1793
South Eastern Trust	729	944	743
Northern Trust	1106	1895	1087
Southern Trust	623	625	494
Western Trust	546	660	636
NI Ambulance Service	178	129	107
<b>Total</b>	<b>4944</b>	<b>6371</b>	<b>4860</b>

### Daisy Hill Hospital, Newry

**Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what progress has been made to date on improving parking facilities at Daisy Hill Hospital, Newry. (AQW 4901/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** I have provided funding for a further 87 car parking spaces at the Daisy Hill Hospital site. Work is underway and is expected to be completed in March 2009.

### Revenue Funding

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if, under exceptional circumstances, revenue funding can be transferred to capital funding. (AQW 4907/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** Under exceptional circumstances it may be possible to transfer revenue funding to capital funding. However, this could only be done with the approval of HM Treasury and in agreement with the Department of Finance and Personnel.

### Patient Deaths

**Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what records the Department keeps on the number of patient deaths attributable to hospital error. (AQW 4908/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The information requested is not collected by my Department.

### Administration Staff in Hospitals

**Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what education and training is in place for administration staff in hospitals in relation to hygiene. (AQW 4910/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** Administration staff in all Trusts receive Infection Prevention and Control training.

### Ambulance Vehicles

**Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the deep cleaning procedures in place for ambulance vehicles. (AQW 4911/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The cleaning of the ambulance fleet and equipment is the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS). I have been assured by NIAS that ambulance stations are supplied with the necessary equipment and materials to facilitate vehicle cleaning and that robust procedures for infection control which comply with national guidelines are in place.

Deep cleaning involves the removal of the major pieces of equipment from the ambulance and thorough cleaning of these along with cleaning the interior of the ambulance and its external body.

### Pneumonia

**Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many cases of hospital acquired pneumonia and MRSA related pneumonia there were in each hospital, in each of the last three years. (AQW 4912/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The information requested is not available

### Flu Vaccination

**Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of people who received letters informing them that they may benefit from a flu vaccination who did not avail of the opportunity and what percentage of the total number of letters sent out that this represented, in each of the last three years. (AQW 4915/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The information requested is not available.

## MRSA

**Mr Simpson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many visitors to hospitals have contracted (i) MRSA; and (ii) Clostridium Difficile, in each of the last ten years. (AQW 4918/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The information requested is not available.

## Nursing Staff

**Mr Molloy** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what the total number of nursing staff is, in each Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 5093/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** Information on the number of nursing staff employed by each Health and Social Care Trust can be found in the latest Northern Ireland Health and Social Care Key Facts Workforce Bulletin as at 31st December 2008, which is on the DHSSPS website at:

[http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/key\\_facts\\_workforce\\_bulletin\\_dec\\_2008\\_web.pdf](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/key_facts_workforce_bulletin_dec_2008_web.pdf)

## Efficiency Savings

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he will be bringing the Health and Social Care Trusts proposals on efficiency savings to the Executive. (AQW 6699/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** Executive approval is only required for decisions or proposals that cross Departmental boundaries. I therefore do not intend to bring any efficiency proposals to the Executive for consideration. The Executive is aware of the public concerns about the proposals being put forward by Health and Social Care Trusts. These proposals are only necessary as there has been no dispensation given to Health and Social Care from the 3% per annum efficiency target.

## Cancelled Clinics

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many clinics were cancelled during the 2007/08 and 2008/09 period. (AQW 6754/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** Information in respect of cancelled clinics during 2007/08 can be found on the DHSSPS website at [http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats\\_research/stats-activity\\_stats-2/hospital\\_statistics.htm#hospital](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/stats-activity_stats-2/hospital_statistics.htm#hospital)

Following a review of my Department's outpatient data collection, the collection of data on cancelled clinics was discontinued from the beginning of 2008/09 and was replaced by the collection of data on cancelled outpatient appointments.

The 2008/09 Annual Hospital Statistics publication which will report on the number of cancelled outpatient appointments during 2008/09 will be published in August/September 2009.

## Minor Ailments Scheme

**Mr McClarty** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the reasons why people who are not exempt from paying prescription charges are also not eligible for the minor ailments scheme, given that some medications on this scheme are cheaper on prescription rather than over-the-counter. (AQW 6978/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The minor ailments service was initiated as part of the Pharmaceutical Efficiencies programme in response to the Comprehensive Spending Review 2005/08. The principal tenet of the minor ailments service is that it is more efficient to treat some common, minor ailments in community pharmacies as opposed to within GP practices. The evidence suggests that those patients who can afford to pay for medication for minor ailments will choose to do so, while those who cannot afford to pay will consult their GP in order to receive supply via a health service prescription.



Whilst there are some products on the Minor Ailments Scheme, mainly for headlice and thrush, which cost more than the cost of a current prescription charge, the majority, over 80% are less than £3.00.

It is important to note that this is an interim scheme which will run for one year. It will be monitored and include an evaluation of the ongoing affordability and value for money of the service. Now that prescription charges are in the process of being removed, careful consideration needs to be given to the minor ailments scheme and a review group comprising relevant stakeholders has been established to make proposals.

### Care of Patients

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking to increase the role of family members for the care of patients. (AQW 6989/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** Trusts, at present, are required to ensure that comprehensive determination of need takes account of the wishes of service users and their carers (usually family). Service users and their carers should be supported to make informed choices about packages of care. The proposed new capacity legislation will provide for statutory recognition of the views of carers to be taken into account when decisions on care plans are being made.

### Care of Patients

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what responsibilities health care staff have to take into consideration the views of family members regarding the care of patients who have reduced mental capacity. (AQW 6990/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** Staff dealing with patients with a reduced mental capacity should, as best practice, consult with a person nominated to speak on behalf of the patient and explain what their proposed treatment will be. In the case of a patient detained under the Mental Health Order, the 'nearest relative' should be informed about the proposed treatment regime. The views of family members are integral to any care package as part of a multidisciplinary assessment of needs.

### Care of Patients

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what role do family members have in the decision making process relating to the care of individuals with severe mental problems. (AQW 6991/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** Family members are involved in any multidisciplinary assessment of the patients needs. In the case of a person with severe mental needs, there would usually be one member of the family nominated to speak for, and be consulted on, the person's behalf.

### Care of Patients

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his plans to introduce legislation to clarify the rights of family members to intervene when patients with mental health problems are incapable of making their own decisions. (AQW 6992/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** My Department has completed consultation on a "Legislative Framework for Mental Capacity and Mental Health Legislation in Northern Ireland", which ended on 31 March. This framework contains a proposal to replace the existing role of the nearest relative with a new role of nominated person, as recommended in the Bamford Review. Following this consultation, my Department will be seeking the endorsement of the Executive on its policy proposals.

## Care of Patients

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety under what circumstances can health professionals intervene in the feeding of a patient with mental health problems who is refusing to eat. (AQW 6993/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** In the first instance health professionals would aim to engage with the patient, and if appropriate their family and carers, in order to persuade the patient to eat voluntarily. Should this prove unsuccessful, and where the patient is suffering from a mental illness or severe mental impairment of a nature or degree which would warrant his detention in hospital, they would then be able to intervene by detaining the person under the Mental Health Order for treatment, which may include re-feeding.

Before deciding on whether or not to feed a patient against their will, clinicians will ensure that any intervention is proportionate and complies with available clinical and legal guidance.

## Policy on Recycling

**Dr Farry** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to report on the current policy on recycling or purchasing used medical equipment where appropriate and safe to do so. (AQW 7016/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** Any medical device, new or otherwise, used by HSC bodies that has been purchased, donated or obtained on loan, must have a valid CE mark and be fit for its intended purpose in accordance with the guidance contained in Device Bulletin DB2006 (05) Managing Medical Devices published by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency and available on their website at [www.mhra.gov.uk/publications/safetyguidance/devicebulletins](http://www.mhra.gov.uk/publications/safetyguidance/devicebulletins).

## MRSA

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) what is the procedure for swabbing for MRSA at the A&E department in the Ulster Hospital; and (ii) why there is a procedural difference between this and those in the wards in the hospital. (AQW 7113/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The swabbing procedures for MRSA in the Ulster Hospital are;

- (i) Nasal and groin swabs are taken when screening for MRSA. For patients who are denture wearers a throat swab is also requested. If a patient has a wound (break in the skin) this area is also swabbed.
- (ii) The same screening procedure is employed in the A&E department as in the wards of the hospital.

## MRSA

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why people testing positive for MRSA at the A&E department in the Ulster Hospital are sent home being unaware of the test results, particularly as it is contagious. (AQW 7114/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** Following submission of swabs screening for MRSA a preliminary result is available within 24hrs of receipt of the sample. However following this, the bacteria undergoes further tests, requiring incubation for a further 18-24 hours, to confirm its species and antibiotic sensitivity pattern. It is only when this 48 hour testing period is complete that confirmation of the presence of MRSA can be made.

Most patients presented to the A&E department will have been either admitted to the hospital or discharged home by this time.

When the presence of MRSA has been confirmed, usually 48 hours after the test is submitted to labs, the practice is that the Trust's infection control staff contact the patient's GP to advise of this result, who will follow up.

This is in line with Trust policy.

## MRSA

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why GP's nurses and family members of people who test positive for MRSA in the A&E department of the Ulster Hospital are not told of the results. (AQW 7115/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** Following submission of swabs screening for MRSA a preliminary result is available within 24hrs of receipt of the sample. However following this, the bacteria undergoes further tests, requiring incubation for a further 18-24 hours, to confirm its species and antibiotic sensitivity pattern. It is only when this 48 hour testing period is complete that confirmation of the presence of MRSA can be made.

Most patients presented to the A&E department will have been either admitted to the hospital or discharged home by this time.

When the presence of MRSA has been confirmed, usually 48 hours after the test is submitted to labs, the practice is that the Trust's infection control staff contact the patient's GP to advise of this result, who will follow up.

This is in line with Trust policy.

## Children's Diabetes Research

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to explain why he does not provide funding for children's diabetes research. (AQW 7117/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** My Department, via the Health and Social Care (HSC), Research and Development function of the Public Health Agency, funds a significant amount of research into diabetes - funding currently exceeds £4.9 million and supports twenty three research studies. The studies do not generally focus on the age of patients. Rather they consider aspects such as the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of diabetes and the prevention of diabetic complications.

As well as funding individual research studies the Public Health Agency also funds networks to support clinical research, including the recently established Northern Ireland Clinical Research Network (NICRN). To date the NICRN has adopted ten diabetes research studies with a further six in the pipeline. The NICRN is part of a wider UK Clinical Research Network which brings together a wide range of commercial, academic and charitable funders. Some of these clinical trials are UK-wide studies and some are initiated in Northern Ireland - an example of the latter group is a project looking at the needs of adolescents with Type 1 diabetes.

## Patient and Client Council

**Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide the names of those appointed to the Patient and Client Council. (AQW 7144/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** I refer the Member to [www.patientclientcouncil.hscni.net](http://www.patientclientcouncil.hscni.net)

## DEPARTMENT FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### Road Opening

**Mr Maginness** asked the Minister for Regional Development what steps he intends to take to ensure that the recommendations in the recent PAC Report in relation to road opening are implemented. (AQO 2492/09)

**Minister for Regional Development (Mr Murphy):** I note publication of the report and will consider the Committee's recommendations fully.

The member for Belfast North will be aware of the established parliamentary process regarding responding to recommendations made by the Public Accounts Committee which requires a detailed Memorandum of Reply,

setting out my Department's response to the report, to be submitted to the Chairman of the Committee within 2 months of the publication of the report. On this occasion that will be done before 22 May 2009.

It would, therefore, be inappropriate for me to comment in detail in advance of the issue of the Memorandum of Reply.

### **Rapid Transport System, Belfast**

**Mr B McCrea** asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the need to develop Belfast's rapid transport system beyond the boundaries of the city. (AQO 2493/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** In November 2008 the Executive endorsed the design and construction of a pilot Rapid Transit network in Belfast with 3 routes from the city centre into Titanic Quarter, East Belfast and West Belfast. The newly formed Rapid Transit Division within my department is currently working on the preliminary design of this network. Extensions to the pilot network, either within or outside the boundaries of the city, will be considered based upon the success of the initial pilot network.

### **Water Pipes**

**Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister for Regional Development what action he has taken to ensure that his Department is better equipped to deal with burst water pipes. (AQO 2494/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that it is satisfied it is adequately equipped to respond efficiently and effectively to incidents of burst water mains, through the deployment of in-house resources and contractor support. NIW carries out reviews of all significant incidents and the effectiveness of its responses to them, and any lessons learnt are used to improve subsequent responses.

### **M2 Road Works**

**Mr McCartney** asked the Minister for Regional Development if the M2 road works are on schedule. (AQO 2495/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that the M2 improvement scheme is currently programmed by the contractor for completion by late April/early May - approximately four months ahead of the contractor's original programmed completion date of 28 August 2009.

### **20mph Zones: Lagan Valley**

**Mr Craig** asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to introduce 20mph zones in the Lagan Valley constituency. (AQO 2496/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that it has no plans to introduce any 20 mph zones in the Lagan Valley constituency, at this time.

By way of background I should explain that 20mph zones are an extension of traffic calming schemes, and are generally implemented in residential areas where an extensive network of streets are involved and self-enforcing measures are provided to reduce vehicle speeds to approximately 20mph. Experience shows that 20mph zones in residential areas are ineffective without traffic calming measures.

While there are no plans to introduce any 20mph zones in the Lagan Valley constituency area, Roads Service will continue to implement traffic calming schemes which, by their nature, will encourage a reduction in speed to 20 mph. However, the provision of traffic calming schemes is dependent upon resources. Roads Service receives many requests for traffic calming schemes and, as demand greatly exceeds the capacity to supply these measures, priorities must be established. All requests are assessed objectively, using criteria which consider factors such as, speed, volume of traffic, collision history and general road characteristics.



### Foyle Ferry Service

**Mr Dallat** asked the Minister for Regional Development what steps he has taken to amend articles 99 and 100 of the Roads (NI) Order 1993 which would allow him to take direct action to save the Foyle Ferry Service. (AQO 2497/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** As I advised the Member in my recent answer to his Assembly Question AQW 6417/09, my Department was not involved in the creation of this ferry service, nor does it have legislative or direct operational responsibility. However, in the absence of other Departments or Ministers accepting responsibility, I have offered to work with all parties to see if solutions to its financial problems can be found.

I have previously made it clear that there are already many pressures on the funding available for Roads Service, and I do not foresee my Department taking over responsibility for this ferry service. That said, I am hopeful that in highlighting the problems being encountered by the ferry service and urgently canvassing support from all possible interested parties, the necessary financial support can be secured.

### Rural Transport

**Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister for Regional Development when he intends to conduct a review into rural transport. (AQO 2498/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** My Department is currently reviewing the Regional Transportation Strategy. Among the issues being considered by the review team is accessibility for people living in rural areas.

In 2007 the Department carried out a review of the Rural Transport Fund. This Fund provides support to 18 Rural Community Transport Partnerships to offer a range of specialised transport services to their members. These services complement the existing conventional public transport network and provide transport opportunities for people with reduced mobility living in rural areas throughout the North.

The rural transport services provided by Translink are monitored and developed on an ongoing basis taking account of current customer patronage and prospective demand.

### Narrow Water/Carlingford Lough: Proposed Bridge

**Mr Kennedy** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the development of the proposed bridge between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland at Narrow Water/Carlingford Lough. (AQO 2499/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** My Department's Roads Service has no direct involvement in the proposal to provide a bridge at Narrow Water. The project is being taken forward by Louth County Council and their Consultant Roughan O'Donovan. I am therefore unable to provide you with an update on development of the proposed bridge.

### Planning Applications

**Ms Lo** asked the Minister for Regional Development what guidelines the Roads Service follows when being consulted on the impact of a planning application upon traffic and parking in a given area. (AQO 2500/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** My Department's Roads Service is consulted by Planning Service to provide advice on roads matters for planning applications, including the impact of traffic and parking in a given area.

The main guidelines that Roads Service considers planning proposals against, is the "Transport Assessment – Guidelines for Development Proposals in Northern Ireland", a joint DOE/DRD planning guide.

In addition, Roads Service considers planning proposals against:

- Creating Places - achieving quality in residential developments (DOE/DRD 2000);
- Guidelines for Traffic Impact Assessment (Institution of Highways and Transportation, 1994);
- Planning Policy Statements and Development Control Advice Notes;
- Northern Ireland Road Safety Strategy 2002 – 2012 (DOE/DRD/Investing for Health/PSNI); and

- Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (Highways Agency).

### **A8 Belfast to Larne: Dualling**

**Mr Neeson** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update, including timescale, on the full dualling of the A8 Belfast-Larne road; and what assurance he can give that funding from the Irish Government, under the National Development Plan, will remain available for the project. (AQO 2501/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** Development work on the dualling of the remaining stretch of single carriageway, on the A8 Belfast to Larne road, has been progressing well. The first key milestone, completion of the preliminary route corridor assessment, was achieved ahead of target and the next key milestone, to identify a preferred route option within the corridor, is expected to be completed on target in mid 2009.

Subject to satisfactory progression through the statutory procedures and procurement process, and the availability of finance, construction could start in 2012. I can also advise that the Irish Government has recently confirmed that the £400 million contribution to the A5 and A8 projects is still available.

### **Corporate Social Responsibility**

**Ms Anderson** asked the Minister for Regional Development what his Department is doing to advance any policy focusing on Corporate Social Responsibility, and how his Department and its agencies will provide positive community and social impact through procurement and service delivery. (AQO 2502/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** My Department is strongly committed to corporate social responsibility and has articulated how it aims to develop it in its Corporate and Business Plans 2009-11.

In relation to procurement, my Department is following the guidance prepared by the Central Procurement Directorate and the Equality Commission on Sustainable Development and Equality of Opportunity in Public Sector Procurement. In line with this guidance, action plans have recently been produced by Roads Service, Northern Ireland Water and Translink at my instruction. These include proposals for implementing critical community impact and social objectives such as increasing access to public sector procurement opportunities for small and medium enterprises, encouraging the economically inactive back into the workplace and encouraging training and skills development through, for instance, apprenticeships.

In addition, the Roads Service Action Plan ensures that social and environmental factors are taken into consideration, alongside financial factors, in making procurement decisions.

The Action Plan has a package of actions to deliver the step change needed to ensure that Roads Service and its partners are focused upon better design, low waste, higher recycled content, respect for biodiversity and delivery of its wider sustainable development goals.

We are also very keen to support our staff to make a personal contribution to the community. One of the ways we hope to achieve that is through a partnership with Business in the Community, which would allow us to participate in schemes such as the Talent Management programme and the Time to Read initiative. You will also be aware of the recent Between the Bridges community-based charity event which my Department played a role in facilitating, through its corporate social responsibility agenda.

We also wish to develop in areas such as Research Development where we can, through internships and work placements, make use of undergraduates and graduates to help us with work associated with promoting sustainability.

It is my intention to publicly launch my Departments Corporate Social responsibility policy shortly which is currently being comprehensively developed to take account of the wide spectrum of measures we will take now and in the future.

### **Irish Language: Public Transport**

**Ms S Ramsey** asked the Minister for Regional Development what his Department is doing to advance the use of the Irish Language in the Gaeltacht Quarter in Belfast through services provided by his Department's agencies, such as Translink, in the delivery of public transport. (AQO 2503/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** The Department worked recently with Raidió Fáilte to develop Irish-language advertisements to promote our Door-2-Door transport and concessionary travel services in Belfast. Literature to promote Door-2-Door services has also been made available in Irish.

I am told by Translink that it provides school safety information and guides on how to use their services in Irish. Also at a local level it has made information available on bus services at two bus stops with known Irish-language links. Following representations on this matter, I am asking Translink to give consideration to the provision of further bilingual information.

### **Road Schemes: Northern Division**

**Mr McQuillan** asked the Minister for Regional Development how many major road schemes are planned for the Northern Division in 2009/10 and 2010/11. (AQO 2504/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** My Department's Roads Service has two major road schemes planned for Northern Division in 2009/10 and 2010/11, these being:

- A2 Broadbridge dualling scheme between Maydown and City of Derry Airport; and
- M2/A26 Ballee Road East dualing scheme outside Ballymena

It is anticipated that construction of both these schemes will commence during April/May 2009.

### **Water Charges: Undetected Leaks**

**Mr P J Bradley** asked the Minister for Regional Development what assessment he has made of consumers being charged for water that is lost through undetected leaks in the metered supply. (AQO 2505/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** I am advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that customers with metered water supplies are legally responsible, and are billed, for all water usage recorded through their meters. This will include any water which is lost through bursts and leaks on their private supply pipes, as well as the water that is consumed. These responsibilities reflect the fact that there is a cost associated with treatment and distribution of all water supplied to customers and that the cost of wastage arising from bursts or leaks on private supply routes should not be borne by other customers or the taxpayer.

Nevertheless, NIW recognises that customers may be unaware that wastage is occurring and, in specified circumstances where NIW believes the customer has not been negligent and repairs have been carried out effectively, defined allowances may be granted in accordance with a policy agreed with the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland.

NIW will also offer a repayment agreement to the customer, which will enable revised amounts to be paid over an extended period.

## **DEPARTMENT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

### **Caravan Owners**

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Social Development if he plans to introduce legislation to protect caravan owners from being evicted by caravan site owners, if they do not agree to upgrade their caravans. (AQW 6828/09)

**Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie):** I refer the Member to the answers I gave in respect of AQW 7085/08 and AQW 5513/08.

## Homes Scheme

**Dr Farry** asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the current status of the 'Homes Scheme' to facilitate existing Housing Executive tenants to access tenancies in other parts of the United Kingdom. (AQW 6833/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The Housing Organisations Mobility Exchange Scheme provided the facility to enable social tenants to swap homes between different regions of the UK. The scheme was facilitated through the Housing Selection Scheme, a scheme approved by my Department in accordance with Article 22(2) of the Housing (NI) Order 1981. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister revised a range of 'mobility' scheme and services, resulting in the cancellation of the Housing Organisations Mobility Exchange Scheme in August 2006.

However, the Housing Selection Scheme continued to provide the facility for qualifying UK applicants to apply directly for social housing from outside Northern Ireland.

## Budget Priorities

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister for Social Development what her budget priorities will be in the next financial quarter. (AQW 6998/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** For the incoming year 2009-10 my priorities remain:

- investing in housing and addressing the housing crisis;
- building communities, tackling disadvantage and encouraging social responsibility; and
- creating vibrant cities, towns and urban areas.

## Social Housing

**Miss McIlveen** asked the Minister for Social Development how many are currently on the waiting list for social housing in the Down District. (AQW 7005/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** At 31 December 2008, 1266 applicants were on the waiting list for social housing in the Housing Executive's Downpatrick District Office.

## Household Fuel Payments

**Mr Brady** asked the Minister for Social Development why enough money was not available in Post Offices to meet the household fuel payments, bearing in mind the numbers involved, and what action the Minister is taking to rectify the situation; and can she give an assurance that it will not happen again and that these payments will be dealt with appropriately. (AQW 7065/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The provision of cash in Post Offices is a matter for Post Office Ltd. Questions relating to the operation and management of the Post Office Network should therefore be directed to Post Office Limited. My officials are working with Post Office Ltd to ensure that lessons are learnt from this incident and that a recurrence is avoided.

## Social Security Agency

**Mr F McCann** asked the Minister for Social Development in relation to vacancies in the Social Security Agency, (i) how many there are; (ii) for how long they have been vacant; (iii) what sections/branches are affected; (iv) what the grades are; and (v) what action is being taken to fill the vacancies. (AQW 7118/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** At the 31 March 2009 the Social Security Agency (SSA) had a net vacancy position of 199. This is approximately 3.8% of the total SSA employees. Staff turnover alone in a typical year is in the order of 7%. Therefore the Agency will always have a 'float' of vacancies and temporary staff at any particular moment in time. The length of time a post can be vacant varies and a breakdown is not readily available. Details are provided in the tables below of the vacancies at Directorate and grade level. The Agency is continuing to work with the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) and HR Connect in the recruitment of new staff.



**OPERATIONS DIRECTORATE**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Vacancy (Surplus) March 09</b>
G7	4.00
DP	3.39
SO	9.02
EO1	41.20
EO2/ SSO1	64.82
AO/SSO2	61.82
AA	87.35
Other Perm Staff	59.19
Temporary Staff	(196.9)
<b>Total</b>	<b>133.89</b>

**FINANCE AND PLANNING DIRECTORATE**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Vacancy (Surplus) March 09</b>
G7	0.00
DP	2.00
SO	5.5
EO1	4.17
EO2/ SSO1	3.25
AO/SSO2	18.18
AA	14.46
Other Perm Staff	0.00
Temporary Staff	(13.00)
<b>Total</b>	<b>34.56</b>

**BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT DIRECTORATE**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Vacancy (Surplus) March 09</b>
G7	3.3
DP	2.00
SO	4.50
EO1	6.98
EO2/ SSO1	5.59
AO/SSO2	7.67
AA	0.00
Other Perm Staff	4.8
Temporary Staff	(4.00)
<b>Total</b>	<b>30.84</b>

**SOCIAL SECURITY AGENCY (TOTAL)**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Vacancy (Surplus) March 09</b>
G7	7.30
DP	7.39
SO	19.02
EO1	52.35
EO2/ SSO1	73.66
AO/SSO2	87.67
AA	101.81
Other Perm Staff	63.99
Temporary Staff	(213.9)
<b>Total</b>	<b>199.29</b>

Grades: G7 (Grade 7) DP (Deputy Principal) SO (Staff Officer) EO1 (Executive Officer 1) EO2/ SSO1 (Executive Officer 2, Social Security Officer 1) AO/SSO2 (Admin Officer, Social Security Officer 2) AA (Admin Assistant)

# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 1 May 2009

## Written Answers to Questions

### OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

#### UK Government Command Paper

**Mr McNarry** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what progress has been made in adopting the UK Government Command Paper 7424 - 'The Nation's Commitment: Cross Government Support to our Armed Forces, their Families and Veterans, July 2008'; whether OFMDFM is content to proceed with the intent expressed in the Command Paper; and what assessment it has made of how this issue is currently being addressed by Government Departments. (AQW 6416/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mr P Robinson and Mr McGuinness):** The Command Paper 'The Nation's Commitment: Cross Government Support to our Armed Forces, their Families and Veterans' has been passed to us by the Ministry of Defence for consideration.

#### Commissioner for Older People

**Mrs M Bradley** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what work has been done to put a permanent commissioner for older people in place. (AQW 6582/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** We would refer the Member to the answer given to her previous question on this issue (AQO 1658/09 12 January 2009).

In order to appoint a Commissioner for Older People we need to bring forward primary legislation. It is our intention to have this Bill introduced and passed within the lifetime of this current Assembly.

We would confirm that our officials are currently working on developing detailed policy proposals together with a draft Bill which we intend to issue for public consultation in autumn 2009.

In developing these proposals, our officials are currently considering the evidence base available. They continue to engage with interested stakeholders, including the Age sector representatives, the interim Advocate, Dame Joan Harbison, and others to ensure that there is the broadest possible involvement in the preparatory stages of the legislative and policy development process prior to further public consultation. As part of this process, Junior Minister Donaldson met with Ruth Marks, the Welsh Older People's Commissioner, in February of this year.

#### Lifetime Opportunities Strategy

**Mr B Wilson** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the 'Lifetime Opportunities' strategy that was ratified by the Executive in December 2008; and if and when an action plan will be published. (AQW 7083/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** In agreeing, on 20th November 2008, to formally adopt the broad architecture and principles of Lifetime Opportunities as the basis of its strategy to tackle poverty

and social exclusion and patterns of deprivation based on social need, the Executive further agreed to the establishment of an Executive Sub-Committee on poverty and social inclusion.

The first meeting of this Executive Sub-Committee took place on Thursday 26th March and we chaired this jointly. The aim of setting up this Committee was to try and achieve closer, more co-ordinated and more effective cross departmental working on anti-poverty issues. The Committee will focus not only on trying to lift those people out of poverty, but also to prevent more from falling into poverty. This is all the more critical now given the economic climate and the impact of that on employment.

On 26 March the Sub-Committee:

- considered its terms of reference;
- was informed as to the levels of poverty here and individuals, groups and areas at greatest risk; and
- considered and discussed initial proposals as to possible priority action areas.

Following those discussions we have now asked that officials liaise with colleagues in other departments and finalise a list of priority action areas for consideration and agreement at the Executive Sub-Committee's second meeting, which we intend to convene during May.

At this second meeting the Sub-Committee will also specifically consider proposals in respect of the monitoring and reporting frameworks that will be associated with the Lifetime Opportunities strategy.

### 2010 European Year Against Poverty

**Mr B Wilson** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the plans of the (i) EU unit; and (ii) Anti-Poverty Unit for the 2010 European Year Against Poverty. (AQW 7085/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** The Executive, through its recently published 'Priorities for European Engagement', has committed to participating in the 2010 European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion. OFMDFM's European Division is tasked with raising awareness of the Year among Northern Ireland Departments and will continue to disseminate all relevant information across departments on an ongoing basis.

An official from OFMDFM's Anti-Poverty Unit will represent the Executive on the National Implementation Body for the Year. Recently established by the Department for Work and Pensions, this Body will meet on 30 April for the first time to consider implementation options.

### Child Poverty

**Ms Purvis** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what method is being used to measure the level and elements of severe child poverty, which the Executive has pledged to eradicate by 2012. (AQW 7092/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** Work has been ongoing for some time to identify the most appropriate way to measure severe poverty. A paper for consideration by the Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People has been prepared and will shortly be circulated to Ministers. It proposes a measure based on a mixed income plus material deprivation definition that would produce a headline figure, which could be monitored over time, plus an acknowledgement that the most vulnerable groups need to be targeted. We are aiming to have this method agreed by the Sub-Committee at its next meeting.

### Women Appointed to Public Office

**Mrs D Kelly** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what action it will take to ensure that more women are appointed to public office. (AQW 7139/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** The overarching principle of the public appointment process is that selection is based on merit. We are committed to achieving greater diversity amongst public appointees provided that all action is consistent with the merit principle.



We are aware that some sections of our society are not applying in sufficient numbers and as a result are under-represented on the boards of public bodies, but we remain committed to encouraging greater participation from amongst these groups.

In an effort to encourage more people to apply, we have put a number of measures in place to raise awareness of public appointments and appointment opportunities. In this regard, OFMDFM works closely with other departments and:

- maintains a public appointments page on its website. This contains information on public appointment issues and includes details of current vacancies;
- maintains a mailing list of individuals and organisations interested in receiving information on public appointments. The mailing list is open to all and includes under-represented groups and organisations representing women;
- circulates on a regular basis to everyone on the mailing list information on forthcoming public appointment opportunities;
- published a practical guide to public appointments to help people engage with the process to the best of their abilities; and
- publishes a Public Appointments Annual Report.

Ultimately, diversity amongst public appointees depends upon the range and calibre of people willing to put themselves forward for consideration.

### Victims and Survivors Strategy

**Mrs D Kelly** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the implementation of the Victims and Survivors Strategy. (AQW 7140/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** It is our intention to finalise and publish the Strategic Approach for Victims and Survivors when the OFMDFM Committee has completed its consideration of the document.

The Committee has advised us that it will be in a position to give its views on the document when it has considered our detailed proposals for the proposed Victims and Survivors Service. These proposals were passed to the Committee on 23 April for consideration.

### Victims and Survivors Organisations

**Mrs D Kelly** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the funding arrangements for victims and survivors organisations. (AQW 7142/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** The Victims and Survivors Groups Core Funding and Development Grant Schemes, administered by the Community Relations Council (CRC) on behalf of OFMDFM, have been extended to 2009/10 with £2.75 million and £1.6 million being available respectively. It was agreed that the amounts available to groups under the core funding scheme will be increased by 10% in line with verified expenditure under the terms of the scheme.

### Planning Appeals Commission

**Mr Newton** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in relation to planning appeals determined by the Planning Appeals Commission, how many (i) have been decided; (ii) were related to single dwellings in the countryside; and (iii) were related to single dwellings in the countryside and have been dealt with by informal hearing, in the last six months. (AQW 7189/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** The Planning Appeals Commission is an independent tribunal Non-Departmental Public Body. Given its independent tribunal status, its Chief Commissioner has been asked to provide a response directly to you, and we understand that she has written to you in the following terms:

“I have been asked to provide you with information requested in the above Assembly Question.

- (i) The Planning Appeals Commission issued 687 decisions in the 6 month period ending 31 March 2009, (ii) 474 of these decisions related to single dwellings in a rural area and (iii) of the 474 decisions that related to single dwellings in a rural area, 29 of these decisions were dealt with by the Informal Hearing Procedure.

I would be happy to provide any further information you require arising out of this response or to meet with you to discuss the matter if that would be more suitable."

## DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

### Tuberculosis Cases in North Antrim

**Mr Storey** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to confirm her Department's policy on restricting the number of tuberculosis cases in North Antrim. (AQW 7058/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms M Gildernew):** There is a key goal in the Programme for Government to reduce by 27% the incidence of TB in cattle in the north of Ireland by 2011. Actions to achieve the targeted reduction are based on the continuing implementation of the TB control programme.

The TB programme is based on the detection of diseased or high risk animals, the compulsory removal of these animals from their herd of origin to slaughter, and the restriction of movements of cattle from infected herds until they are tested clear. Generally, individual animals that test positive are removed rather than the whole herd.

My Department targets its TB control programme across the North, and there is no policy specific to North Antrim.

### Tuberculosis Cases in North Antrim

**Mr Storey** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many confirmed cases of tuberculosis there have been in North Antrim, in each of the last three years. (AQW 7059/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** Number of confirmed TB cases in the last 3 years:

Year	Total
2008	72
2007	58
2006	91

This represents cases that have been detected, in the Ballymena and Coleraine Divisions, at an official Tuberculosis test or meat inspection and had the disease confirmed by culture of the causal organism in the AFBI Laboratory.

### Crossnacreevy Site

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what plans her Department has for the Crossnacreevy site. (AQW 7120/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** A business case which considers the possible relocation of the functions at the Crossnacreevy site is now with me. I will be taking my decision and informing the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee and stakeholders of this in the near future.

### Crossnacreevy Site

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what is (i) the size; and (ii) the land valuation of the Crossnacreevy site. (AQW 7121/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** The Crossnacreevy site comprises 35 hectares.

In February 2008, the Department was advised that the potential realisable value of the Crossnacreevy site could be in the range of £2.28m to £5.78m, depending on the potential use of the land and buildings.

Using agricultural land values (2006: £24,870 per hectare) and the value of buildings as per the DARD asset register, the value of the site is £2.71m.

### Crossnacreevy Site

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to explain why the report on the proposed sale of Crossnacreevy been delayed. (AQW 7122/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** A business case considering the possible relocation of the functions currently carried out at the Crossnacreevy site was to be completed within the period of the 2008/09 DARD Balanced Scorecard. This target was achieved. I am now considering that report.

### Crossnacreevy Site

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development when the report on the proposed sale of Crossnacreevy will be published. (AQW 7123/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** I am considering a business case on the possible relocation of functions currently undertaken at Crossnacreevy. I envisage releasing the report to the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee and stakeholders in the near future.

### Bovine Tuberculosis

**Mr P J Bradley** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail how much (i) bovine tuberculosis; and (ii) brucellosis cost her Department in the 2007/08 financial year. (AQW 7161/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** In 2007/08 the bovine tuberculosis programme cost the Department £21. 2m. In the same period, the brucellosis programme cost £13.9m.

### Bovine Tuberculosis

**Mr P J Bradley** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many animals were slaughtered as a result of (i) bovine tuberculosis; and (ii) brucellosis, in each of the last three calendar years. (AQW 7163/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** Number of Animals slaughtered as a result of Tuberculosis and Brucellosis during 2006 to 2008 is as follows:

	Tuberculosis	Brucellosis
2006	9922	4838
2007	7896	6214
2008	9359	4853

### Bovine Tuberculosis

**Mr P J Bradley** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) for her assessment of using a vaccine for cattle and badgers to eradicate bovine tuberculosis; and (ii) what plans she has to introduce a trial of the method of vaccinating badgers used by her counterpart in England. (AQW 7165/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:**

- i. The use of a vaccine for cattle is not currently an option because the efficacy of any vaccine is not clear and it may interfere with the current diagnostic tests. My Department will continue to keep in contact with the work that is on-going in Britain to develop a cattle vaccine. As regards badgers, I recognise that badger vaccination may be the most feasible solution in the long-term in the eradication of bovine tuberculosis, but it could be some time before an effective vaccine becomes available.
- ii. Currently, I have no plans to introduce a trial similar to the Injectable Badger Vaccine Deployment Project in England. My Department will continue to keep in contact with the work that is on-going in Britain and in the South to develop a badger vaccine. We will continue to explore how best we can contribute to this work.

**Bio-Security on Farms**

**Mr P J Bradley** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline what measures she has taken to encourage greater bio-security on farms. (AQW 7166/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** I believe that the prevention of disease by the practice of good biosecurity is an essential component to promote a competitive industry; protect animal and public health; and safeguard the interests of all.

To this end, my Department has a long term commitment to promoting biosecurity messages in a timely manner and in response to heightened disease risk. This takes the form of leaflets, advertising, press articles, posters, DARD website updates, and meetings with farmers and with Private Veterinary Practitioners.

In 2004 the Department issued all livestock keepers with a copy of the 'Biosecurity Code for NI Farms', which also included guidance for official visitors and recreational users of farms. This is a voluntary code issued in conjunction with the north of Ireland industry. The booklet is also available on request or from the DARD website.

In addition, the new Diseases of Animals Bill, which will shortly move to Consideration Stage in the Assembly, includes a provision which will enable my Department to prepare and publish statutory biosecurity guidance for specific diseases, such as Foot and Mouth Disease, Avian Influenza, Tuberculosis and Brucellosis. The guidance will include advice on practical precautions which farmers can take to prevent the introduction of disease on to their premises and will set standards that everyone will have to comply with. The Department will work closely with stakeholders and the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee in producing the guidance.

Other initiatives include courses run at the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise, Greenmount which contain biosecurity input for the instruction of the next generation of farmers, and a Biosecurity module for farmers in their Lifelong Learning programme. The Focus Farms Scheme, funded under Axis 1 of the Rural Development Programme, promotes good practice and provides biosecurity training. Each focus farm is required to prepare a biosecurity plan to protect stock. This information is cascaded to farmers attending the focus farms and protective clothing and footwear, as well as disinfectant dips for cars and footwear is provided by the Focus Farmer.

Where there are specific disease outbreaks, for example in relation to Brucellosis (BR) or Tuberculosis (TB), information, including biosecurity advice, is provided directly to infected farms by Veterinary Service staff. A booklet 'TB in Your Herd', which includes biosecurity advice to reduce the risk of infection to cattle, is issued to all affected herds and is also available on the DARD website. Biosecurity is an important part of the Brucellosis Initiative. It has been discussed at farmers' meetings in high incidence Divisions and the Farmers' Liaison Groups set up following these meetings. In addition, an advice letter on biosecurity with regard to Brucellosis has been issued.

Biosecurity also includes the prudent sourcing of stock and associated on-farm quarantine. I have repeatedly stressed this message in relation to Bluetongue and have urged the farming community to enforce a voluntary ban on the import of animals from bluetongue affected areas.



## Water Rights for Clay Lough

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the reasons for it taking so long to transfer the water rights for Clay Lough, Killyleagh. (AQW 7177/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** The ownership of the water rights associated with complex transfers of land and property since the 19th Century is still under legal investigation. Transfers of water rights and access to these are a matter for private contractual arrangements and outside the drainage remit of the Rivers Agency, however I can assure the member that my department is doing everything in its power to expedite the matter.

## Mussel Site in Belfast Lough

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) if her Department is aware that the mussel site in Belfast Lough is being illegally used by a Dutch boat; and (ii) what she is doing to license this site to those who have applied legally. (AQW 7241/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** I am aware of an incident regarding alleged illegal fishing activity in Belfast Lough. The matter is currently the subject of an ongoing investigation to establish the facts and to determine what further action may be taken. The Department's Fisheries Inspectorate continues to monitor fishing activity and there is no evidence to indicate there is ongoing illegal fishing activity taking place in the area in question.

As I have previously advised in my answer to AQW 6717/09, there are a number of outstanding aquaculture licence applications for sites in Belfast Lough, including that to which you refer which are affected by the current moratorium on the granting of any further licences for the bottom culture of mussels.

The moratorium was introduced because of concerns about the ability of local sea loughs to sustain what was a rapid development of the industry and about demand for mussel seed exceeding supply. Pending resolution of these issues, which will include the use of carrying capacity models which have been developed recently, the moratorium therefore remains in place.

## Bee Strategy

**Mr Cree** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to provide an update on her Department's bee strategy. (AQW 7349/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** As indicated to you in February, I felt it would be appropriate to await the outcome of Defra's Bee Health Strategy. This Strategy has now been published and my Department has begun consideration of a Strategy for the north of Ireland. Engagement with stakeholders will follow in due course.

## DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

### Ulster-Scots and Irish-Language Funding

**Mr Simpson** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what was the total amount of funding awarded by his Department for (i) Ulster Scots and (ii) Irish language, in each of the last four years. (AQW 6736/09)

**Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr G Campbell):** The total amount of funding awarded by my Department and its Agencies for Ulster-Scots and Irish language projects is shown in the table below.

Year	Ulster Scots	Irish Language Broadcast Fund (ILBF)	Irish (excluding ILBF)
2008	£730,201.44	£3,000,000	£1,385,324.78
2007	£1,520,072.21	£3,000,000	£2,070,491.90
2006	£629,309.57	£3,000,000	£2,040,687.77
2005	£300,292.50	£3,000,000	£2,114,989.67

### Developing Lough Neagh

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail his plans and proposals to develop Lough Neagh as a navigable, inland waterway and recreational facility as part of his Department's Corporate Plan 2008/11. (AQW 7216/09)

**Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** My Department has commissioned a Business Case to assess the viability of establishing a Navigation Authority for Lough Neagh and the Blackwater and Upper Bann Rivers and this is due to be submitted to the Department in May 2009.

I am not in a position to develop any plans or proposals for the development of Lough Neagh until this Business Case has been considered.

### Developing Lough Neagh

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what investment and support has his Department put towards the development of Lough Neagh as a recreational angling and inland waterway resource, in the last five years. (AQW 7218/09)

**Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** My Department's only statutory remit regarding Lough Neagh is maintenance of the navigation channel and markers at the entrance to the Sixmilewater River. Despite this limited remit, my Department works in partnership with Local Authorities and others to help develop Lough Neagh's navigational and recreational potential.

Over the last 5 years my Department has grant aided the following projects:

- Refurbishing the Maid of Antrim passenger vessel: £67,110;
- Provision of a replacement bridge at Maghery Cut: £294,704;
- Development of Rams' Island Jetty and Ferry facility: £10,000;
- Ballyronan Marina watersports centre: £11,350.

Whilst DCAL would like to promote angling development on Lough Neagh, it is a private fishery and currently there is no resource allocated to assist with private fishery development.

## DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

### Teacher's Retirement

**Mr Dallat** asked the Minister of Education what steps she is taking to ensure that teachers will continue to be able to retire early without suffering financially as a result of the recent proposals to reduce their rights. (AQW 6916/09)

**Minister of Education (Ms C Ruane):** The arrangements by which teachers are compensated for premature retirement are intended to provide a management tool which employing authorities can use to bring about a qualitative improvement in the educational provision in their schools. They allow teachers' employers to effect redundancies in the context of necessary organisational change and to retire teachers in the interests of the efficient discharge of the employer's function. They do not confer a right to early retirement on teachers. A separate provision was introduced in 2007 which allows a teacher aged 55 or over to retire before normal retirement age and receive actuarially reduced pension benefits.

My Department is currently consulting on draft regulations which will ensure that, in future, employers will meet the extra cost of teachers' premature retirement. However, employers will still have available to them all the options which previously existed to enable them to secure the early release of teachers where necessary. In addition, the new regulations will allow employers to make an enhanced severance payment as an alternative to granting premature retirement.

As siocair nach raibh ar na fostóirí foráil bhuiséid a dhéanamh do na costais seo san am atá thart, chuir mé £6m i 2009 agus £6m eile i 2010 i leataobh le cuidiú a thabhairt d'fhostóirí le hiomarcaíochtaí múinteoirí

a bhainistiú. Dá bhfágfaí na socruithe mar atá anois, bheadh méadú suntasach ar ranníocaíochtaí pinsin do mhúinteoirí de thoradh air. Bheadh tionchar aige seo ar sheirbhísí túslíne agus ar phá glan na múinteoirí ar fad.

Recognising that employers have not had to budget for these costs in the past, I have set aside £6m in 2009 and a further £6m in 2010 to help employers manage teacher redundancies. To leave arrangements as they are would lead inevitably to a significant increase in teachers' pension contributions. This would have an impact on frontline services and on the take-home pay of all teachers.

### Knives Seized in Schools

**Mr Hamilton** asked the Minister of Education how many knives have been seized in schools, in each of the last five years broken down by (i) primary schools and (ii) secondary schools. (AQW 7023/09)

**Minister of Education:** Ní bhailíonn ná ní choinníonn an Roinn an t-eolas a iarradh.

The Department does not collect or hold the information requested.

### Language Training for Teachers

**Mr K Robinson** asked the Minister of Education how many teachers have received English as an additional language training as part of their continuous professional development through (i) her Department; (ii) the Inclusion and Diversity Scheme; and (iii) the Boards and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (AQW 7053/09)

**Minister of Education:** Tugann mo Roinn cistiú don Seirbhís um Chuimsiú agus Éagsúlacht (IDS) le forbairt profisiúnta a sholáthar do mhúinteoirí. Maidir le oideachas do dhaltaí núíosacha, soláthraíonn IDS oiliúint scoilbhunaithe, cé go raibh an oiliúint ionadhbhunaithe roimhe sin.

My Department funds the Inclusion and Diversity Service (IDS) to provide professional development to teachers. In relation to the education of newcomer pupils IDS provide school-based training, although previously training was centre-based.

In 2007/08, a total of 709 teachers (primary and post-primary) received centre-based professional development. In 2008/09, this figure was 459 teachers. After the appointment of diversity coordinators and assistant advisers school-based training was gradually introduced.

The IDS only records the number of schools supported via school-based training, which in 2008/09 was over 130 schools. Therefore a record of the number of teachers trained by this method is not held.

### Youth Service Provision in East Belfast

**Mr Newton** asked the Minister of Education to confirm the capital build programme for youth service provision in East Belfast; and when it will start. (AQW 7066/09)

**Minister of Education:** The Chief Executive of the South-Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) has confirmed that a new Statutory Youth Centre is to be built in the grounds of Brooklands Primary School, Dundonald at an estimated cost of £750,000. Work is expected to begin in June 2009 for completion by May 2010.

The Chief Executive of the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) has confirmed that the replacement of Sydenham and Archway Youth Clubs has been identified as a priority. Funding has been sought for a single unit, scheduled to be built on a new site within East Belfast in the 2010/11 financial year, at an estimated cost of £1.5 million plus economic appraisal costs.

Ní chuirtear san áireamh leis seo aon thionscadal a bhaineann leis an Earnáil Óige Dheonach a bhfuil breithniú á dhéanamh air ag an Roinn Oideachais faoi láthair.

This does not include projects in the Voluntary Youth Sector currently under consideration by the Department of Education.

### Irish-Language Schools

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Education how much money her Department spends on pupils born in Northern Ireland who are educated in Irish-language schools who consider English as their second language.

(AQW 7069/09)

**Minister of Education:** Níl aon dalta ag freastal ar Ghaelscoil nó ar aonad Gaeilge a rangáítear mar dhaltaí a bhfuil ‘Béarla mar Theanga Bhreise’ acu.

There are no pupils attending Irish-medium schools or units who are classed as ‘English as an additional language’ pupils.

I have recently launched the policy ‘Every School a Good School - Supporting Newcomer Pupils’. Within this policy a newcomer is defined as a child or young person who has enrolled in a school but who does not have satisfactory language skills to participate fully in the school curriculum and does not have a language in common with the teacher. This policy does not refer to indigenous pupils who choose to attend an Irish-medium school. That circumstance is addressed and funded under Irish-medium education policy.

### Education and Skills Authority

**Mr McQuillan** asked the Minister of Education if she has considered introducing legislation which would contain checks on the power that the Education and Skills Authority will have.

(AQW 7093/09)

**Minister of Education:** The Education Bill which provides for the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority also contains provisions which afford reasonable checks and balances on the operation of a public body. Schedule 1 of the Bill includes provision for accounts, annual reports and other reports to be made to the Department (and as appropriate to the Department of Employment and Learning). The Schedule further provides that complaints against any action of the ESA may be considered by the Commissioner for Complaints. Article 101 of the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986 affords the Department the power to issue a direction to any relevant public authority in respect of any power conferred or any duty imposed on that Authority.

Tá mé sásta go dtugann sé seo réimse láidir rialuithe atá leordhóthanach le feidhmiú na gcumhachtaí a mholtar don Údarás um Oideachas agus Scileanna a rialú.

I am satisfied that this offers a robust range of controls adequate to control the exercise of the powers proposed for the Education and Skills Authority.

### Education and Skills Authority

**Mr McQuillan** asked the Minister of Education if she can give assurances that the Education and Skills Authority will not interfere with the running of successful schools.

(AQW 7094/09)

**Minister of Education:** Soláthróidh an Bille Oideachais struchtúr nua riaracháin le tacaíocht a thabhairt don ardú caighdeán i ngach scoil. Tá sé ar intinn agam go dtabharfaidh an tÚdarás um Oideachas agus Scileanna (an ESA) cuidiú do scoileanna le feabhsú ar leith a bhaint amach ó thaobh gnóthachtálacha gach dalta de.

The Education Bill will provide a new administrative structure to support the raising of standards in all schools. It is my intention that the Education and Skills Authority (the ESA) will assist schools in achieving significant improvement in the achievements of all pupils.

The arrangements being established will see local area support teams working with schools, reflecting the individual needs of each school. It would not be appropriate to characterise this relationship as one of interfering. I will also ensure that my policy of Every School a Good School will mean that all schools will be seen as successful.

### Education and Skills Authority

**Mr McQuillan** asked the Minister of Education if she can give assurances that, with the introduction of the Education and Skills Authority, schools will not lose their characters and ethos.

(AQW 7095/09)

**Minister of Education:** Le bunadh an Údaráis um Oideachas agus Scileanna, cuirfear tacaíocht feabhsaithe ar fáil do scoileanna, trí fhoirne tacaíochta áitiúla a bheidh níos sofheagraí do na imthosca aonair a bhíonn acu.



Is iad na scoileanna iad féin, áfach, tríd na boird rialaithe, a shocróidh an réim agus an ghné a bhaineann leis an tacaíocht seo. Níl rud ar bith sa reachtaíocht a moladh a d'fhéadfadh a bheith mar thionchar docharach do cháil nó d'éiteas na scoile.

The establishment of the Education and Skills Authority will offer schools improved support through local support teams that will be more responsive to their individual circumstances. However schools themselves, through their governing bodies, will determine the nature and scope of this support. There is nothing in the proposed legislation that should cause any detrimental impact on the character or ethos of schools.

### Primary Languages Programme

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Education for an updated list of the primary schools that are participating in the Primary Languages Programme, broken down by (i) parliamentary constituency; and (ii) languages that are being taught, per school. (AQW 7110/09)

**Minister of Education:** Tá 298 bunscoil ag glacadh páirte sa Chlár Teangacha Bunscoile faoi láthair. Leagtar amach sna táblaí thíos na scoileanna, agus an teanga atá á teagasc i ngach ceann acu, de réir toghcheantair pharlaiminte.

There are currently 298 primary schools participating in the Primary Languages Programme. The schools, and the language being taught in each, are set out by parliamentary constituency in the tables below.

A further 25 primary schools are currently awaiting the allocation of language tutors. In addition to this, I have made additional funding available to expand the programme, which will mean that still more primary pupils will benefit from the Programme.

#### PRIMARY SCHOOLS CURRENTLY PARTICIPATING IN THE PRIMARY LANGUAGES PROGRAMME

##### CONSTITUENCY – BELFAST EAST

St Bernard's Primary School	Belfast	Spanish
St Joseph's Primary School	Belfast	Spanish
Euston Street Primary School	Belfast	Spanish
Knocknagoney Primary School	Belfast	Spanish
Lisnasharragh Primary School	Belfast	Spanish

##### CONSTITUENCY – BELFAST NORTH

Holy Cross Boys' Primary School	Belfast	Irish
Holy Family Primary School	Belfast	Spanish
Sacred Heart Primary School	Belfast	Irish
Whitehouse Primary School	Newtownabbey	Spanish
Glenwood Primary School	Belfast	Spanish
Mercy Primary School	Belfast	Spanish
Seaview Primary School	Belfast	Spanish
St Therese of Lisieux Primary School	Belfast	Spanish
Wheatfield Primary School	Belfast	Spanish

##### CONSTITUENCY – BELFAST SOUTH

St Malachy's Primary School	Belfast	Irish
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Fane Street Primary School	Belfast	Spanish
Forge Integrated Primary School	Belfast	Spanish
St Michael's Primary School	Belfast	Spanish
Taughmonagh Primary School	Belfast	Spanish

**CONSTITUENCY – BELFAST WEST**

Donegall Road Primary School	Belfast	Spanish
Malvern Primary School	Belfast	Spanish
St John the Baptist Boys' Primary School	Belfast	Spanish
St John the Baptist Girls' Primary School	Belfast	Spanish
St Kevin's Primary School	Belfast	Irish
St Kieran's Primary School	Poleglass	Irish
St Mark's Primary School	Twinbrook	Spanish
St Mary's Primary School	Belfast	Spanish

**CONSTITUENCY – EAST ANTRIM**

Ballycarry Primary School	Ballycarry	Spanish
Acorn Integrated Primary School	Carrickfergus	Spanish
Victoria Primary School	Carrickfergus	Spanish
Carrickfergus Model Primary School	Carrickfergus	Spanish
St James' Primary School	Newtownabbey	Spanish
Glynn Primary School	Glynn	Spanish
Greenisland Primary School	Greenisland	Spanish
Silverstream Primary School	Greenisland	Spanish
Kilcoan Primary School	Larne	Spanish
Olderfleet Primary School	Larne	Spanish
Oakfield Primary School	Carrickfergus	Spanish
Lourdes Primary School	Whitehead	Spanish
Whitehead Primary School	Whitehead	Spanish
St Nicholas' Primary School	Carrickfergus	Spanish

**CONSTITUENCY – EAST DERRY**

Culcrow Primary School	Aghadowey	Spanish
St Finlough's Primary School	Ballykelly	Irish
Ballyhackett Primary School	Castlerock	Spanish
Ballysally Primary School	Coleraine	Spanish
Castleroe Primary School	Coleraine	Spanish

Damhead Primary School	Coleraine	Spanish
St Columba's Primary School	Garvagh	Irish
St Patrick's & St Joseph's Primary School	Garvagh	Irish
Faughanvale Primary School	Greysteel	Irish
Kilrea Primary School	Kilrea	Spanish
Limavady Central Primary School	Limavady	Spanish
St Aidan's Primary School	Limavady	Spanish
Irish Society's Primary School	Mountsandel	Spanish
Carnalridge Primary School	Portrush	Spanish
Millstrand Integrated Primary School	Portrush	Spanish
Portrush Primary School	Portrush	Spanish
St Patrick's Primary School	Portrush	Spanish
Portstewart Primary School	Portstewart	Spanish
St Peter's & St Paul's Primary School	Dungiven	Irish

**CONSTITUENCY – FERMANAGH AND SOUTH TYRONE**

St Mary's Primary School	Bellanaleck	Spanish
Blessed Patrick O'Loughran Primary School	Castlecaulfield	Spanish
St Nailes Primary School	Kinawley	Spanish
Holy Trinity Primary School	Cornagrade	Irish
St Mary's Primary School	Derrylin	Spanish
Lisferty Primary School	Dungannon	Spanish
Brookeborough Primary School	Enniskillen	Spanish
Enniskillen Integrated Primary School	Enniskillen	Spanish
St Patrick's Primary School	Mullinaskea	Spanish
Maguiresbridge Primary School	Maguiresbridge	Spanish
St Mary's Primary School	Maguiresbridge	Spanish
St John's Primary School	Moy	Irish
Howard Primary School	Moygashel	Spanish
Lisbellaw Primary School	Tatnamallaght	Spanish
St Mary's Primary School	Tempo	Spanish
Cornagague Primary School	Enniskillen	Irish
Killyhommon Primary School	Enniskillen	Irish
Moat Primary School	Enniskillen	Spanish
St Brigid's Primary School	Augher	Irish
St Eugene's Primary School	Lisnaskea	Spanish
St Joseph's Primary School	Caledon	Irish

St Mary's Primary School	Newtownbutler	Spanish
St Mary's Primary School	Ballygawley	Irish
St Mary's Primary School	Aughnacloy	Irish
St Ninnidh's Primary School	Enniskillen	Spanish
St Patrick's Primary School	Dungannon	Irish

**CONSTITUENCY – FOYLE**

Glendermott Primary School	Ballyshasky	Spanish
Gaelscoil Eadain Mhoir	Brandywell	Spanish
Cumber Claudy Primary School	Claudy	Spanish
St Colmcille's Primary School	Claudy	Spanish
St Mary's Primary School	Claudy	Spanish
Broadbridge Primary School	Eglinton	Spanish
Drumahoe Primary School	Derry	Spanish
Oakgrove Integrated Primary School	Derry	Spanish
Newbuildings Primary School	Newbuildings	Spanish
Holy Family Primary School	Derry	Spanish
St Oliver Plunkett Primary School	Strathfoyle	Spanish
Fountain Primary School	Derry	Spanish
Ebrington Controlled Primary School	Waterside	Spanish
Good Shepherd Pr and Nursery School	Waterside	Spanish
Rosemount Primary School	Derry	Irish

**CONSTITUENCY – LAGAN VALLEY**

Ballinderry Primary School	Ballinderry Upper	Spanish
Ballycarrickmaddy Primary School	Ballinderry Upper	Spanish
St Michael's Primary School (Finnis)	Dromara	Spanish
Christ the Redeemer Primary School	Dunmurry	Spanish
Dunmurry Primary School	Dunmurry	Spanish
Seymour Hill Primary School	Dunmurry	Spanish
Ballymacrickett Primary School	Glenavy	Spanish
St Colman's Primary School	Lambeg	Irish
Brownlee Primary School	Lisburn	Spanish
Killowen Primary School	Lisburn	Spanish
Riverdale Primary School	Lisburn	Spanish
St Aloysius Primary School	Lisburn	Spanish
St Joseph's Primary School	Lisburn	Spanish



Anahilt Primary School	Hillsborough	Spanish
Fort Hill Primary School	Lisburn	Spanish

**CONSTITUENCY – MID ULSTER**

Greenlough Primary School (St Mary's)	Clady	Irish
St Brigid's Primary School	Coalisland	Irish
St John's Primary School	Coalisland	Spanish
Donaghmore Primary School	Donaghmore	Spanish
St Mary's Primary School	Draperstown	Irish
Bush Primary School	Dungannon	Spanish
St Brigid's Primary School	Knockloughrim	Irish
Cookstown Primary School	Cookstown	Spanish
St John's Primary School	Swatragh	Irish
Ampertaine Primary School	Maghera	Spanish
Culnady Primary School	Maghera	Spanish
Drumard Primary School	Maghera	Spanish
Altayeskey Primary School	Draperstown	Irish
Ballylifford Primary School	Cookstown	Spanish
Castledawson Primary School	Castledawson	Spanish
Gaelscoil na Spéiríní	Draperstown	Spanish
Holy Trinity Primary School	Cookstown	Irish
Knockloughrim Primary School	Knockloughrim	Spanish
Lissan Primary School	Cookstown	Spanish
Magherafelt Controlled Primary School	Magherafelt	Spanish
Spires Integrated Primary School	Magherafelt	Spanish
St Brigid's Primary School Tirkane	Maghera	Spanish
St Columb's Primary School (Cullion)	Desertmartin	Spanish
St John Bosco Primary School	Portglenone	Spanish
St Joseph's Primary School	Cookstown	Irish
St Mary's Primary School	Bellaghy	Spanish
St Mary's Primary School	Cookstown	Spanish
St Mary's Primary School	Stewartstown	Irish
St Patrick's Primary School	Coalisland	Irish
St Patrick's Primary School	Donaghmore	Irish
St Patrick's Primary School (Glen)	Maghera	Irish
St Patrick's Primary School	Magherafelt	Spanish
Tobermore Primary School	Tobermore	Spanish

**CONSTITUENCY – NEWRY AND ARMAGH**

Lisnadill Primary School	Armagh	Spanish
Cortamlet Primary School	Altnamachin	Spanish
Mount St Catherine's Primary School	Armagh	Irish
St Patrick's Primary School	Armagh	Irish
Our Lady's Primary School	Benburb	Irish
St Jarlath's Primary School	Blackwatertown	Irish
St Malachy's Primary School	Camlough	Irish
St Malachy's Primary School	Carnagat	Spanish
St Brigid's Primary School	Crossmaglen	Irish
St Oliver Plunkett Primary School	Forkhill	Spanish
St Francis of Assisi Primary School	Keady	Irish
St Mary's Primary School	Keady	Spanish
Clea Primary School	Keady	Spanish
St Joseph's Primary School	Killeavy	Spanish
St Oliver Plunkett Primary School	Kilmore	Irish
St Johns Primary School	Middletown	Irish
St Mary's Primary School	Mullaghbawn	Irish
St Josephs and St James Primary School	Poyntzpass	Spanish
Hardy Memorial Primary School	Richill	Spanish
Armstrong Primary School	Armagh	Spanish
Cloughoge Primary School	Newry	Spanish
Jonesboro' Primary School	Newry	Spanish
Poyntzpass Primary School	Poyntzpass	Spanish
St Clare's Convent Primary School	Newry	Spanish
St Colman's Abbey Primary School	Newry	Spanish
Windsor Hill Primary School	Newry	Spanish

**CONSTITUENCY - NORTH ANTRIM**

Fourtowns Primary School	Ahoghill	Spanish
Longstone Primary School	Ahoghill	Spanish
Armoy Primary School	Armoy	Spanish
St Olcan's Primary School	Armoy	Spanish
Hazelbank Primary School	Aughafatten	Spanish
Ballycastle Controlled Integrated Primary School	Ballycastle	Spanish
St Patrick's & St Brigid's Primary School	Ballycastle	Spanish
Ballykeel Primary School	Ballymena	Spanish

Carniny Primary School	Ballymena	Spanish
Dunclug Primary School	Ballymena	Spanish
St Brigid's Primary School	Ballymena	Spanish
Kilmoyle Primary School	Ballymoney	Spanish
Landhead Primary School	Ballymoney	Spanish
Leaney Primary School	Ballymoney	Spanish
St Brigid's Primary School	Ballymoney	Spanish
Broughshane Primary School	Broughshane	Spanish
Bushmills Primary School	Bushmills	Spanish
Buick Memorial Primary School	Cullybackey	Spanish
St Mary's Primary School	Cushendall	Irish
St Ciaran's Primary School	Cushendun	Spanish
Gracehill Primary School	Gracehill	Spanish
Kells & Connor Primary School	Kells	Spanish
Straidbilly Primary School	Liscolman	Spanish
St Patrick's Primary School	Loughguile	Irish
Barnish Primary School	Ballycastle	Irish
Garryduff Primary School	Ballymoney	Spanish
Portglenone Primary School	Portglenone	Spanish
St Brigid's Primary School	Cloughmills	Spanish
St Mary's Primary School	Portglenone	Spanish

**CONSTITUENCY – NORTH DOWN**

St Comgall's Primary School	Bangor	Spanish
Hollywood Primary School	Hollywood	Spanish
Ballyvester Primary School	Donaghadee	Spanish
Donaghadee Primary School	Donaghadee	Spanish

**CONSTITUENCY - SOUTH ANTRIM**

Creavery Primary School	Antrim	Spanish
Parkhall Primary School	Antrim	Spanish
Antrim Primary School	Antrim	Spanish
Straid Primary School	Ballyclare	Spanish
Tir-na-Nog Primary School	Ballyclare	Spanish
Ballynure Primary School	Ballynure	Spanish
Doagh Primary School	Doagh	Spanish
Ballyhenry Primary School	Glengormley	Spanish

Earlview Primary School	New Mossley	Spanish
Carnmoney Primary School	Newtownabbey	Spanish
Glengormley Integrated Primary School	Newtownabbey	Spanish
Mallusk Primary School	Newtownabbey	Spanish
Mossgrove Primary School	Newtownabbey	Spanish
Mossley Primary School	Newtownabbey	Spanish
St Mary's on the Hill Primary School	Newtownabbey	Spanish
Loanends Primary School	Crumlin	Spanish
Straidhavern Primary School	Crumlin	Spanish
St Macnisi's Primary School	Tannaghmore	Irish
Carlane Primary School	Toomebridge	Spanish
Crumlin Primary School	Crumlin	Spanish
Duneane Primary School	Toomebridge	Spanish
Groggan Primary School	Randalstown	Spanish
Mount St Michael's Primary School	Randalstown	Spanish
St Joseph's Primary School	Crumlin	Spanish
Templepatrick Primary School	Templepatrick	Spanish

**CONSTITUENCY – SOUTH DOWN**

Holy Cross Primary School	Atticall	Spanish
Ballyholland Primary School	Ballyholland	Irish
Christ the King Primary School	Ballynahinch	Irish
Drumadonnell Primary School	Ballyrone	Spanish
Bunscoil Bheanna Boirche	Castlewellan	Spanish
St Malachy's Primary School	Castlewellan	Irish
St Patrick's Primary (Burrenreagh)	Castlewellan	Spanish
Cumran Primary School	Clough	Spanish
Cedar Integrated Primary School	Crossgar	Spanish
Glasswater Primary School	Crossgar	Spanish
St Joseph's Primary School	Crossgar	Spanish
Holy Family Primary School	Downpatrick	Irish
St Brigid's Primary School	Downpatrick	Spanish
St Patrick's Primary School	Downpatrick	Spanish
Sacred Heart Primary School	Dundrum	Irish
St Patrick's Primary School	Hilltown	Irish
St Joseph's Primary School	Killough	Spanish
St Macartan's Primary School	Loughinisland	Spanish



St Patrick's Primary School	Mayobridge	Irish
All Childrens Integrated Primary School	Newcastle	Spanish
St Mary's Primary School	Newcastle	Spanish
Moneydarragh Primary School	Newry	Spanish
St Mary's Primary School	Rathfriland	Irish
Kilbroney Integrated Primary School	Rostrevor	Spanish
St Bronagh's Primary School	Rostrevor	Irish
St Mary's Primary School	Saintfield	Spanish
St Joseph's Primary School	Strangford	Spanish
St Malachy's Primary School	Strangford	Spanish
Ballynahinch Primary School	Ballynahinch	Spanish
Carrick Primary School	Warrenpoint	Irish
St Colman's Primary School	Banbridge	Spanish

**CONSTITUENCY – STRANGFORD**

Alexander Dickson Primary School	Ballygowan	Spanish
Kirkistown Primary School	Cloughey	Spanish
Kircubbin Primary School	Kircubbin	Spanish
Millennium Integrated Primary School	Lisdoonan	Irish
Carrickmannon Primary School	Newtownards	Spanish
Newtownards Model Primary School	Newtownards	Spanish
Portaferry Integrated Primary School	Portferry	Spanish
St Mary's Primary School	Portferry	Spanish
St Patrick's Primary School	Portferry	Spanish
Ballycloughan Primary School	Saintfield	Spanish
St Caolan's Primary School	Saintfield	Irish
St Joseph's Primary School	Carryduff	Irish
Carrowdore Primary School	Carrowdore	Spanish
Carryduff Primary School	Carryduff	Spanish

**CONSTITUENCY – UPPER BANN**

St Brendan's Primary School	Craigavon	Irish
St Mary's Primary School	Lurgan	Irish
St Patrick's Primary School	Magheralin	Irish
Hart Memorial Primary School	Portadown	Spanish
Portadown Integrated Primary School	Portadown	Spanish
Richmount Primary School	Portadown	Spanish

Seagoe Primary School	Portadown	Spanish
Donacloney Primary School	Donacloney	Spanish
Milltown Primary School	Banbridge	Spanish
St Mary's Primary School	Banbridge	Spanish
St Patrick's Primary School	Aughagallon	Spanish
St Teresa's Primary School	Lurgan	Spanish

**CONSTITUENCY – WEST TYRONE**

St Mary's Primary School	Ballymagorry	Irish
Gaelscoil na gCrann	Ballynamullan	Spanish
Bready Jubilee Primary School	Bready	Spanish
St Patrick's Primary School	Carrickmore	Irish
St Columbkille's Primary School	Carrickmore	Spanish
Bridgehill Primary School	Castlederg	Spanish
Edwards Primary School	Castlederg	Spanish
Cooley Primary School	Cooley	Spanish
Donemana Primary School	Donemana	Spanish
Tummery Primary School	Dromore	Irish
Envagh Primary School	Drumquin	Spanish
St Joseph's Primary School	Drumquin	Irish
St Matthew's Primary School	Garvaghey	Irish
Dunmullan Primary School	Knockmoyle	Spanish
St Brigid's Primary School	Mountfield	Irish
St Patrick's Primary School	Newtownstewart	Spanish
Christ the King Primary School	Omagh	Spanish
Gortnagarn Primary School	Omagh	Spanish
Loreto Convent Primary School	OMAGH	Spanish
Sion Mills Primary School	Sion Mills	Spanish
St Teresa's Primary School	Sixmilecross	Irish
Drumnabey Primary School	Spamount	Irish
Gaelscoil Uí Dhochartaigh	Strabane	Spanish
St Anne's Primary School	Strabane	Spanish
St Mary's Girls' Primary School	Strabane	Spanish
Knocknagor Primary School	Trillick	Irish
Queen Elizabeth II Primary School	Trillick	Spanish
St Scire's Primary School	Trillick	Spanish
All Saints Primary School	Omagh	Irish

Drumduff Primary School	Sixmilecross	Irish
Recarson Primary School	Omagh	Irish
St Mary's Primary	Omagh	Spanish
St Patrick's Primary School	Castlederg	Irish

### Educational Psychologists

**Miss McIlveen** asked the Minister of Education what the waiting time is for an assessment by an educational psychologist, in each of the Education and Library Boards. (AQW 7131/09)

**Minister of Education:** Dhíreoinn aird an Chomhalta ar an fhreagra a thug mé ar AQO 712/09, a chuir an Comhalta Stephen Moutray ó thoghcheantar na Banna Uachtair agus a foilsíodh sa Tuairisc Oifigiúil ar 24 Deireadh Fómhair 2008.

I would refer the Member to my reply to AQO 712/09, tabled by the Member for Upper Bann, Stephen Moutray, and published in the Official Report on 24 October 2008. Please note however that since that time the figure provided by the Belfast Education and Library Board in respect of Stage 3 assessments has been revised to 43 days.

### Youth Workers

**Mr Craig** asked the Minister of Education how many youth workers are planned for the Lagan Valley constituency, in the next three years. (AQW 7133/09)

**Minister of Education:** Faoi láthair, is é an Roinn Oideachais a thugann cistiú do Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Deiscirt agus do Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Oirdheiscirt le haghaidh soláthair don óige i dToghcheantar Ghleann an Lagáin.

The Department of Education currently provides funding to the Southern and South Eastern Education and Library Board for the youth provision in the Lagan Valley Constituency. The Chief Executives of both Boards have advised that they have no plans to change the current level of youth workers in the area. It will be the responsibility of the new Education and Skills Authority to determine how it deploys resources for the youth service from January 2010.

The current level of youth workers in the Lagan Valley Constituency is as follows:

	Full Time Youth Workers	Part Time Youth Workers
Southern Education and Library Board	1	8
South Eastern Education and Library Board	5	22

### Youth Workers

**Mr Craig** asked the Minister of Education how many youth workers are employed in the Lagan Valley constituency. (AQW 7134/09)

**Minister of Education:** Faoi láthair, is é an Roinn Oideachais a thugann cistiú do Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Deiscirt agus do Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Oirdheiscirt le haghaidh soláthair don óige i dToghcheantar Ghleann an Lagáin.

The Department of Education currently provides funding to the Southern and South Eastern Education and Library Boards for the youth provision in the Lagan Valley Constituency. The Chief Executives of both Boards have provided the following information on the number of youth workers in the Lagan Valley Constituency -

	Full Time Youth Workers	Part Time Youth Workers
Southern Education and Library Board	1	8
South Eastern Education and Library Board	5	22

### Primary School Uniforms

**Mr O'Dowd** asked the Minister of Education (i) how many children will benefit annually from her plans to introduce grants for primary-school uniforms; (ii) how much money is being made available for each grant; (iii) how will the scheme be managed; and (iv) when the first grants will be available. (AQW 7148/09)

**Minister of Education:** Measann an Roinn go mbeidh 29,000 páiste i dteideal deontas d'éidí bunscoile a fháil gach bliain. Tá deontas de £35 in aghaidh an pháiste ar fáil a chuimseoidh gach riachtanas éidí scoile, éidí don chorpoideachas san áireamh.

The Department estimates that 29,000 children will be eligible annually for the primary-school uniform grant, which has been set at £35 per child to cover all uniform requirements including physical education. The scheme will be managed by the education and library boards until the formation of the education and skills authority, when the latter will assume responsibility. The first grants will be available for the 2009-10 school year.

### Portadown College

**Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to her answer to AQW 6739/09, if, as part of the economic appraisal of Portadown College and among the 'full range of feasible options' to be considered, the board of Governors' preferred option of building on the existing College footprint will be taken into account. (AQW 7156/09)

**Minister of Education:** Déanfaidh an breithmheas measúnú ar réimse iomlán na roghanna inmharthana lena n-áirítear na costais a bhaineann le gach ceann acu.

The appraisal is to assess the full range of viable options including the financial costs of each. This will include the Board of Governors' preferred option for the building on the footprint of the existing College site.

### Portadown College

**Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to her answer to AQW 6739/09, if, as part of the economic appraisal for Portadown College and among the 'full range of feasible options' to be considered, the financial cost of the Board of Governors' preferred option of building on the existing college footprint will be considered alongside that of the existing proposal. (AQW 7160/09)

**Minister of Education:** Déanfaidh an breithmheas measúnú ar réimse iomlán na roghanna inmharthana lena n-áirítear na costais a bhaineann le gach ceann acu.

The appraisal is to assess the full range of viable options including the financial costs of each. This will include the Board of Governors' preferred option for the building on the footprint of the existing College site.

### Special Needs Facilities

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Education which special needs facilities are being closed in the North Down area. (AQW 7174/09)

**Minister of Education:** Tá dhá aonad Phríomh Eochair 3 ag Donaghadee High School. Tá an scoil le druidim i mí Lúnasa 2009 ach meastar go bhfuil gá ann aonad amháin a choinneáil. Beidh an t-aonad seo athlonnaithe ag Dundonald High School ón 1 Meán Fómhair 2009.

There are two Key Stage 3 units at Donaghadee High School. The school is due to close in August 2009 but it is considered that there is the need for one of the units to continue. This unit, which is for Year 10 pupils, will be relocated at Dundonald High School from 1 September, 2009.



### Special Needs Facilities

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Education if the special needs facility at Clandeboyne Road Primary School is to be closed. (AQW 7175/09)

**Minister of Education:** Tá tugtha le fios dom ag Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Deiscirt go ndéanann an Bord athbhreithniú ar aonaid MLD ar bhonn bhliantúil lena chinntiú go bhfreastalaíonn an tsoláthar ar na riachtanais mar is ceart agus go mbaintear an úsáid is fearr as na hacmhainní.

I am advised by the South Eastern Education and Library Board that the Board reviews MLD units on an annual basis to ensure that provision meets need and to make best use of resources.

The Board has decided that the Key Stage 2 Unit at Clandeboyne Primary School will be suspended with effect from 31 August 2009 as there is capacity within the North Down area to meet current and projected needs in the incoming year.

### Youth Workers

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Education to detail how many youth workers are planned for the North Down constituency in the next three years. (AQW 7181/09)

**Minister of Education:** Faoi láthair, tugann an Roinn Oideachais cistiú do Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Deiscirt le haghaidh soláthair don aos óg i dToghcheantar an Dúin Thuaidh.

The Department of Education currently provides funding to the South Eastern Education and Library Board for the youth provision in the North Down Constituency.

The Chief Executive of the South Eastern Education and Library Board has advised that while they have no plans to change the current level of full time youth workers in the area, they are proposing to recruit a further 6 part time staff in the area over the next three years. However, it will be the responsibility of the new Education and Skills Authority to determine how it deploys resources for the youth service from January 2010

The current level of youth workers in the North Down Constituency is as follows:

	Full Time Youth Workers	Part Time Youth Workers
South Eastern Education and Library Board	7	33

### Youth Workers

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Education, how many youth workers are employed in the North Down constituency. (AQW 7182/09)

**Minister of Education:** Faoi láthair, tugann an Roinn Oideachais cistiú do Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Deiscirt le haghaidh soláthair don aos óg i dToghcheantar an Dúin Thuaidh. Tá an t-eolas seo a leanas curtha ar fáil ag Príomhfheidhmeannach an Bhoird maidir le líon na n-oibrí don aos óg i dToghcheantar an Dúin Thuaidh.

The Department of Education currently provides funding to the South Eastern Education and Library Board for the youth provision in the North Down Constituency. The Chief Executive of the Board has provided the following information on the number of youth workers in the North Down Constituency -

	Full Time Youth Workers	Part Time Youth Workers
South Eastern Education and Library Board	7	33

### Inclusion and Diversity Service

**Mr K Robinson** asked the Minister of Education if the Inclusion and Diversity Service will be training substitute teachers who are not in long term temporary posts to enable them to assist non-English speaking pupils. (AQW 7192/09)

**Minister of Education:** Tugann mo Roinn cistiú don Seirbhís um Chuimsitheacht agus Éagsúlacht, a bhí bunaithe ag an cúig Bórd Oideachais agus Leabarlainne (ELBanna) le forbairt profisiúnta a sholáthar do mhúinteoirí a bhfuil daltaí nuáíocha ina scoileanna acu. Ní dhéantar idirdhealú ar sholáthar an oiliúna de réir conartha, bíodh sé buan nó sealadach.

My Department funds the Inclusion and Diversity Service (IDS), which was established by the five Education and Library Boards (ELBs), to provide professional development to teachers who have newcomer pupils in their school. It does not discriminate in the provision of training, on the basis of temporary or permanent contracts.

School principals are responsible for determining the training needs of their teachers, including substitute teachers, and they can avail of the wide range of in-service courses offered by ELBs, including the IDS.

The provision of continuing professional development for teachers is the responsibility of the ELBs through their respective Curriculum Advisory Support Service (CASS). All ELBs undertake, on an annual basis, a needs analysis of the training required by schools in the forthcoming academic year.

### Northern Ireland Block

**Mr Gardiner** asked the Minister of Education if she is making bids for any of the additional money provided to the Northern Ireland Block, under the provisions of the Budget of 22 April 2009. (AQW 7207/09)

**Minister of Education:** The Finance Minister has advised that the outworking of the British Chancellor's announcements in respect of the 2009/10 financial year would be incorporated into the Executive's decisions as regards the forthcoming June Monitoring Round in line with local needs and priorities.

Is féidir liom a dheimhniú go bhfuil sé ar intinn agam cur isteach ar acmhainní breise d'oideachas sa bhabhta monatóireachta i mí Meithimh. I dtaca leis an chistiú breise a cuireadh ar fáil do 2010/11, is féidir liom a dheimhniú go bhfuil sé ar intinn agam cur isteach ar acmhainní breise d'oideachas in 2010/11 má bhíonn deis ann.

I can confirm that I intend to bid for additional resources for education, including resources needed to maintain the Extended Schools programme at current levels, in the June monitoring round. With regards to the additional funding made available in 2010/11, I can again confirm that I intend to bid for additional resources for education in 2010/11 when the opportunity arises.

### Non-UK Nationals

**Miss McIlveen** asked the Minister of Education how many non-UK nationals have been enrolled in secondary schools in the (i) controlled sector; (ii) maintained sector; (iii) integrated sector; and (iv) Irish -medium sector, broken down by (a) total enrolment; and (b) percentage of the total numbers of pupils enrolled in each sector. (AQW 7224/09)

**Minister of Education:** Ní bhailítear an t-eolas a iarradh. Ach tá eolas ar chúlra eitneach na ndaltaí agus ar líon na ndaltaí a bhfuil Béarla acu mar theanga bhreise ar fáil. Is féidir an t-eolas seo a fháil tríd na naisc ghréasáin seo a leanas:

The information requested is not collected. However, information on the ethnic background of pupils and the numbers of pupils with English as an additional language is available. These may be accessed via the following web links.

Pupil Ethnicity by ELB 2008/09

[http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/32-statisticsandresearch\\_pg/32-statistics\\_and\\_research\\_statistics\\_on\\_education\\_pg/32\\_statistics\\_and\\_research-numbersofschoolsandpupils\\_pg/32\\_education\\_and\\_library\\_board\\_level/statistics\\_and\\_research\\_education\\_and\\_library\\_board\\_data\\_2008\\_09.htm](http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/32-statisticsandresearch_pg/32-statistics_and_research_statistics_on_education_pg/32_statistics_and_research-numbersofschoolsandpupils_pg/32_education_and_library_board_level/statistics_and_research_education_and_library_board_data_2008_09.htm)

Pupils with English as an additional language 2001/02 – 2008/09

[http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/32-statisticsandresearch\\_pg/32-statistics\\_and\\_research\\_statistics\\_on\\_education\\_pg/32\\_statistics\\_and\\_research-numbersofschoolsandpupils\\_pg/32\\_statistics\\_and\\_research-northernirelandsummarydata\\_pg.htm](http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/32-statisticsandresearch_pg/32-statistics_and_research_statistics_on_education_pg/32_statistics_and_research-numbersofschoolsandpupils_pg/32_statistics_and_research-northernirelandsummarydata_pg.htm) .

### Education Welfare Officers

**Miss McIlveen** asked the Minister of Education how many vacancies there are for Education Welfare Officers, in each of the Education and Library Boards. (AQW 7225/09)

**Minister of Education:** Tá tugtha le fios ag na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne gur mar seo a leanas atá líon na bhfolúntas d'Oifigigh Leasa Oideachais:

The Education and Library Boards have advised of the following number of vacancies for Education Welfare Officers:

Board	BELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB	WELB
Number of Vacancies	2	2	3	0	0

### Post-Primary Teachers

**Miss McIlveen** asked the Minister of Education how many sick days have been taken by post-primary teachers in (i) the controlled sector; (ii) the voluntary grammar school sector; (iii) the maintained sector; (iv) the integrated sector; and (v) the Irish-medium Sector, broken down by education and library board, in each of the last five years. (AQW 7235/09)

**Minister of Education:** Ta an t-eolas a iarradh sa tábla thíos.

The information requested is detailed in the table below.

2003/04

Sector	BELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB	WELB	Total
Controlled	3679	8755	5972	5828	3375	27609
Controlled Integrated	0	0	991	256	0	1247
Grant Maintained Integrated	871	957	946	311	998	4083
Irish Medium	225	0	0	0	0	225
Other Maintained	0	0	0	0	0	0
Catholic Maintained	6185	4333	2611	9215	7688	30032
<b>Total</b>	<b>10960</b>	<b>14045</b>	<b>10520</b>	<b>15610</b>	<b>12061</b>	<b>63196</b>

2004/05

Sector	BELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB	WELB	Total
Controlled	2884	6610	5852	6059	2981	24386
Controlled Integrated	0	0	931	611	0	1542
Grant Maintained Integrated	780	685	1301	256	1011	4033
Irish Medium	161	0	0	0	0	161
Other Maintained	0	0	0	0	0	0
Catholic Maintained	5069	3821	2072	9562	6778	27302
<b>Total</b>	<b>8894</b>	<b>11116</b>	<b>10156</b>	<b>16488</b>	<b>10770</b>	<b>57424</b>

**2005/06**

Sector	BELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB	WELB	Total
Controlled	3606	9036	7072	7180	4324	31218
Controlled Integrated	0	0	1250	297	0	1547
Grant Maintained Integrated	874	892	1061	671	1134	4632
Irish Medium	194	0	0	0	0	194
Other Maintained	0	0	0	0	0	0
Catholic Maintained	6116	5330	3320	10716	7596	33078
<b>Total</b>	<b>10790</b>	<b>15258</b>	<b>12703</b>	<b>18864</b>	<b>13054</b>	<b>70669</b>

**2006/07**

Sector	BELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB	WELB	Total
Controlled	3303	9401	6445	5378	3235	27762
Controlled Integrated	0	0	1080	214	0	1294
Grant Maintained Integrated	919	1478	1373	982	1269	6021
Irish Medium	215	0	0	0	0	215
Other Maintained	0	0	0	0	0	0
Catholic Maintained	6182	4294	3213	9800	7185	30674
<b>Total</b>	<b>10619</b>	<b>15173</b>	<b>12111</b>	<b>16374</b>	<b>11689</b>	<b>65966</b>

**2007/08**

Sector	BELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB	WELB	Total
Controlled	2718	8227	6147	5278	2610	24980
Controlled Integrated	0	1	884	297	0	1182
Grant Maintained Integrated	1143	1095	1241	466	1013	4958
Irish Medium	164	0	0	0	0	164
Other Maintained	0	0	0	0	0	0
Catholic Maintained	4660	4456	2617	8878	6212	26823
<b>Total</b>	<b>8685</b>	<b>13779</b>	<b>10889</b>	<b>14919</b>	<b>9835</b>	<b>58107</b>

### Primary School Teachers

**Miss McIlveen** asked the Minister of Education how many sick days have been taken by primary-school teachers in each sector, broken down by education and library board, in each of the last five years.(AQW 7238/09)

**Minister of Education:** Tá an t-eolas a iarradh sa tábla thíos.

The information requested is detailed in the table below.

**2003/04**

Sector	BELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB	WELB	Total
Controlled	4223	9352	7977	5965	2710	30227
Controlled Integrated	42	156	160	9	0	367



Sector	BELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB	WELB	Total
Grant Maintained Integrated	147	566	202	628	296	1839
Other Maintained	0	53	5	19	0	
Irish Medium	293	0	114	43	78	528
Catholic Maintained	5936	4996	4675	12027	9862	37496
<b>Total</b>	<b>10641</b>	<b>15123</b>	<b>13133</b>	<b>18691</b>	<b>12946</b>	<b>70534</b>

**2004/05**

Sector	BELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB	WELB	Total
Controlled	2944	7654	6683	4807	2465	24553
Controlled Integrated	23	350	575	15	0	963
Grant Maintained Integrated	169	264	198	539	141	1311
Other Maintained	0	1	0	26	0	27
Irish Medium	261	1	154	33	81	530
Catholic Maintained	5142	4761	4277	11964	8006	34150
<b>Total</b>	<b>8539</b>	<b>13031</b>	<b>11887</b>	<b>17384</b>	<b>10693</b>	<b>61534</b>

**2005/06**

Sector	BELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB	WELB	Total
Controlled	3459	10069	8381	5721	3593	31223
Controlled Integrated	106	363	428	13	0	910
Grant Maintained Integrated	131	308	240	635	322	1636
Other Maintained	0	7	2	29	0	38
Irish Medium	303	1	180	232	177	893
Catholic Maintained	6852	5577	4964	14869	9729	41991
<b>Total</b>	<b>10851</b>	<b>16325</b>	<b>14195</b>	<b>21499</b>	<b>13821</b>	<b>76691</b>

**2006/07**

Sector	BELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB	WELB	Total
Controlled	3563	8884	6811	5977	3518	28753
Controlled Integrated	16	259	601	12	55	943
Grant Maintained Integrated	198	359	338	761	541	2197
Other Maintained	0	10	21	79	0	110
Irish Medium	599	0	34	76	219	928
Catholic Maintained	6120	5220	4530	14036	9579	39485
<b>Total</b>	<b>10496</b>	<b>14732</b>	<b>12335</b>	<b>20941</b>	<b>13912</b>	<b>72416</b>

2007/08

Sector	BELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB	WELB	Total
Controlled	4047	8614	6563	6871	3844	29939
Controlled Integrated	34	296	192	5	7	534
Grant Maintained Integrated	333	467	193	426	449	1868
Other Maintained	0	9	6	51	0	66
Irish Medium	607	2	52	89	146	896
Catholic Maintained	5200	4492	4472	11487	9440	35091
<b>Total</b>	<b>10221</b>	<b>13880</b>	<b>11478</b>	<b>18929</b>	<b>13886</b>	<b>68394</b>

### Free School Meals

**Mr Gardiner** asked the Minister of Education how many pupils receive free school meals in the Upper Bann constituency. (AQW 7250/09)

**Minister of Education:** Athraíonn líon na bpáistí a mbíonn béilí scoile acu ar bhonn seachtainiúil.

The number of children taking school meals varies from week to week. However, information collected annually from the School Meals Census provides a snapshot of the numbers taking meals on the day on which census information is gathered.

On the date of the most recent School Meals Census, 10th October 2008, 2,698 pupils in the Upper Bann parliamentary constituency received free school meals.

### Selective/Non-Selective System

**Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of Education what assessment she has made of the length of time taken by other countries to change from a selective system to one that is non-selective. (AQO 2531/09)

**Minister of Education:** Bíonn imthosca difriúil i ngach tír, agus ní bhíonn pointe tosaigh agus deiridh glansoiléir ann maidir leis an idirthréimhse ó chóras roghnach chuig córas neamhroghnach i gcónaí, rud a fhágann go mbíonn sé deacair comparáidí a dhéanamh.

Each country's circumstances are different, and the period of transition from a selective to non-selective system does not always have a clear cut start and end point, making direct comparisons difficult.

In general terms, the assessment that I would make is that countries which have decided to transform their education systems in this way have prospered, as evidenced by the PISA performance ratings. The rate at which non-selective systems emerge from a period of transition is variable, and depends very much on individual circumstances.

I proposed a three year period of transition here, believing that to be a reasonable period given that demographic decline has for some time now been effecting an unmanaged transition, with an ever increasing number of grammar schools forced to dilute the academic nature of their intakes. My preference was to manage this transition in an orderly fashion, within a regulated framework, but instead, for reasons which have been explained many times in this Assembly, we must proceed without regulation and according to the transfer 2010 guidance.

Reform is needed urgently and any further delay will only perpetuate the inequalities associated with the outgoing arrangements. The rest of the island of Ireland moved to a non-selective system many years ago, now it is time for the north to follow suit.

## Energy Efficiency and Climate Change

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Education what provision is made within the curriculum in relation to energy efficiency and climate change. (AQO 2533/09)

**Minister of Education:** Sílim go bhfuil páirt le glacadh ag gach duine againn agus muid ag diriú ar Fhorbairt Inbhuanaithe, a bhfuil eifeachtacht fuinnimh agus an t-athrú aeráide mar chodanna di, le cosaint a thabhairt don timpeallacht ar son na glúinte atá le teacht.

We all have a part to play in addressing issues of Sustainable Development, which include energy efficiency and climate change, to protect our environment for future generations. The statutory revised curriculum which I am introducing includes Education for Sustainable Development from Year 1 onwards.

Through Education for Sustainable Development, pupils will explore issues such as environmental and climate change and the need to manage human impact on the environment. At primary level pupils will have the opportunity to appreciate the environment, their role in maintaining and improving it, and understand how their actions can affect the environment.

As they move into post-primary they will have the opportunity to come to understand the interdependence of society, the economy and the environment; to develop respect for the needs of both present and future generations; to act towards promoting an improved environment; and to learn about exercising environmental responsibility through, for example, conservation of resources, waste management and the promotion of local biodiversity.

## Post-Primary Transfer: Academic Criteria

**Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Education whether the right for any school wishing to use academic criteria for post-primary transfer remains on the statute book. (AQO 2534/09)

**Minister of Education:** Dhíreoinn aird an chomhalta ar an chomhfhreagra a thug mé ar AQW 5829/09, AQW 5839/09 agus AQW 5859/09 a chuir David Simpson MLA, agus a foilsíodh sa Tuairisc Oifigiúil ar 6 Márta 2009.

I refer the member to my combined answer to questions AQW 5829/09, AQW 5839/09 and AQW 5859/09 raised by David Simpson MLA, published in the Official Report on 6 March 2009.

## Irish-Language Proficiency

**Mr Storey** asked the Minister of Education to outline the level of proficiency in the Irish language that is required before a person is able to teach in an Irish-medium school. (AQO 2536/09)

**Minister of Education:** Caithfear go mbeidh eolas leordhóthánach teangeolaíoch agus oideolaíoch ag múinteoirí i nGaelscoileanna agus i gcomhthéacsanna eile dátheangacha le bheith ábalta an curaclam a theagasc.

Teachers in Irish-medium and other bilingual contexts must have sufficient linguistic and pedagogical knowledge to teach the curriculum. It is the responsibility of Boards of Governors of Irish-medium schools, as employers, to ensure that their teachers have the necessary linguistic skills to work competently in the Irish-medium sector.

## Academic Selection: NICCY

**Ms S Ramsey** asked the Minister of Education what correspondence she has received or meetings she has attended with the Children's Commissioner in relation to academic selection. (AQO 2537/09)

**Minister of Education:** Bhuaile mé le Coimisinéir na Leanaí cúpla uair ag ócáidí a bhain le ceisteanna oideachais éagsúla, agus bhí ceist an aistrithe iarbhunscoile faoi phlé ag cruinniú le déanaí ar 19 Feabhra 2009.

I have met with the Children's Commissioner on a number of occasions on various education issues, and the issue of post-primary transfer was discussed at a recent meeting on 19 February 2009. The issue has also been raised in correspondence with the Commissioner and I support her view that "selection of children at 11 does not work".

I am also conscious of concerns that have been expressed in the past by the Human Rights Commission about academic selection at age eleven and the protection of individual human rights.

### Post-Primary Transfer: Working Group

**Mr McCallister** asked the Minister of Education what action she will take, following the call by the Northern Ireland Commission for Catholic Education and the education spokespersons of Protestant churches, to set up a Working Group to establish a consensus on post-primary transfer. (AQO 2538/09)

**Minister of Education:** After exhaustive discussions, stretching over the last two years, with every educational stakeholder on the issue of transfer 2010, and extensive research on this issue dating back to 2000 to inform the work of the Burns-led post-primary review body and later the Costello-led review of post-primary Education, I must make clear that we are now past the stage for further discussions. The time for action is now.

Creidim go nglacfaidh na scoileanna gramadaí leis amach anseo go mbeadh a gcuid daltaí níos fearr as, dá mbeadh siad páirteach sa chóras príomhshrutha oideachais, seachas taobh amuigh de.

I believe that the breakaway grammar schools will in time accept that their pupils are better served if they are part of, rather than outside, the mainstream education system.

### Teacher Redundancy Arrangements

**Mr Dallat** asked the Minister of Education what plans she has to change the redundancy arrangements for teachers. (AQO 2539/09)

**Minister of Education:** Is ceist í socrúithe iomarcaíochta do mhúinteoirí a bhaineann lena bhfostóirí. Tá mo Roinn ag déanamh comhairliúcháin faoi láthair áfach ar dhréacht Rialacháin do mhúinteoirí (Cúiteamh i leith Iomarcaíochta agus Luathscoir).

The redundancy arrangements for teachers are a matter for their employers. However, my Department is currently consulting on draft Teachers' (Compensation for Redundancy and Premature Retirement) Regulations. A single consultation exercise is being carried out for both the Draft Regulations and the Equality Screening of the Regulations. The closing date for responses is 15 May 2009.

The new regulations will have the effect of making teachers' employers liable for the cost of premature retirement compensation. They will also provide for employers to make an enhanced severance payment as an alternative to granting premature retirement. The existing provisions regarding discretionary compensation for redundancy will be retained. All necessary equality processes will be followed.

### Schools Estate

**Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister of Education what assessment she has made of how the schools estate will be utilised over the next five years. (AQO 2540/09)

**Minister of Education:** Bainfear úsáid as eastát na scoile le hoideachas d'ardchaighdeán a sholáthar dár bpáistí.

The schools estate will be used to provide our children with a high quality education.

### Violence in Schools

**Mr Burns** asked the Minister of Education what advice her Department offers to teachers who have suffered violence on school premises. (AQO 2541/09)

**Minister of Education:** Bunaíodh grúpa oibre anuraidh faoi stiúir Choiste Idirbheartaíochta na Múinteoirí le himscrúdú a dhéanamh ar an fhadhb a bhaineann leis an drochíde a imrítear ar mhúinteoirí.

A working group was established last year under the aegis of the Teacher Negotiating Committee to examine the problem of abuse of teachers. The working group comprises representatives of the Department, the employing authorities and the teachers' unions. It has reviewed existing guidance and organised a workshop last November to consider the extent and nature of teacher abuse. The group is currently completing new guidance on tackling violent behaviour in schools and dealing with the abuse of teachers, whether physical, verbal or electronic.



Responsibility for teachers' health and safety rests with teachers' employers. The employing authorities provide a range of welfare services to teachers as required, and have recently extended the provision of confidential counselling services to all teachers in grant-aided schools. They also provide advice and guidance to principals on dealing with specific school situations.

### Post-Primary Transfer: Entrance Tests

**Mr Cree** asked the Minister of Education what advice she is giving to principals and teachers responding to parental demands for preparation for entrance tests in an unregulated system. (AQO 2542/09)

**Minister of Education:** Léiríonn an chomhairle a thug mé do bhunscoileanna agus do thuismitheoirí, sa treoir ar Aistriú 2010, mo mheasúnú ar an tionchar dhiúltach a bhíonn ag aistriú acadúil iar-bhunscoile ar eispéireas oideachasúil páistí bunscoile.

The advice I have provided to primary schools and parents, in the form of the transfer 2010 guidance, reflects my assessment of the distorting impact of academic post-primary transfer on the educational experience of primary-school children. The guidance, therefore, seeks to support primary schools' delivery of the primary curriculum in the interests of children and parents. I have written to the parents of all P6 children to the same effect.

The message to primary schools is that they should not be obliged or pressured in respect of a post-primary school's admissions arrangements. Primary schools understand that their role, outlined in legislation, is to continue to provide to their children an excellent primary curriculum. It is not to serve the narrow interests of the admission arrangements of a post-primary school. Teacher unions are also providing this message to their members: The Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) has advised its members against:

- involvement in the administration of entrance tests;
- preparing pupils for entrance tests;
- supervising entrance tests;
- marking entrance tests.

My message to parents is to assure them that they have no need to put their child through an entrance test. The transfer 2010 guidance recommends that no school should operate this test and if all schools follow this guidance then, for the first time, all parents and children will be served by a fair system of transfer.

### Academic Selection: Breakaway Tests

**Mrs McGill** asked the Minister of Education what advice has been issued by the teaching unions to their members on the operation of any breakaway academic selection tests. (AQO 2543/09)

**Minister of Education:** Léiríonn an chomhairle a thug mé do bhunscoileanna agus do thuismitheoirí, sa treoir ar Aistriú 2010, mo mheasúnú ar an tionchar dhiúltach a bhíonn ag aistriú acadúil iar-bhunscoile ar eispéireas oideachasúil páistí bunscoile.

The advice I have provided to primary schools and parents, in the form of the transfer 2010 guidance, reflects my assessment of the distorting impact of academic post-primary transfer on the educational experience of primary-school children. The guidance, therefore, seeks to support primary schools' delivery of the primary curriculum in the interests of children and parents. I have written to the parents of all P6 children to the same effect.

The message to primary schools is that they should not be obliged or pressured in respect of a post-primary school's admissions arrangements. Primary schools understand that their role, outlined in legislation, is to continue to provide to their children an excellent primary curriculum. It is not to serve the narrow interests of the admission arrangements of a post-primary school. Teacher unions are providing this message to their members: The Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) states that members are advised against:

- involvement in the administration of entrance tests;
- preparing pupils for entrance tests;
- supervising entrance tests;
- marking entrance tests.

I also wholeheartedly endorse comments from the Ulster Teachers' Union that grammar schools setting entrance tests "are making primary principals and P6 and 7 teachers the targets for the concerns and frustrations of parents. We must not allow ourselves and the curriculum we offer to children in primary schools to be dictated to by a minority."

### Education and Skills Authority

**Mr Maginness** asked the Minister of Education how the Bill for the education and skills authority will affect the voluntary principle under which some schools operate. (AQO 2544/09)

**Minister of Education:** Níl sé i gceist agam cur isteach ar an phrionsabal deonach faoina mbíonn roinnt scoileanna á fheidhmiú.

It is not my intention to erode the voluntary principle under which some schools operate. The proposed arrangements do not involve any real, or practical, loss of autonomy, as boards of governors will remain responsible for the exercise of employment functions in their schools, and will take employment decisions that ESA will be under a legal duty to put into effect.

The aim of the policy is to achieve greater consistency, transparency and accountability in the employment arrangements for grant aided schools. The aim is not to reduce autonomy in employment matters, but to ensure that it is available to all schools on the basis of equality, rather than to some schools on the basis of historical differences in ownership, and in a way that reflects the needs and capacity of each school.

### Educational Underachievement Working Group

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Education what work programme the North South Ministerial Council has arranged for the recently established joint Educational Underachievement Working Group. (AQO 2545/09)

**Minister of Education:** At the last meeting of the Council, Ministers endorsed proposals for future work on Educational Underachievement which will initially focus on interventions to support parents and families in helping children with education, and challenges facing children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds.

My Ministerial colleagues agreed that the Underachievement Working Group will provide an early focus on interventions supporting parents and families in helping their children with education. The group has identified a programme to recognise and disseminate good practice examples of how teachers in schools serve the most disadvantaged communities and raise expectations among pupils and parents for improved educational attainment, particularly in literacy and numeracy. In addition, the group will work in partnership to explore the specific challenges facing children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, particularly Traveller children, newcomer families, children with learning or other disabilities, and children suffering social impacts such as alcohol or drug misuse in the home, or domestic violence and sexual violence.

Tá sé beartaithe fosta go ndéanfaidh an Grúpa Oibre maoirsiú ar obair an dá ghrúpa thuaidh/theas atá ann anois a dhíríonn ar litearthacht agus uimhearthacht agus ar fhreastal agus choinneáil daltaí.

It is envisaged that the Working Group will also oversee the work of the two existing north/south groups on literacy and numeracy and on pupil attendance and retention.

## DEPARTMENT FOR EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING

### Steps to Work Programme

**Mr Kennedy** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to confirm how many of the 438 referrals from all Jobs and Benefits Offices to TWL Training Ltd, in the County Antrim area, under Step 2 of the Steps to Work programme, have been placed under Step 1 of this programme. (AQW 7080/09)

**Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey):** Of the 438 referrals from all Jobs and Benefit offices to TWL Training Ltd, in the Co. Antrim area, under Step 2 of the Steps to Work programme, 187 have been placed under Step 1 of this programme.

### North West Regional College

**Mrs McGill** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many (i) fulltime; (ii) part time; and (iii) evening students from the Strabane catchment area attend the North West Regional College Londonderry/Derry campus; and to list the courses available to them. (AQW 7081/09)

**Minister for Employment and Learning:** In the 2007/08 academic year (latest available validated data) there were (i) 273 Full time; (ii) 898 Part time; and (iii) 544 evening enrolments from the Strabane catchment area attending the North West Regional College Londonderry/ Derry campus.

The North West Regional College has advised that all courses currently offered at the Londonderry/ Derry campus are available to students from the Strabane catchment area. While too detailed to list here, a copy of the College's prospectus containing information on all courses offered, can be downloaded from the College's website ([www.nwrc.ac.uk](http://www.nwrc.ac.uk)).

### Holylands Disorder

**Mr Cobain** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what discussions he has had with the Universities' Vice Chancellors in relation to the recent disorder in the Holylands area of Belfast. (AQO 2552/09)

**Minister for Employment and Learning:** I contacted the Vice Chancellor of both Queen's University and the University of Ulster on the morning of 18 March after the disorder the previous day in the Holylands area. I discussed what action had been taken on the day in relation to student behaviour and what potential there was for further action to prevent such scenes occurring in the future.

I have also invited both Vice Chancellors to attend the stakeholder forum I announced on the same date. This forum is scheduled to take place on 7 May.

### FE Sector: Public Funds Expenditure

**Mr Butler** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, in light of the auditor's report into the financial management of the further education sector, what plans he has to monitor and assess more closely how public funds allocated to further education colleges are spent. (AQO 2553/09)

**Minister for Employment and Learning:** The Northern Ireland Audit Office Report on Financial Management in the Further Education sector will be considered at a forthcoming meeting of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC).

It would be inappropriate for me to comment in detail on the report in advance of either the PAC hearing, the Committee's report arising from the meeting or the formal response to that report from the Minister of Finance and Personnel.

I can report, however, that I am satisfied that monitoring arrangements have improved in Further Education Colleges since the Auditor's report. The formal memorandum of reply provided by the Department of Finance and Personnel will provide a comprehensive response to the Auditors report.

### Construction Workers

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what programmes he has in place to assist construction workers, who are unemployed, to train and enhance their skills. (AQO 2554/09)

**Minister for Employment and Learning:** A variety of opportunities exist to help all workers aged 16 years and over who are unemployed.

In particular, for construction, Further Education Colleges across Northern Ireland have developed retraining and upskilling initiatives specifically for construction workers who are unemployed. This includes Enhanced Construction Skills and the Potential Site Supervisor Programme to be run at South Eastern Regional College after Easter. At South West College there will be training in areas of quarrying, road building and renewable energy.

Additionally, the Training for Success and Steps to Work programmes have recently been adapted to meet the emerging needs of those facing unemployment, especially apprentices

Collectively these programmes will prepare our workforce for future employment and the eventual upturn in the economy.

### **Vacancies/Jobseeker's Allowance: Fermanagh and South Tyrone**

**Mr Elliott** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the change, over the last year, in the total numbers of vacancies and Jobseeker's Allowance claimants recorded at the Jobs and Benefits Offices in Fermanagh and South Tyrone. (AQO 2555/09)

**Minister for Employment and Learning:** Over the year from March 2008 to February 2009 the total number of Jobseeker's Allowance claimants recorded at the Jobs and Benefits Offices in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone area rose from 1275 to 2813, representing an increase of 120.62%.

In February 2009 the Jobs and Benefits offices in Enniskillen and Dungannon had a total of 134 vacancies, representing 286 jobs. In March 2008, the same offices had a total of 246 vacancies, representing 364 jobs.

### **Apprenticeships: Arm's-Length Bodies**

**Mr Newton** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning which arm's-length bodies offer apprenticeships and to what extent these are delivered. (AQO 2557/09)

**Minister for Employment and Learning:** Northern Ireland Water recently recruited 22 employees for their water utility apprenticeship programme and 10 Royal Mail staff are starting on the management apprenticeship later this year. The Western Health and Social Care Trust currently provide apprenticeship training in health and social care for 18 people including some private sector employees. These apprenticeships are delivered in accordance with departmental guidelines.

My Department has held discussions with the central personnel group of the Department of Finance and Personnel and government skills, the sector skills council, to explore apprenticeships within the Civil Service. My Department is creating, as a pilot, a number of apprenticeships in business administration.

### **Apprentices: Public Contracts**

**Mr Burns** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if there will be a requirement in procurement for a percentage of apprentices to be employed in public contracts. (AQO 2558/09)

**Minister for Employment and Learning:** The Construction Industry Forum (NI) has developed 'Proposals for Promoting Equality and Sustainable Development by Sustainable Procurement in Construction'. Within this, specific proposals encourage training and skills development to build a sustainable industry. These proposals require main contracts to include a requirement that main contractors recruit one apprentice, either directly or through the supply chain, for each £2m of project value.

The NICS's Procurement Practitioners' Group, which includes representatives from Centres of Procurement Expertise with responsibility for construction procurement across government, agreed at its meeting on the 30 September 2008, to incorporate the Industry Forum's proposals, in so far as is practicable, in all new construction contracts from December 2008.



### **Vacancies/Jobseeker's Allowance: Mid Ulster**

**Mr Armstrong** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the change, over the last year, in the total numbers of vacancies and jobseeker's allowance claimants recorded at the Jobs and Benefits Offices in Mid Ulster. (AQO 2559/09)

**Minister for Employment and Learning:** Over the year from March 2008 to February 2009 the total number of jobseeker's allowance claimants recorded at the Jobs and Benefits Office and JobCentre in the Mid Ulster area rose from 591 to 1727 claimants representing an increase of 192.2%.

In February 2009 the Jobs and Benefits office in Magherafelt and the JobCentre in Cookstown were advertising a total of 58 vacancies, representing 87 jobs. In March 2008 the same offices displayed a total of 191 vacancies, representing 235 jobs.

### **Review of Teacher Training**

**Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning when the Review of Teacher Training will be published. (AQO 2560/09)

**Minister for Employment and Learning:** This is a joint review between my Department and the Department of Education. There are a number of issues within the review which are, the responsibility of the Department of Education. Accordingly I have written recently to The Minister of Education and have stressed the importance of publishing the review without further delay.

### **Land and Accommodation Strategy**

**Mr Attwood** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if his Department is preparing a protocol with institutions of higher education governing acquisitions or disposals of land to ensure that, as a primary funder, the government is properly involved in the Housing Executive's land and accommodation strategy. (AQO 2561/09)

**Minister for Employment and Learning:** Acquisition or disposal of land by institutions of higher education is covered under the terms of their Financial Memorandum with my Department. The universities and university colleges are required to keep their holdings of land and buildings under review, with the objective of rationalising and disposing of those which they consider, in light of their estate strategy, to be no longer needed. The Financial Memorandum places conditions on the sale of any property with an exchequer interest. These include the need to notify, or consult with, my Department in advance of such a sale and the possibility of money being recouped from the proceeds where they are not being reinvested.

Furthermore as the Housing Executive and its land and accommodation strategy does not fall within my Department's remit I will not therefore be developing a protocol.

### **Training Schemes**

**Mr Molloy** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if he will put in place specific training schemes in areas of high unemployment and places where there have been substantial job losses. (AQO 2562/09)

**Minister for Employment and Learning:** The Department's main adult return to work programme, Steps to Work, and its Local Employment Intermediary Service are already available in areas of high unemployment. In addition, there is immediate access to Steps to Work for those who become unemployed following large scale redundancies including groups such as redundant apprentices.

### **University Education**

**Mr McCausland** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail any ongoing discussions between Queen's University, Belfast and the University of Ulster about widening participation in university education; and to confirm whether his Department has participated in these discussions. (AQO 2563/09)

**Minister for Employment and Learning:** The Department has received commitment from relevant government departments to work with it and other stakeholders, including the higher education institutions, in the development and implementation of an integrated regional strategy for widening participation. Initial meetings of a widening participation strategy group are planned to take place in the near future and a Regional Co-ordinator will be appointed shortly.

Both Queen's University and the University of Ulster are committed to future participation in the widening participation strategy group.

### Conflict Dispute Resolution

**Mr McClarty** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning when the consultation paper on dispute resolution will be published. (AQO 2564/09)

**Minister for Employment and Learning:** A draft of the consultation document has been circulated to individual Departments for comment and is currently awaiting Executive clearance. I am committed to issuing the consultation at the earliest opportunity, however the timing of the commencement of the public consultation process will depend on when Executive clearance is received.

### Vacancies/Jobseeker's Allowance: North Down

**Mr Cree** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the change, over the last year, in the total numbers of vacancies and Jobseeker's Allowance claimants recorded at the Jobs and Benefits Offices in North Down. (AQO 2565/09)

**Minister for Employment and Learning:** The economic crisis has had a significant effect on the workforce in North Down. The Job Seekers Allowance register in the North Down area has risen from 776 to 1262 in the twelve months to the end of February 2009, a 62% increase. The number of vacancies notified to the Department fell from 296 representing 641 jobs to 117 representing 202 jobs in the same period, a 61% decrease.

## DEPARTMENT OF ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

### Manufacturing Companies in East Antrim

**Mr K Robinson** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what level of support her Department and its agencies (i) have given in each of the last five years; (ii) are currently giving; and (iii) will give to address the problems associated with the economic downturn, to manufacturing companies, in East Antrim. (AQW 7052/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs A Foster):** (i) & (ii) The table below addresses both points (i) and (ii) and provides information on the amount of assistance offered by Invest NI within the East Antrim Parliamentary Constituency Area during the five-year period 2003/04 to 2007/08, and for the most recent year 2008/09. This represents the value of support which is expected to be paid towards business-related investment during the life-time of assisted projects.

#### INVEST NI ASSISTANCE OFFERED IN EAST ANTRIM PCA (2003/04 – 2008/09)

Year	No. of Offers	Total Assistance Offered (£m)	Total Planned Investment (£m)
2003/04	176	3.90	12.60
2004/05	175	6.36	25.95
2005/06	92	14.71	58.40
2006/07	71	9.59	24.68
2007/08	98	5.26	24.49

Year	No. of Offers	Total Assistance Offered (£m)	Total Planned Investment (£m)
2008/09	93	5.74	19.76
<b>Total</b>	<b>705</b>	<b>45.55</b>	<b>165.89</b>

**Notes:**

1. 2008/09 figures are provisional and may be subject to change.
2. Tables may not add due to rounding.
3. Planned Investment includes Total Assistance Offered.

In addition, the Northern Ireland Start a Business Programme (SABp), which is provided by Invest NI in partnership with Enterprise Northern Ireland offered assistance of over £430,000 to 922 individuals in the East Antrim PCA to start their own business during the time period.

- (iii) In response to the increasingly difficult global economic conditions, Invest NI has developed a programme of actions and initiatives designed to enable its clients throughout Northern Ireland to tackle the impact of a sustained economic downturn. In particular, it has focused on the areas of cash flow management, cost reduction and improving production efficiency.

Invest NI has held seminars to offer local companies practical specialist advice on coping with the credit crunch. At the first seminar in Belfast, Invest NI's £5 million Accelerated Support Fund was launched, which can make fast track advice and assistance available to client companies which are suffering the adverse effects of the downturn.

Invest NI is currently working with clients in East Antrim to help address the very significant problems being experienced as a result of the current economic recession. The focus is on business improvement and capability building including training, skills development and process improvement. These initiatives offer opportunities to redeploy and retain skilled labour as an alternative to redundancies.

Against this difficult economic backdrop, Invest NI is proactively working intensively with the companies and entrepreneurs whose business strategies and investment decisions are essential to progressing towards the targets contained in the Executive's Programme for Government.

## People Registered as Unemployed

**Mr Armstrong** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many people were registered as unemployed in the month of April in Magherafelt, Cookstown and Dungannon Council areas, in each of the last five years. (AQW 7186/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** The latest claimant count unemployment data published on 22nd April 2009, relates to March 2009 figures. This most recent claimant count data and the equivalent month's figures in each of the last four years for Magherafelt, Cookstown and Dungannon District Council areas are given in the following table.

	Magherafelt		Cookstown		Dungannon		Northern Ireland	
	Number	Rate#	Number	Rate#	Number	Rate#	Number	Rate#
March 2005	343	1.3	352	1.7	562	1.8	29,156	2.7
March 2006	370	1.4	385	1.8	515	1.6	28,649	2.7
March 2007	267	1.0	339	1.5	475	1.4	25,928	2.4
March 2008	288	1.1	363	1.6	477	1.4	24,532	2.3
March 2009*	985	3.6	913	4.1	1,455	4.3	45,286	4.2

\*Latest data, published on 22nd April 2009

#Percentage of the working age population

For information, corresponding data for Northern Ireland are also given in the above table.

April 2009 data will be published on the 13th May.

### Belfast to Stranraer Ferry Service

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if she has held any discussions with Stena Line about the proposal to discontinue the ferry service from Belfast to Stranraer and replace it with a slower ferry, which will increase the journey time by two or three hours. (AQW 7195/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** I have not held any discussions with Stena Line on this matter.

Stena Line is one of a number of private sector ferry companies providing important sea linkages to the United Kingdom mainland which benefit the people and economy of Northern Ireland.

Stena Line are in the middle of a service rationalisation plan involving the re-siting of its terminal facilities in Northern Ireland and Scotland and replacing existing vessels with newer and more efficient ones, both of which are designed to reduce journey times, cut fuel costs and enhance passenger and freight services. Stena Line has advised that there are no plans to withdraw the high speed ferry service between Northern Ireland and Scotland.

### Developing Lough Neagh

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans she has to suggest to the Northern Ireland Tourist Board that it gathers tourism statistics for the Lough Neagh region. (AQW 7219/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** There is no formal definition of a “Lough Neagh” region.

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) currently provides statistics relating to tourism trips and associated spend at a Regional Tourism Partnership level (see [www.nitb.com/research](http://www.nitb.com/research)). Data at individual Local Authority level whilst available is not published as sample sizes are not sufficient to make information robust.

NITB will consider the possibility of collating such statistics for the Lough Neagh region, based on data for the six Local Authority areas bordering Lough Neagh, subject to a robust level of data being available.

### Developing Lough Neagh

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how the Northern Ireland Tourist board will promote and market Lough Neagh. (AQW 7220/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** Lough Neagh’s main tourism strength lies in the range of water-based sports and activities that it has to offer. The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) is working to develop the Lough as a key element of its Sports, Activities and Waterways product portfolio. To this end, NITB is working closely with the Lough Neagh Partnership to ensure the work of both bodies is complementary and indeed that the tourism and leisure potential of the Lough is realised.

NITB also works to promote Northern Ireland as a short break destination to residents of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and as such recently launched a major marketing campaign that featured attractions right across Northern Ireland including Lough Neagh.

NITB includes Lough Neagh within other promotional materials including brochures and its consumer website [www.discovernorthernireland.com](http://www.discovernorthernireland.com). Information on Lough Neagh is also available from our partner organisations and their websites such as Regional Tourism Partnerships, the Lough Neagh Partnership and the Countryside Access and Activities Network.

NITB will continue to work to develop, promote and market Lough Neagh as a key part of the Northern Ireland tourism offering.

### Project Kelvin

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the assistance provided to date from Invest NI to Hibernia Atlantic in relation to Project Kelvin (i) for acquiring and developing a Telehouse facility in Derry City; (ii) in respect of any proposed facilities in Coleraine; and (iii) any other assistance that has been made available. (AQW 7226/09)



**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** Hibernia Atlantic has been in discussion with Invest NI in relation to surveying two of the agency's regional offices (outside the north-west) as potential points of presence and to understand the location of Invest NI's business parks and landholding across Northern Ireland including, but not limited to, the Derry City Council area.

Hibernia Atlantic was referred to the publicly available information on Invest NI's landholding on [www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk](http://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk) and was provided with maps and aerial photographs of a number of its properties across Northern Ireland.

Hibernia Atlantic has also had meetings with Invest NI in April to discuss how Project Kelvin can be used to promote Northern Ireland to potential overseas inward investment.

No request for funding has been received and Invest NI has no expectation of receiving such a request.

### Project Kelvin

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the acquisition of land and the development of facilities by Hibernia Atlantic in (i) Derry City, (ii) Coleraine, and (iii) in any other locations, as part of Project Kelvin. (AQW 7227/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** Hibernia Atlantic is currently progressing both the submarine and terrestrial aspects of Project Kelvin. It proposes to put forward a contract variation to the Department in respect of relocating the telehouse to Londonderry. All other aspects of the construction are proceeding as per the contract.

In particular at this point the company is actively negotiating with land owners regarding the location of the telehouse and the cable landing station. Sites for the other points of presence are also being considered and surveyed.

### Project Kelvin

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to her answer to AQW 6603/09, (i) for an update on the progress of the variation to contract procedure to ensure the location of the Project Kelvin Telehouse in Derry City; and (ii) if a revised proposal has been submitted to her Department. (AQW 7229/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** Hibernia Atlantic has been evaluating potential sites for the telehouse in Londonderry. Only when this work has been completed will the company be in a position to submit a contract variation proposal to the Department.

Once we receive a proposal it will be evaluated by both the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Department of Communication, Energy and Natural Resources and our technical advisers to ensure it meets the technical specification in the Kelvin contract.

### Project Kelvin

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to her answer to AQW 6603/09, (i) for an update on the progress of the competition for the appointment of technical consultants to advise her Department on Project Kelvin, (ii) to indicate when such consultants are likely to be appointed; and (iii) what technical expertise is available to her Department for Project Kelvin, pending the outcome of the procurement exercise. (AQW 7230/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** The tender for the appointment of technical consultants is being managed for the Department by the Central Procurement Directorate (CPD), Department of Finance and Personnel. The tender was advertised in the EU Official Journal and the CPD website on 10 April 2009. The closing date for tenders is the 19th of May 2009 and the evaluation of the tenders is scheduled to take place on the 26th (and if necessary 27th) of May 2009. At this time the bidders will be notified of the outcome. CPD allow 14 calendar days from notification of the award decision until the end of the mandatory standstill period before the actual contract can be awarded (around 12 June 2009). This is a slight slippage from the original timetable of end May 2009.

The Department has appointed Offshore Marine Management to provide any technical advice on the submarine cable aspects of the project until the new consultants are in place.

In addition the Department can also call upon the services of engineers (including Civil, Mechanical and Electrical) in DFP (CPD) as required.

### Energy Supply

**Mr McCallister** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline her Department's long-term vision for energy supply. (AQO 2570/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** The Department's strategic aim is for a more sustainable energy system in which energy is used as efficiently as possible; where much more of our energy is from renewable sources; and where energy is as competitively priced as possible.

Reducing dependency on fossil fuels will increase Northern Ireland's security of supply and help meet the United Kingdom's commitments to the European Union's climate change targets.

Security of energy supply will be one of the key themes of the new Strategic Energy Framework. The draft Framework, which I hope to put out to consultation this summer, will set out how my Department plans to realise the vision for the benefit of all consumers.

### Tourism in West Tyrone

**Mrs McGill** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if her Department will promote, advertise and provide resources to develop tourism in the West Tyrone constituency, particularly in the Glenelly Valley area. (AQO 2572/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** The Northern Ireland Tourist Board works to promote and develop tourism right across Northern Ireland. To this end, NITB has just recently launched a major marketing campaign in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland to raise the profile of Northern Ireland as a short break destination.

The campaign encourages people to explore more of what Northern Ireland has to offer and, within this, all of the key regions of Northern Ireland have featured. County Tyrone has received significant coverage as a result of this with Beaghmore Stones, Creggandevsky Court Tomb, The Ulster American Folk Park, Gortin Glen and An Creagan Visitor Centre among some of the attractions featured.

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board will continue to work to promote and develop tourism in all areas of Northern Ireland.

In addition, DARD is making up to £12million available for tourism through the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme 2007 – 2013.

### Energy Efficiency in Agriculture

**Mr Burns** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what actions have been taken by her Department, in partnership with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, to improve energy efficiency in agriculture. (AQO 2573/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** DETI has an overall co-ordinating role for energy efficiency within its energy policy remit. However, legislative powers in respect of energy efficiency are allocated across a number of Departments and Non-departmental Public Bodies in Northern Ireland.

I have, therefore, recently set up a Sustainable Energy Inter-departmental Working Group which will ensure that sustainable energy issues are dealt with strategically across Northern Ireland departments. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development is represented on this group.

I have directed that a sub-group be set up specifically to look at energy efficiency, and the terms of reference for this group will be agreed shortly.

My Department continues to work with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development on collaborative projects that impact on energy use in agriculture related areas. This work covers matters such as energy from waste projects and EU Directives, as appropriate.

Invest NI currently funds the Carbon Trust to provide advice and information on energy efficiency to the business sector, including agri-businesses that add value to primary agricultural activities.

### Debt Advisory Services

**Ms J McCann** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if she will ensure that any future enhancement of Debt Advisory Services will include the creation of services that are community based and accessible to those families and individuals most in need. (AQO 2574/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** Additional funding secured by my Department will bring spending on debt advice to £1million per annum this year and will significantly enhance existing debt advice services. It is my intention that funding for extra face to face debt advisers will complement the existing service and will target sectors of society which are disadvantaged in their access to advice services.

### Electricity Interconnector

**Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the opportunities that will arise from the new electricity interconnector between the island of Ireland and Wales, that was announced in March 2009 by the Energy Minister of the Republic of Ireland. (AQO 2575/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** The Irish Government's plan to build its first electricity interconnector between the Republic of Ireland and Wales by 2012 will improve regional interconnection capacity. It will be in addition to the existing Moyle interconnector between Northern Ireland and Scotland.

The extra interconnection will help the long term integration of electricity markets into a regional France-UK-Ireland market under the European Internal Market Electricity Regional Initiative. This should improve security of supply, and enhance trading and competition between the Single Electricity Market and the larger Great Britain market.

### Renewable Energy: Economic Opportunities

**Mr McClarty** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what assessment her Department has made of the long-term economic opportunities presented by renewable energy. (AQO 2576/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** The Energy and Environmental sector of the Northern Ireland economy currently employs approximately 4,500 people in 200 companies and has an estimated annual turnover of £300 million. This indicates that Northern Ireland has a solid base on which to build future development. Invest NI believes that growth in this sector will offer many opportunities for businesses involved in design, installation or manufacture of the component parts associated with a range of renewable energy technologies.

Invest NI is actively engaged with the Department for Energy and Climate Change, UK Renewables, UK Trade and Investment and the UK Renewables Deployment Group in the targeting of renewables as a growth sector. Invest NI is also developing a strategy to maximise the potential economic benefits of the sector and this is targeted for completion by the end of 2009.

Furthermore, the recently established Inter-Departmental Working Group on Sustainable Energy, which I chair, has set up a sub-group looking specifically at opportunities for 'green jobs' and skills development within Northern Ireland.

I believe that there is significant potential for 'green jobs' in Northern Ireland and that now is the right time to encourage investment in renewable energy technologies for the future. My Department will be consulting shortly on a new Strategic Energy Framework. This will highlight how renewable energy technologies can help deliver security and diversity of energy supply, address climate change and create local employment opportunities.

### Foreign Direct Investment Grants

**Mr O'Loan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much money was allocated for foreign direct investment grants over the last three years; and how much of this has been spent. (AQO 2577/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** In common with other Government Agencies and Departments, the total Invest NI budget has been allocated by DFP for the 2008/09 to 2010/11 period.

Within Invest NI, the budget is allocated to specific programmes in order to deliver on the objectives contained in its Corporate Plan.

Ultimately, the Budget allocation to each of Invest NI's operating divisions is based upon the following factors:

- Brought forward commitments; an estimation of the budget that is required to fund existing contractual commitments to client companies.
- Work in Progress; an assessment of the impact that current work in progress will have on budget allocations.
- New business; refers to the level of budget headroom available to fund programmes that deliver outputs in line with corporate targets.

The Budget is not, and never has been, allocated in terms of client company ownership and therefore no specific budget is allocated for foreign direct investment

I can confirm, however, that during the last three financial years for which final figures are available, that is 2005/06, 2006/07 and 2007/08, Invest NI offered £84.8 million, £48.3 million and £54.6 million of assistance respectively to externally owned clients.

Invest NI accounts for grant expenditure according to the type of assistance provided to client companies, for example employment grants, capital grants, or research and development grants. Grant expenditure is not classified according to the mechanism by which the offer was secured and, consequently, expenditure information related to FDI projects is not currently available on this basis.

### Presbyterian Mutual Society

**Mr Kennedy** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in light of the situation facing the Presbyterian Mutual Society, what changes she plans to make to the regulation of mutual societies.(AQO 2578/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** Both credit unions and industrial and provident societies are mutual societies.

The Inquiry by the Assembly's Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment has considered options for the future regulation of credit unions in Northern Ireland. The Committee recently published its report setting out its recommendations. My Department's response endorsed the Committee's preferred option that registration of Northern Ireland credit unions should remain but that credit unions should be regulated by the Financial Services Authority. Regulation of Northern Ireland credit unions by the Financial Services Authority will ensure that the funds of all members are protected by the Financial Services Compensation Scheme.

In addition, HM Treasury is presently conducting a review of all Northern Ireland mutuals, including industrial and provident societies. Among other things, the review will consider the position of Northern Ireland and Great Britain members in respect of the effectiveness of arrangements for depositor protection and the services that may be offered. The outcome of this review will also help inform how best to develop the legislative framework for the future regulation of both the credit unions and industrial and provident societies mutual sectors in Northern Ireland.

When the Treasury review has been completed and I have considered both reports in detail, I plan to bring forward proposals for the future regulation of Northern Ireland's mutuals but Financial Services Authority regulation will be for HM Treasury.



## Economic Downturn

**Mr McLaughlin** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what steps she is taking to maintain growth in the current economic downturn. (AQO 2579/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** My Executive colleagues and I remain committed to providing support for businesses at this time, and the economic downturn continues to be a standing item on the agenda for Executive meetings.

In addition to the £44.5 million package of measures announced by the Executive on 15 December 2008, I established a sub-group of the Economic Development Forum to consider what further action could be taken. The sub-group, which was led by the private sector, made a number of recommendations which are currently under consideration.

More recently, I have established private-sector led sub-groups on exports and manufacturing, with a view to considering what further measures could be taken in these areas specifically.

This is in addition to the support already being provided by Invest NI. As you may be aware, Invest NI has established the Accelerated Support Fund to offer clients targeted assistance. Seminars are also being held for client and non-client companies to provide advice on how businesses can respond to the downturn.

My Department and the Executive will continue to do all that we can to support the economy through this difficult period.

## Growth Areas

**Mr P J Bradley** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment which industries and industry segments are considered by her Department to be future growth areas that can be exploited by local companies. (AQO 2580/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** One of the key priority actions identified within Invest NI's 2008 - 2011 Corporate Plan is to shift Northern Ireland's sectoral focus towards high-value added economic activity.

A number of sectors are specifically identified as having significant growth potential - these include creative industries, life sciences, niche manufacturing, advanced materials, biotechnology and energy and environmental technology.

In terms of foreign direct investment, our efforts are concentrated on key sectors such as software development, ICT and financial services. We can increase Northern Ireland's capacity to compete at a global level for business in these sectors by emphasising both the sophistication of our product, process and procurement, and our research and design capabilities.

Of course, the global recession has meant that attracting such investments has become more difficult. In response to this, we are marketing Northern Ireland as a cost competitive location, emphasising key selling points such as our highly educated workforce, competitive operating costs, advanced telecoms infrastructure and excellent university / business linkages.

A key aspect of the work of MATRIX, the Northern Ireland Science Industry Panel, has been to identify a number of global market opportunities where Northern Ireland companies have potential to achieve significant market share in the next two, five and ten years. These markets are "Clean and Green", "Safe and Secure", "Joined-up and Connected" and "health".

Specific niche opportunities were also identified across five sectors: Advanced Engineering, Information Technology, Life and Health Sciences, Advanced Materials and Agri-Food.

In terms of our indigenous business base, Invest NI's focus will continue to be on developing our locally owned companies into world leaders within the niche markets in which they operate. A number of our home-grown companies, such as Almac and Randox for example, have shown how to exploit their niche strengths to achieve significant global success.

Invest NI will continue to assist its local clients to improve their global competitiveness and, with a continued focus on capability and innovation development, we will ensure that our companies can successfully compete at a global level well into the next decade.

## InterTradeIreland

**Mr Doherty** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the priorities of Inter-Trade Ireland. (AQO 2581/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** InterTradeIreland's Vision is of a globally competitive enterprise environment in which Northern Ireland and Ireland co-operate to ensure the optimal utilisation of economic resources; particularly knowledge resources, to drive additional trade and wealth creation.

InterTradeIreland's Mission is to enhance the global competitiveness of the economy of both jurisdictions for mutual benefit; through co-operative business, policy and research programmes; partnerships and networks.

InterTradeIreland's strategic objectives, as stated in the Body's 2008 – 2010 Corporate Plan, are to:

- generate business value, by enhancing company competitiveness and capability through co-operative North/South initiatives; and
- to improve the competitive environment on the island, for mutual benefit, through co-operative policy research, reports and networks.

At present the Body's stated priority area is Science, Technology and Innovation, which aligns with the enterprise priorities of both Northern Ireland and Ireland.

It is clear that InterTradeIreland's priorities and activities link to and complement the Programme for Government's key strategic priority to 'grow a dynamic, innovative economy'.

## Economic Development

**Mr Brady** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the contribution made by local enterprise companies to economic development. (AQO 2582/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** Local Enterprise Agencies in Northern Ireland operate collectively as Enterprise Northern Ireland. At a local level, they operate on an individual basis with local stakeholders. Our local LEAs make a valuable contribution to economic development.

In terms of their current contribution, the 32 agency companies provide 2 million square feet of workspace at 42 locations across Northern Ireland and are managed by voluntary boards comprising over 300 local directors. The LEAs are, therefore, an important property resource and source of advice and information to local businesses.

For a number of years the LEAs have delivered the Start a Business Programme on behalf of Invest NI. In the 2008/09 year which has just ended, the Start a Business Programme, now replaced by Go for It, had 6,061 participants leading to 2,323 new business starts; which it is anticipated will generate up to 3,500 jobs. This clearly illustrates the significance of the network to local economic development.

I recently announced that Enterprise NI has been awarded the contract to deliver the Enterprise Development programme for Invest NI which includes the "Go for It" and "Growth" programmes. This will be the first time that one programme will provide an integrated range of guidance, signposting, training, mentoring and business clinics aimed at attracting more people into the entrepreneurial pipeline and accelerating their progression along it. The focus will be on building the skills and capabilities of the entrepreneur and in ensuring that those businesses capable of making a significant economic impact receive appropriate support.

In recognition of their importance, I have asked DETI and Invest NI, with Enterprise NI, to commission an independent review to identify how the agencies can maximise their contributions. This is particularly important given the current economic situation and in the context of the future implementation of the recommendations of the review of public administration.

## Economic Downturn

**Mr Lunn** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline her strategy on sectors to target in light of the global economic downturn. (AQO 2583/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** One of the key priority actions identified within Invest NI's 2008 - 2011 Corporate Plan is to shift Northern Ireland's sectoral focus towards high-value added economic activity.

A number of sectors are specifically identified as having significant growth potential - these include creative industries, life sciences, niche manufacturing, advanced materials, biotechnology and energy and environmental technology.

In terms of foreign direct investment, our efforts are concentrated on key sectors such as software development, ICT and financial services. We can increase Northern Ireland's capacity to compete at a global level for business in these sectors by emphasising both the sophistication of our product, process and procurement, and our research and design capabilities.

Of course, the global recession has meant that attracting such investments has become more difficult. In response to this, we are marketing Northern Ireland as a cost competitive location, emphasising key selling points such as our highly educated workforce, competitive operating costs, advanced telecoms infrastructure and excellent university / business linkages.

A key aspect of the work of MATRIX, the Northern Ireland Science Industry Panel, has been to identify a number of global market opportunities where Northern Ireland companies have potential to achieve significant market share in the next two, five and ten years. These markets are "Clean and Green", "Safe and Secure", "Joined-up and Connected" and "health".

Specific niche opportunities were also identified across five sectors: Advanced Engineering, Information Technology, Life and Health Sciences, Advanced Materials and Agri-Food.

In terms of our indigenous business base, Invest NI's focus will continue to be on developing our locally owned companies into world leaders within the niche markets in which they operate. A number of our home-grown companies, such as Almac and Randox for example, have shown how to exploit their niche strengths to achieve significant global success.

Invest NI will continue to assist its local clients to improve their global competitiveness and, with a continued focus on capability and innovation development, we will ensure that our companies can successfully compete at a global level well into the next decade.

### Investment Opportunities

**Mrs O'Neill** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans she has to create investment opportunities in areas of social need. (AQO 2584/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** The Executive is fully committed to tackling the issue of disadvantage in Northern Ireland, with my Department contributing to the delivery of Programme for Government targets that seek to encourage investment and employment opportunities in areas of economic and social need.

Within its 2008 - 2011 Corporate Plan, Invest NI is committed to ensuring that 70% of the new Foreign Direct Investment projects it secures are located within 10 miles of an area of economic and social disadvantage. In the longer term, the agency will also ensure that 75 percent of its future land bank acquisition is within these areas. Delivery of these targets will help address some of the barriers to employment that exist and allow residents of these areas to exploit the extensive opportunities that will be created.

My Department also leads on the development of the social economy in Northern Ireland. Social enterprises have the potential to bring significant positive impacts, particularly to disadvantaged groups and areas, and I will issue the Executive's updated Social Economy Strategy for public consultation shortly with the aim of having it agreed and published in the autumn.

### Cross-Border Trade

**Mr Simpson** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what assessment she has made of the numbers of people crossing the border to shop in Northern Ireland and the benefits that this brings to traders. (AQO 2585/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** Information on the total annual value of trade coming into Northern Ireland as a result of shopping by visitors from the Republic of Ireland is not collected via any official survey and therefore relevant figures are not available.

We do, however, continue to promote Northern Ireland as a key shopping destination. The Northern Ireland Tourist Board had a calendar of activity during 2008 that ensured exposure for Northern Ireland in the Republic of Ireland throughout the whole year. To this end, initial NITB estimates show that overnight visitor numbers from the Republic of Ireland to Northern Ireland increased by 14% to 366,000 in 2008. Marketing activity in 2009 will be equally intense.

NITB launched an extensive spring campaign at the beginning of February 2009 in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The campaign features two new TV adverts as well as press advertising, outdoor, on-line and PR, and will continue the development of the new creative designs. There are also plans to promote Northern Ireland to Republic of Ireland residents who are already coming to Northern Ireland for the day to shop, to encourage them to extend their stay and take a short break. Exploiting the euro / sterling rate will be a key priority.

NITB is developing plans for a summer Gateway campaign and an autumn campaign to ensure consistent exposure for the Northern Ireland product in the Republic of Ireland.

## DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT

### Working Group on PPS 21

**Mr McGlone** asked the Minister of the Environment how the independent working group on PPS 21 is to engage with the community and receive feedback from individuals and groups affected by the policy.

(AQW 7011/09)

**Minister of the Environment (Mr S Wilson):** The independent working group was set up to fulfil the terms of reference which were agreed for it by the Executive Committee.

These terms of reference require it to (among other things) take account of views raised by consultees following publication of the emerging findings document and the publication of draft PPS 21.

The independent working group is not required by its terms of reference to engage with the community or receive feedback.

### Domestic Noise Pollution

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of the Environment if a review is being considered on the law on domestic noise pollution.

(AQW 7086/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** Noise nuisance is one of a number of local environmental quality issues my officials have considered under the clean neighbourhoods agenda remit which aims to bring forward stronger and more effective legislation and guidance to help district councils to improve the environmental quality of our local neighbourhoods and public spaces throughout Northern Ireland.

The timescale for progressing the clean neighbourhoods agenda is, however, subject to competing priorities and resource constraints facing my Department. I am also conscious of the impact on councils of the review of public administration and our intention to implement the agreed structural reform package by 2011. In the circumstances I have decided to defer any further consideration of the clean neighbourhoods agenda and associated new primary legislation until 2011 by which time the structural reform package should be implemented and to allow my officials, in the meantime, to concentrate on higher priority environmental issues.

### Domestic Noise Pollution

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of the Environment how many prosecutions there have been for domestic noise pollution, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 7088/09)



**Minister of the Environment:** The Department of the Environment records the number of noise complaints received, and the legal action initiated, by each of the district councils. This information is published annually by way of the noise complaint statistics for Northern Ireland reports.

The table below shows the total number of complaints and prosecutions in each of the last five years for all 26 district councils.

Period (1 April – 31 March)	Total no of complaints	Total no of prosecutions
2007/2008	11705	9
2006/2007	11923	8
2005/2006	11337	8
2004/2005	10047	17
2003/2004	8397	7

## DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

### Civil Service

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what is the level of absenteeism in the Civil Service; and what measures are being taken to reduce it. (AQW 6799/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr N Dodds):** The level of absenteeism in each Department is set out in the attached table.. This reflects the outturn figures for the 2007/2008 financial year and the target rate for 2008/2009. The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) is currently working to analyse and validate the data for the 2008/2009 financial year as part of the preparation of its annual report, which is due in September.

Over recent months my officials have been working with Departments on the implementation of the various recommendations contained in the Northern Ireland Audit Office report on Sickness Absence in the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) and the subsequent report published by the Public Accounts Committee.

A senior level sub-group has been set up, under the chairmanship of the NICS Director of Personnel, to oversee and to drive forward the implementation of the various recommendations. Many of the recommendations will be for Departments and Agencies to implement, building on the work already underway. My Department will lead on policy work and any procedural changes that may be required.

The NICS plans to undertake a service-wide stress survey in May 2009, which will be based on the Health and Safety Executive's Stress Management Standards. A report is expected around September/October 2009. It is hoped that the survey will help to shape and inform future policy considerations in this area and will also identify problem areas where specific actions can be developed.

TABLE 1: WORKING DAYS LOST

Department	Average Number of Working Days Lost: 2007/2008	Target end of year rate - 2008/2009
DARD	10.9	8.5
DCAL	11.4	10.4
DE	11.8	8.5
DETI	7.4	8.5
DFP	11.5	9.3
DEL	13.7	11.5
DHSSPS	10.2	8.5

Department	Average Number of Working Days Lost: 2007/2008	Target end of year rate - 2008/2009
DOE	11.0	9.1
DRD	9.0	8.5
DSD	16.9	12.5
OFMDFM	9.7	8.5
NI Departments overall	12.9	10.2

### Civil Service

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to his answer to AQW 3190/09, if he will provide an update on the (i) location; and (ii) number of vacancies in the Northern Ireland Civil Service for the positions of (a) Administrative Officer; (b) Executive Officer II; (c) Executive Officer I; and (d) Staff Officer in each government department. (AQW 6945/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel:** The location and number of vacancies in permanent posts in each Northern Ireland Civil Service department at the grades of (a) Administrative Officer; (b) Executive Officer 2; (c) Executive Officer 1; and (d) Staff Officer are set out in the attached table.

**VACANCIES (FULL TIME EQUIVALENT BASIS) IN THE 11 NI DEPARTMENTS AND THEIR AGENCIES IN GRADES: AO; EO2; EO1; SO, AT 3 APRIL 2009**

Department	AO		EO2		EO1		SO	
	Number	Location (posts)	Number	Location (posts)	Number	Location (posts)	Number	Location (posts)
Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD)	3	Belfast	3	Belfast	5	Belfast	2	Belfast(1), Armagh(1)
Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL)	3	Belfast	0		0		2	Belfast
Education (DE)	1	Bangor	0		2	Bangor	0	
Employment and Learning (DEL) <sup>1</sup>	20	Belfast(6), Antrim(4), Armagh(1), Carrickfergus(1), Foyle(1), Larne(1), Limavady(2), Newcastle/Newry(1), Newry(3)	21	Belfast(10), Antrim(2), Armagh(1), Banbridge(1), Carrickfergus(2), Dungannon(1), Larne(1), Newry(3)	28.5	Belfast(28), Limavady(0.5)	9	Belfast(8), Carrickfergus(1)
Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI)	7	Belfast	1	Belfast	7.7	Belfast(6.7), Omagh(1)	1	Belfast
Finance and Personnel (DFP) <sup>2</sup>	32	Belfast(30), Craigavon(1), Londonderry(1)	15	Belfast	21	Belfast	24	Belfast(16), Bangor(6), Lisburn(1), Londonderry(1)
Health, Social Services & Public Safety (DHSSPS)	0		5	Belfast	3	Belfast	2	Belfast

Department	AO		EO2		EO1		SO	
	Number	Location (posts)	Number	Location (posts)	Number	Location (posts)	Number	Location (posts)
Environment (DOE)	13	Belfast(1.5), Coleraine(9), Downpatrick(1.5), Enniskillen(1)	6	Belfast(5), Coleraine(1)	20	Belfast(16), Coleraine(3), Londonderry(1)	12	Belfast(8), Armagh(1), Ballymena(1), Coleraine(2)
Regional Development (DRD)	20	Belfast(1), Ballymena(6), Coleraine(2), Craigavon(3), Downpatrick(4), Enniskillen(1), Omagh(2), Newry(1)	16	Belfast(9), Ballymena(5), Coleraine(1), Downpatrick(1)	12	Belfast(10), Antrim(1), Ballymena(1)	12	Belfast(8), Ballymena(3), Craigavon(1)
Social Development <sup>3</sup> (DSD)	66.9	Belfast(56.6), Ballymoney(2), Banbridge(0.7), Limavady(1), Magherafelt(1), Newtownabbey(1), Portadown(4.6)	74.3	Belfast(61.8), Bangor(0.9), Downpatrick(1.5), Limavady(1), Londonderry(6.5), Newcastle(1.1), Newtownards(0.5), Portadown(1)	48.2	Belfast(38), Armagh(0.7), Coleraine(2), Cookstown(1), Downpatrick(0.2), Dungannon(0.6), Enniskillen(1), Londonderry(3), Newry(1.7)	29.6	Belfast(28.4), Londonderry(0.2), Newtownards(1)
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM)	4	Belfast	3	Belfast	4	Belfast	2	Belfast(1) Armagh(1)
<b>Total</b>	<b>169.9</b>		<b>144.3</b>		<b>151.4</b>		<b>95.6</b>	

<sup>1</sup> DEL: Figures provided are at 6 April 2009

<sup>2</sup> DFP: Figures provided are at 1 April 2009

<sup>3</sup> DSD: Figures provided are at 3 April 2009 except: Child Maintenance and Enforcement Division, latest figures available at 20 March 2009.

## Industrial Rates

**Mr Hamilton** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much revenue is lost annually by capping industrial rates at 30%. (AQW 7024/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel:** If industrial derating is completely removed from the manufacturing sector, then the annual revenue that would be raised is estimated to be £66m (at the current level of the regional rate). Capping at 30% therefore represents an annual revenue loss of about £46m.

These figures represent a loss to the Assembly because district councils are fully compensated for the revenue forgone through the derating element of the general grant.

Furthermore, these figures represent maximum amounts because it is not unreasonable to assume that the imposition of full rates on some manufacturing firms, particularly during this economic downturn, would have threatened their future viability.

## EU Funding Available to NGOs

**Mr B Wilson** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what mechanisms are in place in the (i) EU unit; and (ii) Anti-Poverty Unit for providing details of EU funding available to NGO's. (AQW 7084/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel:** Each of Northern Ireland's four European Structural Fund Programmes has a designated Managing Authority that is responsible for, among other things, providing advice and information of the available funding opportunities, including to NGOs.

Programme Managing Authorities are detailed in the attached table.

Programme	Managing Authority
European Sustainable Competitiveness Programme	Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI)
European Social Fund Programme	Department for Employment and Learning (DEL)
PEACE III Programme	Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB)
INTERREG IVA Cross-Border Co-operation Programme	Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB)

**Note:**

It is a requirement that Managing Authorities publish details of all projects supported by the EU Programmes.

## Civil Service

**Mr McQuillan** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if he can give assurances that there will be a final settlement on the Civil Service pay dispute, following three months postponement due to the review of the TG1 and TG11 grades. (AQW 7127/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel:** There is no three month postponement to the process of resolving the NICS equal pay issue. I have instructed my officials to work intensively with the trade union to establish as clearly as possible the parameters within which a negotiated settlement might be possible on this issue. The review of TGI and TGII grades will be an important part of that framework and with the cooperation of both the union and staff it is intended to complete this as quickly as possible. It remains my aim to resolve this issue without the need for litigation, the process for which has already been initiated by the union.

## Review of Public Sector Posts

**Mr K Robinson** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what steps he is taking or plans to take, as a result of the Review of Public Sector posts, to ensure that East Antrim receives a share of jobs that will address its position at the bottom of all constituencies. (AQW 7215/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel:** I have recently circulated a paper to Executive Ministers containing proposals on the matter of location of public sector jobs, which I hope will be scheduled shortly for discussion at an Executive meeting. Any decisions on the way forward will be a matter for the Executive.

## Reform and Reinvestment Initiative

**Mr McNarry** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if the Executive has utilised the borrowing powers that existed under the Reform and Reinvestment Initiative. (AQW 7286/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel:** I can confirm that the borrowing power under the Reinvestment and Reform Initiative has been utilised by the Executive since the restoration of devolution in May 2007.

## DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

### New Hospital in Omagh

**Mr Buchanan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when the tender process for the new local enhanced hospital in Omagh will be complete; and when works are due to commence. (AQW 6521/09)



**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr M McGimpsey):** The procurement of the new enhanced hospital in Omagh has been paused to facilitate a review of the business case, including the procurement method. As a consequence of the current uncertainties in financial markets, I consider it appropriate to review whether PFI remains the most appropriate option for this project in terms of affordability and value for money. Once this review has been completed, I will be better placed to advise on the timing of completion of the tender process and commencement of works.

### Assessment by External Service Providers

**Ms Anderson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many Health Service patients that were assessed by external service providers, within the past two years, required subsequent treatment; and how many received it. (AQW 7028/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** Information on the number of Health Service patients that were assessed by external service providers, within the past two years, and that required or received subsequent treatment is not available.

### Foyle Health and Social Services Trust

**Ms Anderson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail what measures have been put in place in the Foyle Health and Social Services Trust area since 2007 to ensure that suitable care packages are available for all patients seen by external contractors. (AQW 7030/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The Western Health and Social Care Trust, which subsumed the Foyle Health and Social Services Trust in April 2007, has advised that a number of measures are in place to ensure that all service users whose care is delivered by an independent sector provider, receive high quality care packages which meet each service user's need. These measures include;

- Legally binding contracts with independent providers which include a detailed service delivery specification. This places a requirement on providers to:
  - Continuously monitor the service they have been commissioned to deliver;
  - Report immediately any change in the clients condition or circumstances;
  - Report any occasion where care is not delivered and the reason for it;
  - Routinely conduct service user satisfaction surveys and visits as a quality assurance requirement.
- In addition, all aspects of the contract specification are also monitored by the Trust in a number of ways, including a formal review of each service user's care plan, the monitoring of all agency providers by the Trust contracts monitoring officer and the monitoring of complaint and incidents received by each provider agency.

### Royal Victoria Hospital

**Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to his answer to AQW 6760/09, to supply the follow up audit to the 25 November 2008 hygiene reports for Theatre 1, including the comment sheet. (AQW 7061/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** This information is not collected centrally.

### Royal Victoria Hospital

**Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to his answer to AQW 6759/09, to supply the weekly hygiene reports for Theatre 1 Royal Victoria Hospital from 8 December 2008 to 20 April 2009. (AQW 7062/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** This information is not collected centrally.

### Royal Victoria Hospital

**Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to his answer to AQW 6760/09, when he will supply hygiene reports for January and February 2009 for ward 4F of the Royal Victoria Hospital. (AQW 7063/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** This information is not collected centrally.

### Family Support Workers

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to his answer to AQW 6459/09, (i) to clarify his use of the term 'deployment'; and (ii) if additional duties will be required from family support workers on top of their existing responsibilities. (AQW 7077/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:**

- (i) By 'deployment', the Trust is referring to the realignment of the workers across the Southern Trust Family Support Social Work Teams. This process is progressing in full consultation and engagement with the staff in question, the Personnel department and staff side representatives.
- (ii) There are no plans for additional duties to be required from the family support workers.

### Emergency Referrals

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many emergency referrals outside normal working hours, have been handled by social workers in the Armagh and Dungannon area, in each of the last three years, broken down by area. (AQW 7079/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The information requested is not collected centrally, and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

### Armagh Hospitals

**Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he will visit (i) Mullinure; (ii) Longstone; and (iii) St Luke's Hospitals, Armagh, as a matter of priority. (AQW 7143/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** I visited Longstone Hospital on 11 March this year and hope to visit the other hospitals in the future.

I am aware of the concerns of Members from the Armagh area about the Southern Trust's proposals for these hospitals and had planned to meet them on 27 April. Unfortunately due to unforeseen circumstances that meeting had to be cancelled. I hope to meet with these Members in the future to discuss their concerns.

### Childhood Diabetes

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to his answer to AQW 5968/09, to confirm if officials in his Department are unaware of the findings published from 1989 onwards in relation to childhood diabetes, given that this information has since been provided to me through Queens University. (AQW 7176/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** A multitude of data and research exist, external to my Department, of varying quality and completeness. In this particular instance, my officials had only just been made aware of the diabetes register maintained by Queen's University but, given that it is voluntary in nature, had no information at the time as to its coverage or reliability. This was only received subsequent to my responding to your question, and showed that the register was up-to-date and had been subject to a validation exercise up until 2003. Whilst I would not be in a position to directly guarantee the quality of the data derived from this source, I am content to highlight it in response to future similar questions.

### The Woodland Trust

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans his Department has to work with The Woodland Trust to create woodland and green open space areas on hospital sites to help with the mental and physical well-being of patients. (AQW 7234/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** My Department has recently commissioned the development of guidance to help Health and Social Care organisations establish the range and remit for organisations such as the Woodland Trust and other voluntary organisations to become involved in protecting and enhancing the biodiversity of the HSC Estate as an integral part of enhancing the wellbeing of patients.

## DEPARTMENT FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### M5 Safety Barrier at Greencastle

**Mr K Robinson** asked the Minister for Regional Development to explain the purpose (i) of the safety barrier on the country bound lane of the M5 at Greencastle to Gideon's Green; and; (ii) of the two short sections of safety barrier between Gideon's Green and the end of the M5 at Hazelbank. (AQW 7051/09)

**Minister for Regional Development (Mr C Murphy):** Firstly, I should explain that the primary aim of a safety barrier is to protect vehicle occupants from potential collision with hazards adjacent to the carriageway. In addition to this, it also protects members of the public from the possible consequences of a vehicle leaving the carriageway.

My Department's Roads Service has advised that in relation to the safety barrier on the country bound section of the M5 at Greencastle to Gideons Green, there are in effect two sections of road restraint system. The first short section of safety barrier protects vehicle occupants from a motorway telecommunications cabinet. The second, longer section, serves a number of purposes. The majority of the second section protects vehicle occupants from a water hazard adjacent to the motorway, while the remainder of the second section, protects vehicle occupants from motorway telecommunications cabinets and an electronic message sign.

With regard to the two short sections of safety barrier, between Gideon's Green and Hazelbank, on the country-bound section of the M5, I am advised that the first section protects vehicle occupants from a parapet at a subway under the motorway, while the second section protects vehicle occupants from both a parapet, at a second subway, and motorway telecommunications cabinets.

### Removal of Emblems

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to the answer to AQW 6780/09, what assessment he has made of whether the Police Service of Northern Ireland is the appropriate body to remove sectarian symbols from lamp standards, which depict groups responsible for attacks on security forces. (AQW 7073/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** In my previous answer to the Member I explained that my Department's Roads Service has signed up to the Joint Protocol on the Display of Flags in Public Areas. Until that protocol is reviewed, it is the responsibility of all the partner organisations to fulfil their designated responsibilities.

Within the protocol a key responsibility of the PSNI is to support partners and where best placed, to take forward consultation and negotiation with local community representatives where the display of flags is an issue.

Roads Service's key responsibility, when called upon by a lead Agency, is to provide support facilities, such as Mobile Extendable Working Platforms, where there has been agreement with the local community representatives to remove flags.

### Removal of Emblems

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister for Regional Development to confirm if staff within his Department have refused to remove sectarian emblems from lamp standards. (AQW 7075/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** Under the terms of the Joint Protocol on the Display of Flags in Public Areas, my Department's Roads Service is responsible for providing support facilities to the lead Agency in the removal of any flags that has been agreed with the local community.

The Joint Protocol states that, "Whichever agency is placed in the most effective position to consult, negotiate or resolve situations, will take the lead and will be supported by the other partners within their remit and specialism. Where the display is one that is causing community tension or is affecting the quality of life for a community, then the police will take the lead".

I am advised that there have been no incidents of Roads Service staff declining requests for the provision of such support.

### Speed Limits Outside Schools

**Mrs Long** asked the Minister for Regional Development if he would consider introducing 20 mph speed limits outside all schools. (AQW 7076/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** As the Member is already aware two schools were selected for trials of 20mph variable speed limits. These were:

- Kilmoyle Primary School, Benvardin Road, Ballymoney; and
- Hazlett Primary School, Downhill Road, Articlave, Castlerock.

The schemes became operative on Monday 1 September 2008, and my Department's Roads Service will continue to monitor and assess these schemes over the full school year, to determine their effectiveness in reducing traffic speeds and other dangers. After this period, consideration will be given to introducing a more widespread programme.

However, I should explain that the part-time 20mph pilot schemes are expensive to install and maintain. It would therefore be inappropriate to roll out further schemes until the costs and benefits have been properly established and compared with those of other measures, that Roads Service is already using, to address sites with known safety problems.

It should be noted that Roads Service has already invested considerable efforts by installing engineering measures, including prominent signing and road markings, to warn approaching drivers about the presence of vulnerable road users, such as children, around schools. In relation to this issue, Roads Service will continue to seek ways to reduce the dangers to children on their journey to and from schools.

### Road Safety

**Mrs I Robinson** asked the Minister for Regional Development if he will (i) review road safety in the vicinity of the pedestrian crossing in the centre of Killyleagh; and (ii) take whatever measures are necessary to maximise safety. (AQW 7099/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** My Department's Roads Service is aware of concerns expressed by members of the public in using the zebra crossing in Killyleagh.

Although advance warning signs and high friction surfacing have been installed to highlight driver's awareness of the crossing, it would appear that public fears persist.

There may be a problem with the correct use of the crossing by pedestrians, in that they should stand at the crossing to show intent to cross, and wait for vehicles to stop before proceeding.

However, I have asked Roads Service to take your concerns on board and for the crossing to be monitored to determine if any other problems are present.



### Half Fare Smart Pass

**Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of whether charging a Translink Half Fare SmartPass holder the cost of a return ticket which is the value of two single tickets (i) equates with the normal practice of a return fare sold at a discounted price; (ii) infringes Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 by distinguishing between passengers paying the full and half price fare to the financial detriment of the Translink Half Fare SmartPass holder; and (iii) is compatible with creating equality for people with disabilities. (AQW 7111/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** In facilitating the purchase of return tickets the Department has made a reasonable adjustment to assist people with disabilities. However, the concessionary fares scheme has been set up and is operated and audited on the basis that it is the full single fare that is being discounted. As regards the equality aspects of your question, I would refer you to my reply to you of 7 April 2009 (AQW 6848/09 refers).

### Gortcorbies Climbing Lane Project

**Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister for Regional Development what consideration has been given to utilising the disused quarry, adjacent to the A37 Limavady to Coleraine Road, as a site for disposal of spoil from the planned Gortcorbies climbing lane project. (AQW 7112/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** My Department's Roads Service has examined three opportunities to dispose of surplus material from the proposed Gortcorbies Climbing Lane on the Coleraine to Derry A37 road:

- in the disused gravel pit at the top of Keady mountain;
- in the quarry at Keady Road; and
- on farmland at Drumalief Road.

I can advise that an environmental assessment of the disused gravel pit at Keady mountain records that it has regressed to an 'area of higher quality habitat' with several ponds inhabited by newts. This excludes the gravel pit as a location for surplus material.

As regards the second option, early contact with the quarry owner indicated that he would be content to allow disposal of some surplus material in the quarry on two conditions: (i) the price was acceptable; and (ii) that it did not compromise future mineral extraction, as the quarry at Keady Road has extant planning permission for mineral extraction. This opportunity remains, subject to cost.

I can also advise that discussions have taken place with a landowner with a view to improving some 15 acres of land at Drumalief Road. Whilst this could have accommodated the estimated 100,000m<sup>3</sup> of surplus material, subsequent legislation has since been introduced which prohibits the disposal or placing of inert material on 'greenfield' land.

As I advised in my reply to your recent question (AQW 6575/09), environmental and design assessments will assist with the selection of a cost effective scheme, which best fits the topography and the environment. A vital part of this assessment process will be the appropriate disposal of the surplus material from construction of the scheme.

However, the situation remains that some, or all, of the surplus material may have to be disposed of in licensed tips, remote from the Binevenagh Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and this would add considerably to construction costs.

### Speed Limits

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Regional Development what contact there has been with Westminster about proposals to reduce some speed limits in England to 20 mph. (AQW 7119/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** I can advise the Member that there has been no direct contact with Westminster on proposals to reduce some speed limits in England to 20 mph. However, my Department's Roads Service is aware of the recently published Department for Transport's consultation document entitled, "A Safer Way: Consultation on Making Britain's Roads the Safest in the World." This document sets out proposals, for targets and measures, for improving road safety in Britain for the period beyond 2010.

The recent public consultation completed by Roads Service, on the setting of speed limits in the North, contains guidance, including specific proposals, on the situations where the 30mph speed limit in urban areas may be altered to introduce a 20 mph limits or zones, for example, where there are particular risks to vulnerable road users.

### Resurfacing Footpaths in Mid-Ulster

**Mr I McCrea** asked the Minister for Regional Development how much funding has been allocated for (i) repairing; and (ii) resurfacing footpaths in Mid Ulster. (AQW 7126/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** My Department's Roads Service does not record expenditure on a constituency basis. I should explain that Roads Service's budget is allocated to its four Divisions on the basis of need, using a range of weighted indicators, tailored to each maintenance activity. Divisions use these indicators when apportioning across council areas to ensure, as far as possible, an equitable distribution of funds.

The combined areas of Magherafelt and Cookstown Districts represent approximately 80% of Mid Ulster and the total expenditure on the items in those Districts in 2008/09 was: (i) £112k, and (ii) £92k. (The combined total of £204k represents 7.6% of the Structural Maintenance expenditure in the two areas.)

### Traffic Management Survey

**Miss McIlveen** asked the Minister for Regional Development when the traffic management survey in Comber will (i) commence; and (ii) be completed. (AQW 7128/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** The traffic management survey for Comber commenced in January 2009, and a preliminary report should be available by the end of May 2009.

### Pot Holes

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Regional Development what measures his Department is taking to fix pot holes in and around the Beechfield and Ashfield Estates, Donaghadee. (AQW 7154/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** My Department's Road Service has advised that the carriageway and footways in the Beechfield and Ashfield estates, in Donaghadee, are inspected every four months in accordance with its Road Maintenance Standards. The most recent inspection, on 8 April 2009, identified some actionable defects in the Ashfield estate. I understand that some of the defects have already been repaired, while the others are awaiting repair within the target response time.

With regard to Beechfield estate, there were no actionable defects identified during the last inspection.

### Chevron Markings

**Mr K Robinson** asked the Minister for Regional Development if Roads Service intends to introduce experimental chevron markings on the motorway network to assist drivers to maintain the two second rule recommended in the Highway Code. (AQW 7200/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** I am advised that initial research on the motorway network in Britain has shown that separation chevrons and associated signs have been effective at reducing the number of shunt, and loss of control collisions, and that they continue to influence driver behaviour for several miles beyond the zones. Further research is now underway to increase the evidence base and to look at other methods, such as interactive variable message signs, for reducing the risks on densely trafficked roads.

My Department's Roads Service is fully aware of these measures and is awaiting the outcome of the above studies, before deciding whether to proceed with such a system here. There are concerns that the road markings themselves can be a distraction, as drivers may focus more of their attention on trying to maintain a safe distance, rather than looking out for dangers ahead. As the chevrons are set for a car travelling at 70 mph in ideal conditions, Roads Service also has reservations that drivers may think that they would be maintaining a safe distance, regardless of their speed and local weather conditions.

A review of the Northern Ireland Road Safety Strategy is currently underway and it will give consideration to this, and other initiatives and suggestions put forward to further reduce the level of road casualties here.

## DEPARTMENT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

### Warm Homes Scheme

**Mr Craig** asked the Minister for Social Development how many homes are waiting for Warm Home Scheme grants in (i) Lisburn; and (ii) Dromore. (AQW 7136/09)

**Minister for Social Development (Ms M Ritchie):** In Lisburn (Postcode areas BT27 and BT28) there are 116 applications to the Warm Homes Scheme waiting for assistance with measures to improve the energy efficiency of their homes.

In Dromore (Postcode area BT25) there are 37 applications to the Warm Homes Scheme waiting for assistance with measures to improve the energy efficiency of their homes.

### Warm Homes Scheme

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of homes waiting for Warm Homes Scheme grants in North Down. (AQW 7180/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** In the North Down Council area there are 140 applications to the Warm Homes Scheme waiting to be surveyed and 22 applications which have been surveyed and are waiting for measures to improve the energy efficiency of their homes to be installed.

### Registered Carers

**Miss McIlveen** asked the Minister for Social Development how many registered carers are over 60 years of age. (AQW 7188/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The information requested is not available as my Department does not hold a list of registered carers.

### Housing Executive

**Mr Irwin** asked the Minister for Social Development to confirm if land owned by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in the Latt Crescent area, off the main Newry/Armagh Road, have been sold, or are in the process of, being sold for development. (AQW 7228/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The Housing Executive owns land at Armagh Road adjacent to Latt Crescent. This site is currently on the market for sale with an offer from an interested party to develop it and negotiations are ongoing.

## NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY COMMISSION

### Events on the Stormont Estate

**Mr Savage** asked the Assembly Commission if it has received any requests for events to take place on the grounds of Stormont Estate between April and September 2009. (AQW 5742/09)

**The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr S Neeson):** The grounds of Stormont Estate are under the control of the Department of Finance and Personnel. The Assembly Commission is aware that the Department of Finance and Personnel intends to hold a “Family Fun Day” in the grounds of Stormont Estate on Monday 25th May 2009. To facilitate this event, Parliament Buildings will be open to Members of the public for tours and refreshments.

### Accommodation Audit

**Mr Attwood** asked the Assembly Commission whether the staff who conducted the accommodation audit were Assembly staff or if their services were acquired from another agency; and to confirm the staff costs involved in the conduct of the audit. (AQW 6605/09)

**The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr S Neeson):** The strategic accommodation review project is being managed by architects from Central Procurement Directorate of DFP with specialist support from a workplace strategy consultant.

Although no fees have been paid to date, the estimated cost for the professional fees for the project is £40k.

The staff who carried out the space utilisation study are civil servants belonging to Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA).

The estimated cost of this element of the work is £12k which includes the space utilisation study, interviews conducted with building users and the preparation of a report.

The Project Team are expected to present their main findings and recommendations to the Assembly Commission at the end of April 2009 with the final report to follow in mid-May. At that stage the project costs will be finalised.

### Assembly Roadshows

**Mr McKay** asked the Assembly Commission how many people attended each of the Assembly Roadshows. (AQW 7164/09)

**The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr S Moutray):** The total number of people attending was 607. This has been broken down below.

Roadshow	No. of attendees
Parliament Buildings	80
Coleraine	48
Ballymena	36
Newry	30
Enniskillen	36
Armagh	59
Derry/Londonderry	95
Omagh	68
Lisburn	37
Belfast	118



# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 8 May 2009

## Written Answers to Questions

### OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

#### Missing People

**Mr McClarty** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what role the Executive plays in the search for reported missing people. (AQW 6965/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mr P Robinson and Mr McGuinness):** Primary responsibility for searching for missing people lies with the Police Service of Northern Ireland. Executive Departments co-operate in the search for missing people as appropriate.

For example, the Department of Health, Social Service and Public Safety (DHSSPS) has indicated that, where families of a child whose name is listed on the child protection register go missing and local efforts to trace the family have failed, and they are thought to be in Northern Ireland, the Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust where the family was residing is responsible for issuing a missing child alert to the other NI Trusts.

Where the family and child are thought to have gone to England, Scotland, Wales or the Republic of Ireland, DHSSPS is responsible for issuing a “missing child alert” to custodians of the child protection register in these jurisdictions.

All HSC Trusts have a statutory duty and agreed procedures to be followed when any child accommodated in a children’s home is absent without permission. A foster carer must notify the child’s social worker or manager and where appropriate the Out of Hours Service when a child goes absent without permission. HSC Trusts’ procedures around missing children are then implemented.

#### Formal Complaints to Newspapers and Broadcasting Services

**Mr Kennedy** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail all formal complaints it sent to the editor, a journalist, another employee, the proprietor of any newspaper, broadcasting service, or other news outlets in Northern Ireland since May 2007. (AQW 7082/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** It is the duty of the Executive Information Service (EIS) to ensure that the policies of the Northern Ireland Executive are reported in an accurate and fair manner in order to ensure greater public understanding of and access to government services.

In fulfilling this duty EIS, which is part of OFMDFM but operates across all government departments, is in regular contact with the media to discuss the quality and level of coverage afforded. EIS has and will continue to address coverage that it feels is inaccurate or misrepresentative or which it feels is unduly negative or unfair and, where appropriate, to register a complaint on behalf of any Executive Minister.

## Childcare Provision

**Mr Durkan** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) to confirm if the preliminary report on childcare provision to the Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People is complete; and (ii) when it will be considered by the Executive. (AQW 7132/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** A Child Poverty Sub-Group of the Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People is currently considering the issue of childcare provision here. They have completed a Preliminary Report and it was hoped to present this to the Ministerial Sub-Committee at its next meeting. We are planning, subject to Ministerial diaries, to hold this meeting in the next few weeks.

## Climate Change

**Mr McGlone** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what the Executive's assessment is of man's contribution to climate change. (AQW 7306/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** The Executive has, collectively within the Programme for Government, acknowledged climate change as a serious global problem. The contributory factors to this problem have not been assessed within the Executive.

## Climate Change

**Mr McGlone** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail any discussions/decisions in relation to its Department's assessment of man's contribution to climate change. (AQW 7307/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister has no policy remit for climate change and has, therefore, made no assessment of the factors that contribute towards climate change. General discussions in relation to climate change have taken place at official level in the broader context of our department's sustainable development work.

## Climate Change

**Mr McGlone** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister if (i) it; and (ii) the Executive shares the Minister of the Environment's view on man's contribution to climate change. (AQW 7308/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** Policy responsibility for climate change lies with the Department of the Environment and the associated Ministerial opinion in relation to the causes of climate change is on public record.

Our Department, and the Executive, clearly recognise climate change as a serious global problem and this is acknowledged within the Programme for Government. The causes of the problem and, more importantly the identification of solutions, are subject to opinion, debate and discussion at local, national and international level.

We, and the Executive, remain determined to play our part in addressing the challenge of climate change.

## Regional Government

**Mr Kennedy** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what discussions it has had with its counterparts in Scotland and Wales about any efficiencies and savings which might be effected by closer co-operation between the regional administrations and associated QUANGOs in the three regions. (AQO 2590/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** We have an extensive range of ongoing contacts with our counterparts in Scotland and Wales. These are both at official and at Ministerial level, on a formal and informal basis, and are aimed at improving co-operation and identifying synergies on issues of mutual interest, including any efficiencies and savings that might be achieved from closer co-operation. For example, we met the Prime Minister and the Heads of the Devolved Administrations on 25 February 2009 and agreed that all regions should consider and share instances of good practice and ideas which had been developed to effectively address problems emerging from the economic downturn.

Furthermore, a review of North South implementation bodies is being taken forward. In addition, we recently announced our intention to bring to the Assembly proposals for the creation of an Efficiency Review Panel.

### Joint Ministerial Council

**Mr Cree** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what discussions it has had with the Cabinet Office in relation to a future meeting of the Joint Ministerial Council. (AQO 2591/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** The purpose of the Joint Ministerial Committee is to provide central co-ordination of the overall relationship between the administrations.

Officials in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister have been in ongoing discussions with Cabinet Office colleagues and their counterparts in the Scottish and Welsh administrations about the work of the JMC.

The JMC meets in a number of formats including:

- plenary meetings chaired by the British Prime Minister or his representative and attended by the heads of the Devolved Administrations;
- JMC (Europe) meetings chaired by the Foreign Secretary and at which Ministers from the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations consider European matters which impinge on devolved responsibilities; and
- more recently JMC (Domestic) meetings which provide a forum for discussion on a range of domestic issues in which the devolved administrations have an interest.

Future JMC meetings have been proposed for May in Domestic format and June Europe format and a meeting in plenary format before the summer.

### Executive Subcommittees

**Rev Dr Robert Coulter** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister which Executive subcommittees are operational, what issues they are addressing and when they expect to report. (AQO 2593/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** The Executive may from time to time establish subcommittees to examine particular areas of work. The role and remit of these subcommittees will vary in accordance with whether, for example, they are established to exercise a continuing oversight role or to prepare reports on specific issues within a given time frame.

At present, 3 subcommittees are in operation for the following matters:

- Poverty and Social Exclusion
- Review of the Regional Development Strategy; and
- Review of Water and Sewerage Services

The subcommittee on poverty and social exclusion is chaired by us as First Minister and deputy First Minister. It exercises an ongoing developmental role in relation to this issue across all government Departments and is working specifically to achieve the four lifecycle goals outlined in “Lifetime Opportunities.” The subcommittee will report to the Executive at appropriate stages of its work.

The Executive sub-group for the review of the regional development strategy, chaired by the Minister for Regional Development, was established to oversee the 10-year review of the regional development strategy and will report back to the Executive before 2011.

The Minister for Regional Development also chairs the Executive subcommittee on the water and sewerage services review, which was established to review the arrangements for financing water and sewerage services.

The Member will be aware that the Minister for Regional Development has recently submitted proposals to the Executive on this matter.

## OFMDFM: Media

**Mr Neeson** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the reasons for its approach to the media in response to comments made on the Executive's handling of the current economic downturn. (AQO 2594/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** OFMDFM on behalf of the Executive and through the Executive Information Service is required to ensure that the policies of the Northern Ireland Executive are reported in an accurate and fair manner in order to ensure greater public understanding of and access to Government services.

The media plays a vital role in this.

Equally it is clearly understood and absolutely accepted that the media has a role in challenging the decisions and policies of Government. OFMDFM see this as an integral part of the democratic process and one, which they would vigorously defend.

Equally, however, we would make no apologies for questioning coverage which we believe to be inaccurate, unfair, or not representative of the Executive's position on various issues.

This is a manifestation of the largely constructive dynamic, which exists between Government and the media.

This should be set within a context, which, since the restoration of the institutions, has seen thousands of stories and millions of words written and spoken by the media about the work of Government.

Often these will not be flattering of Government but it is accepted as part of the healthy tension, which must exist between the media and us.

Where criticism is felt to be unfair or inaccurate, however, Government has the right and indeed the duty to respond.

A case in point was some of the coverage of the Executive's handling of the economic downturn which Ministers felt was unrelentingly negative when set against the actual situation.

In response to that downturn, the Executive has brought forward a raft of initiatives to assist the general public, business interests and others.

- We have taken direct action to support local business and people.
- We froze domestic rates, making the average local household £1000 better off.
- We have waived domestic water charges for 2009/10 putting on average £160 back into people's pockets.
- We are reducing the cost of prescriptions.
- We have implemented the fuel credit scheme for the most disadvantaged households.
- We have used capital spending of our investment strategy to support construction - £1.4 bn last year.
- We used December monitoring to bring forward spending on roads, schools and farms to support the construction sector.
- We have established the Cross Sector Advisory Forum to enhance our ability to stay in touch with local interests across the community.

Neither unrealistic optimism on Government's behalf or unnecessary pessimism or negativity on the behalf of the media should go unchallenged.

We absolutely defend the media's right to be critical of Government when it is justified but equally defend our right to respond when it is not.

By doing so we can best achieve what is a common aim, the betterment of the lives and livelihoods of the citizens that we both serve.

## Corporal Punishment

**Mr Storey** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether it has met with the Children's Commissioner since her failed legal attempt to outlaw smacking. (AQO 2595/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** OFMDFM officials have regular contact meetings with the Commissioner for Children and Young People. These include three-monthly liaison meetings, Audit and



Risk Committee meetings, and six-monthly Accountability meetings. Several meetings have taken place since the outcome of the Commissioner's appeal was announced on 20 February 2009.

### Gender Equality Strategy

**Mrs Long** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister when the advisory panel will be consulted on the Gender Equality Strategy action plan. (AQO 2596/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** The Gender Advisory Panel has met to consider cross-departmental gender equality action plans on several occasions over the past year. At their last meeting on Friday 24 April 2009 stakeholder representatives provided views on final drafts and other proposals to implement the Gender Equality Strategy.

### Maze/Long Kesh

**Mr Butler** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what steps it is taking to maintain the listed buildings at the Maze/Long Kesh site; and what plans it has to provide for maintenance of these buildings in the next few years to ensure they do not fall into a state of disrepair. (AQO 2597/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** We have a responsibility to ensure the buildings on the Maze/Long Kesh site with listed status do not fall into disrepair. This is undertaken as part of the ongoing maintenance programme and is required to ensure our responsibilities as owners are upheld. Over the past 4 years we have taken advice from the Environment Agency and undertaken all necessary maintenance and repairs, spending some £350k.

Following on from this in 2008/09 we contracted for a £224k three-year maintenance programme for the listed and retained buildings. This programme is in addition to planned and preventative maintenance schedules and regular maintenance checks on the site to determine any unforeseen requirements. £48k was invested on the listed buildings in 2008-09 under the programme, and further works are planned for the current year.

### Northern Ireland Bureau

**Mr Gardiner** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline how the Northern Ireland Bureau in Washington D.C. has engaged with major corporations in the United States in the last year. (AQO 2600/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** The Bureau's main role is to represent the interests of the Executive in the United States. From its base in Washington, D.C., it works with the Obama Administration, members of Congress, the Irish-American and Scots-Irish Communities, and Corporate America to promote Northern Ireland as a forward looking European region. The office is recognised by the US Department of State as the diplomatic representation office of the Executive. It enjoys an excellent working relationship with both the British and Irish Embassies and their respective Consular networks around the US. The Bureau also works closely with InvestNI, which has lead responsibility for promoting inward investment and trade in the US, and with Tourism Ireland.

It is InvestNI, rather than the Bureau, which takes the lead in promoting inward investment and trade in the United States. InvestNI engages on a daily basis with a wide range of US corporations and trade associations. The Bureau also includes InvestNI representatives at its events and any business contacts made through its diplomatic activities are passed to InvestNI for follow-up purposes.

### Victims and Survivors Strategy

**Mr Attwood** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister when the outcome of its consultation on the Victims and Survivors Strategy will be published. (AQO 2601/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** It is our intention to publish the outcome of our consultation on the Draft Strategic Approach for Victims and Survivors when the OFMDFM Committee has

completed its consideration of the document. The Committee has advised us that it will be in a position to give its views on the document when it has considered our detailed proposals for the proposed Victims and Survivors Service which we have passed to the Committee on 23 April.

### OFMDFM: Freedom of Information

**Mr Beggs** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for its assessment of its ability to fulfill Freedom of Information Act obligations within the statutory time frame. (AQO 2603/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister is committed to fulfilling Freedom of Information (FOI) Act obligations within the statutory time frame. The Department has an excellent track record in dealing with information requests since the introduction of FOI legislation in January 2005. Although OFMDFM has experienced significant year-on-year increases in the number of requests received, we have nevertheless responded to 94% of the 517 requests received within the statutory time frame.

In the first quarter of 2009, the Department received 39 FOI requests and met the statutory response deadline for 38 of these requests. In the remaining case, the response was provided 2 days outside the deadline.

In addition to the Department's excellent track record in meeting statutory time limits, it also remains committed to providing information where it is appropriate to do so. Since the introduction of this legislation, the information requested has been released in full (where it was held by the Department) in 85% of cases. This figure rises to 96% when partial releases are included, and demonstrates our commitment to the principles of openness and transparency enshrined in this legislation.

To date, the Department has achieved an excellent overall performance in meeting its FOI obligations and expects to maintain its level of performance in the future.

### Economy

**Mrs D Kelly** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what consideration the Executive has given to implementing economic stimulus measures similar to those introduced by the Scottish Executive. (AQO 2604/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** We are aware of the economic stimulus package introduced by the Scottish Government which echoes many of the measures we outlined in December 2008 to support our own economy. We are, of course, happy to consider any further proposals that will protect the interests of local people and businesses.

### Race Relations

**Ms Lo** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what action it is taking to promote better race relations. (AQO 2605/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister is committed to building a cohesive, shared and integrated society for all.

The Programme for Government confirms our commitment to promote tolerance, inclusion and well-being. Part of this is the commitment to continue to challenge racism, sectarianism and intolerance which tarnish our reputation, blight our economic prospects and have a corrosive effect on our society. The Executive is fully committed to addressing these divisions within our society.

Junior Ministers recently announced the recipients of a funding package worth more than £1 million to support the integration of minority ethnic communities. The funding package of £1,046,894 will be awarded to 27 different organisations over the 2009/10 financial year, representing an increase of 10% on funding provided in 2008/09.

This major funding package is a practical response to the changing situation on the ground where our society is becoming more and more diverse and it clearly demonstrates our commitment to promoting racial equality and good race relations.

We recognise that it is on the ground where real change takes place through local people providing local solutions to local issues. The funding will go towards supporting a range of groups working on the frontline to build stronger and more integrated local communities.

In the longer term, this funding will form an important part of our proposals for a Programme of Cohesion, Sharing and Integration, which we hope to bring forward as soon as possible. Action to tackle sectarianism, racism and intolerance will be at the core of these proposals. Whilst the details of the policy proposals are being finalised, the work of challenging sectarianism, racism and all form of intolerance is continuing with the active support of us and the Junior Ministers.

As you are aware, we are also giving consideration to reconvening the Racial Equality Forum. Our Officials are considering the structure and remit of the Forum to help ensure it is fit for purpose in the context of devolution. Officials will seek the views of the sector on this when the initial deliberations have been completed, to decide the best way forward.

## DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

### Orange Halls

**Mr Simpson** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to her answer to AQW 6753/09, what work has been carried out by her Department, in conjunction with the Loyal Orders, to encourage Orange Halls in rural areas to apply for funding from her Department's programmes. (AQW 7149/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms M Gildernew):** No special initiatives have been undertaken to encourage Orange halls in rural areas to apply for funds.

### Orange Halls

**Mr Simpson** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to her answer to AQW 6753/09, what meetings her Department has held with the Loyal Orders to encourage more Orange Halls to apply for funding, through support programmes managed and funded by her Department, in rural areas. (AQW 7159/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** No meetings have been convened to encourage Orange halls in rural areas to apply for funds.

### Orange Halls

**Mr Simpson** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to her answer to AQW 6764/09, what meetings her Department has had with the Loyal Orange Orders to encourage more Orange Halls to apply for funding from her Department's support programmes in rural areas. (AQW 7167/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** No meetings have been convened to encourage Orange halls in rural areas to apply for funds.

### Orange Halls

**Mr Simpson** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to her answer to AQW 6764/09, what work has been carried out by her Department, in conjunction with the Loyal Orders, to encourage Orange Halls in rural areas to apply for funding from her Department's programmes. (AQW 7169/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** No special initiatives have been undertaken to encourage Orange halls in rural areas to apply for funds.

### Water Rights for Clay Lough

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) to detail the reasons for it taking so long to transfer the water rights for Clay Lough, Killyleagh and; (ii) when the final transfer will be completed. (AQW 7194/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** As explained in my response to question AQW 7177/09, the ownership of the water rights associated with complex transfers of land and property since the 19th Century is still under legal investigation. Transfers of water rights and access to these are a matter for private contractual arrangements and outside the drainage remit of the Rivers Agency, however I can assure the member that my department and its legal advisers are doing everything in their power to clarify the legal issues. I cannot, however, provide him with a date by which this matter will be fully resolved.

### Women's Groups

**Mrs McGill** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the women's groups funded by her Department and the amount of funding received by each group in 2007/08 and 2008/09. (AQW 7341/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** My Department has provided funding of £169,939.51 to the NI Rural Women's Network (NIRWN) in 2007/08 under the Building Sustainable Prosperity Programme (BSP). In the 2008/09 year, £191,621.61 has been paid made up of £126,427.30 BSP funding and £65,194.31 under the Community Development element of the Anti-Poverty and Social Exclusion Framework. In addition through the BSP funded "Women's Sectoral Programme" funding of £53,371.51 has been paid in 2007/2008 to 25 Women's Groups.

### Farm Modernisation Scheme

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development when farmers will hear if they have been successful with their applications for the Farm Modernisation Scheme. (AQW 7383/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** Applications for the Farm Modernisation Programme are currently being assessed and the process of issuing Letters of Offer to successful applicants and giving notification to unsuccessful applicants will commence this month.

### Milk Prices

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what her Department is doing to get a better price for the farmers for the milk they produce that is currently being bought at 17 pence a litre. (AQW 7384/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** I, like you, want farmers to receive a good price for their milk. That is why I have been working hard in recent months to try and turn the situation round. When milk prices fell sharply last October my Executive colleagues and I worked tirelessly to secure the re-introduction of export refunds for dairy products. This included lobbying the Defra Minister to support their re-introduction and at my behest the First and deputy First Minister wrote to the Prime Minister. Myself and industry representatives welcomed their re-introduction by the European Commission on 22 January which has put a bottom in the market.

I welcome the slight strengthening of milk prices at the March and April 2009 United Dairy Farmers' milk auctions. This is good news at what is the normal peak production period and I hope that in coming months prices will continue to improve further.

More needs to be done to improve the overall competitiveness of the industry, as EU support measures will not last forever and we all want to see not only less volatile but better prices. This, however, is unlikely to be achieved unless the industry increasingly follows a market led approach. To succeed the industry needs a higher level of product innovation and to improve overall levels of efficiency. Therefore, to help it plan for the future Arlene Foster, the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, and I have agreed to provide support to Dairy UK (NI)



to undertake a competitiveness study into the dairy sector. The aim of this study is to ensure that the North has a sustainable dairy sector with a structure to enable it to compete globally.

My Department also carries out a wide range of activities aimed at assisting the dairy sector. These include the provision of technical support to producers and processors including competence development programmes; the provision of knowledge and technology transfer programmes and benchmarking services which enable farmers to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their farm business. The industry also receives significant assistance from Government through AFBI and CAFRE. In particular CAFRE's Loughry Campus supports the processing sector in the key areas of product innovation.

In addition, my Department has also provided financial assistance to the dairy industry under the Regional Food Programme. Assistance is also available to the dairy sector under Axis 1 of the Rural Development Programme, which has a budget of £45m. The dairy sector also benefits indirectly from aid which continues to be provided under the EU School Milk Scheme to encourage the consumption of milk by school children.

I assure you that I and my Department will continue to work for outcomes on issues which are in the best long term interests of the local dairy industry, particularly producers.

### Brucellosis Tests

**Mr T Clarke** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many animals tested positive in the 30-day brucellosis test from April 2008 to March 2009, in the (i) Ballymena; and (ii) Antrim areas.

(AQW 7399/09)

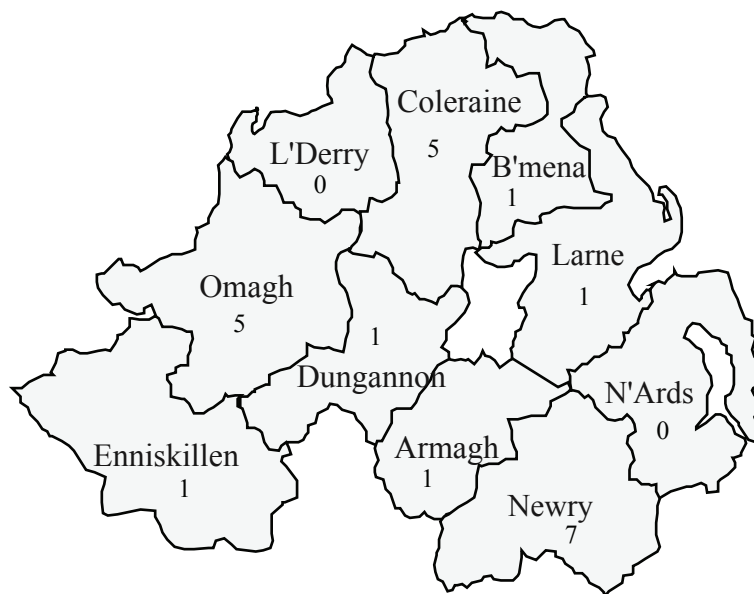
**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** From 01 April 2008 to 31 March 2009, there were a total of 22 cattle in the north of Ireland that tested positive to the 30-day brucellosis pre-movement test. Veterinary Service data on disease incidence is recorded according to Divisional Veterinary Office boundaries. I trust this is specific enough for your needs. The geographical distribution of the 22 animals is shown in the table below.

Divisional Veterinary Office Area	Number of positive cattle *
Armagh	1
Ballymena	1
Coleraine	5
Dungannon	1
Enniskillen	1
Larne	1
Londonderry	0
Newry	7
Newtownards	0
Omagh	5
Total for NI	22

(\* This includes cattle which were positive at the retest of an inconclusive premovement test result)

**The same information is presented in the diagram on the following page.**

## DIVISIONAL VETERINARY OFFICES



### Public Procurement Contracts

**Ms McCann** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) which companies; and (ii) what percentage of companies from the SME or the Social Economy Sector were successful in securing public procurement contracts in works, services and goods through her Department, in the last two years.

(AQW 7414/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** The following list details, where it has been possible to identify companies as being from the SME or Social economy Sector, those who were successful in securing public procurement contracts from 8 May 2007 to 31 March 2009.

Name of Company	Category (Works; Services; or Goods)
A J T Equipment Ltd, West Midlands	Goods
Abbey Farm Engineering	Goods
Abortec	Services
Accelerated Compost Gawsworth Macclesfield	Goods
Advanced Food Equipment, Yorkshire	Goods
AGB Scientific, Belfast	Goods
Alister lindsey	Services
AM Labels Ltd, Kettering	Goods
Amgram	Services
AMT Sybex	Goods/Services
Arch Controls, Ballymena	Goods
Ashley morrow contracts	Services
Belfast Metropolitan College	Training Service
Bio Merieux, Basingstoke	Goods

Name of Company	Category (Works; Services; or Goods)
BL Group, Belfast	Goods
Brodrick Grass Machinery	Goods
BSS	Goods
BSS Licenses	Goods
Butlers Mobile Display Systems	Services
Cardiac Services Ltd Belfast	Goods
Carol McKeown	Services
Cater-Quip, Belfast	Goods
Codesmith Tools	Goods
Com Tag Ltd	Goods
Corporate Document Services	Services
Cyril Johnston	Goods
Cyril Johnston	Goods
DA Forge	Goods
Datactics	Goods/Services
Davidson & Hardy Belfast	Goods
DE Services	Goods
Dr M Span	Services
Dunn & Co, Ballynahinch	Goods
Ecowood Energy Systems	Goods
Edurserv	Goods
Electrolab	Goods
EOS Systems	Goods
Epic Golf Ireland	Goods
Equestrian and Farm Feeds (Lisburn)	Goods
Essener Equipment	Goods
Exclaim	Services
FireIMC	Services
FMS	Goods
FPM	Services
GE Allen	Goods
Geoff Rodgers, Randalstown	Goods
Grey Matter Ltd	Goods
Ground man interests	Goods
H&J Martin Ltd	Works
Heather Coyle	Services
Heyn Truck Solutions	Goods
Hill Components	Goods
Hugh Suffron	Services

Name of Company	Category (Works; Services; or Goods)
IDN Supplies Ltd	Goods
Inpho Active	Goods/Services
Insight Ltd	Goods
J Coulter	Works
Joe O'Donnell	Services
John Grey	Services
John McElderry	Goods
Johnston Gilpen	Goods
KBS	Goods
Keith Pearson, GB	Services
Korim Ltd, Antrim	Goods
Laird Grass Machinery	Goods
Lurgaboy Adventure Centre	Training Service
M Potts 170 Dungannon	Goods
Mascott Construction Ltd	Works
Master burn	Goods
MCA Consulting, Carrickmacross, County Monaghan	Services
McAvoy Group	Works
McGillis outside services, ROI	Services
McLaughlin and Harvey Ltd	Works
Messmer Instruments Imperial Business Gravesend	Goods
Michael Stewart	Goods
Neueda	Goods/Services
Nivac	Goods
North Down Computing Services	Services
North Down Marquees, Carryduff	Goods
Olympus Ind Southend on Sea, Essex	Goods
PCF	Goods
PCS Business Systems Ltd	Goods
Pharma Foods Ltd Carrick On Suir	Goods
Podium for sport	Goods
Porter Brewing Co Ltd, Lancashire	Goods
Porter Contracts	Services
Porters	Services
Quercus/Central Science Laboratory	Services
Quick Start	Training Service
RDM Test Equipment, Herfordshire	Goods
Richard McAllister	Services
RJ Mitten & Sons, Lisnaskea, Co Fermanagh	Goods



Name of Company	Category (Works; Services; or Goods)
RMA Systems	Goods
Scobie & Junor (Ire) Ltd, Newtownabbey	Goods
Selby House Farm, Stanton, Northumberland	Goods
Sensor Wireless CANADA	Goods
Sifam Instruments Ltd, Devon	Goods
Sinead McCorrigan	Services
Singularity	Services
Stevenson Munn Ltd	Services
Tecrock	Goods
Teddy Corrigan, Drumsloe, Ballinamallard, Co Fermanagh	Services
Tendering Pacific Ltd Cambridge	Goods
Tendering Pacific Ltd, Sawston	Goods
The Royal Institute for Deaf People (RNID)	Training Service
Tony Patterson	Services
TOP SURVEY	Goods
Total Computer Networks Ltd	Goods
UMEX	Services
Vigo Ltd, Devon	Goods
VIS Security Ltd	Goods

The Department does not hold a definitive list of the total number of SMEs or other organisations engaged in the Social Economy Sector, and is therefore not in a position to express the total number of companies listed in this answer as an overall percentage figure.

## DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

### Senior Civil Servant Bonuses

**Mr McGlone** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much was paid in bonuses to senior Civil Servants in his Department in (i) 2003/04; (ii) 2004/05; (iii) 2005/06; (iv) 2006/07; and (v) 2007/08.

(AQW 7517/09)

**Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr G Campbell):** The table below sets out how much was paid in bonuses to Senior Civil Servants in DCAL over the last five years.

Year	Amount Paid
2003/04	£19,000
2004/05	£22,250
2005/06	£24,000
2006/07	£32,500
2007/08	£17,250

## DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

### Irish-Medium Schools

**Mr O'Loan** asked the Minister of Education (i) whether the process relating to the cost of vesting of Irish-medium schools includes interest costs incurred by the school trustees for loans of sites purchased for transfer to the Department; and (ii) if she will take action so that the trustees can claim these interest costs. (AQW 7020/09)

**Minister of Education (Ms C Ruane):** Ní áirítear ar chostais dhílseacháin aon chostais úis a thabhaigh iontaobhaithe scoile ar iasachtaí a fuarthas le suíomhanna scoile a cheannach.

The cost of vesting does not include interest costs incurred by school trustees for loans for the purchase of school sites. My department approves the costs of sites for the provision of school accommodation but it does not have a role in the negotiation of any loans or associated charges which is a matter between the trustees and their lenders. My department is currently working with the sector on how best to address the provision of accommodation for schools following the Irish-medium education review.

### Gaelscoil an Chaistil Rental Costs

**Mr O'Loan** asked the Minister of Education to explain the apparent inconsistency of rental costs for Gaelscoil an Chaistil, Ballycastle, considering that the ground rents for the school are approved for payment to Moyle District Council but that rents for premises such as classrooms, offices and lunch facilities are not paid to the landlords; and (ii) if she will take steps to address this severe financial pressure on the school. (AQW 7022/09)

**Minister of Education:** Tá socrú foirmiúil cíosa ann idir an scoil agus Comhairle Ceantair na Maoile le roinnt blianta anuas maidir leis an suíomh. Tá an suíomh á dhíol ag an Chomhairle anois agus dílseofar in eastát na scoileanna é.

There has been a formal agreed rental arrangement in place between the school and Moyle District Council for the site for a number of years. The site is now being sold by the Council and will be vested in the schools' estate. There has not been a similar rental agreement in place for the premises. The issue of rental arrangements is being considered by Iontaobhas na Gaelscolaíochta and my department.

Gaelscoil an Chaistil has recently satisfied the viability criteria to enable the school to receive capital grant aid. When this process is completed, approved capital works at the school will be eligible for grant-aid from the department. This should help to address financial pressures on the school.

### Youth Activities

**Mr McLaughlin** asked the Minister of Education to outline her Department's policy on making available school premises for youth activities after school hours. (AQW 7042/09)

**Minister of Education:** While the Department does not have a policy for making available school premises specifically for youth activities after school hours under Article 140 of the 1989 Education Order schools are encouraged to make premises available (when not required by or in connection with the school) for use by members of the wider community.

Through the Department's Extended School programme over 450 of our most socially disadvantaged schools have been identified for funding. Our policy seeks to establish each extended school as the hub of its local community engaging positively and actively with neighbouring schools, statutory, voluntary and community sector organisations in an effort to meet the needs of the pupils in the school.

A critical first step in the action planning process is to identify the needs of pupils, parents and the wider community and to match this against gaps in provision. Of course we cannot expect schools to be able to respond positively to all requests but closer links between the school and its community is a key element of the policy and one which we are seeking to develop.

Chomh maith leis sin, tá an Roinn ag bunú Grúpa Oibre, le Comhairle na Scoileanna Caitliceacha faoi Chothabháil i gceannas air agus le hionadaithe ó na príomhpháirtithe leasmhara eile oideachais, leis an cheist maidir leis an Phobal ag Úsáid Scoileanna a bhreithniú.

In addition, the Department is establishing a Working Group, lead by the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and with representatives from other key education stakeholders, to consider the issue of the Community Use of Schools. This Group will take forward the process of preparing a report and recommendations to the Department on how we might increase the use (outside of school hours) of school premises by pupils, their families and the wider communities, including the youth sector, within which schools are located.

### Teachers Pension Scheme

**Mr Storey** asked the Minister of Education how many Northern Ireland Teachers Pension Scheme recipients have been overpaid, broken down by Education and Library Board. (AQW 7055/09)

**Minister of Education:** Tá sonraithe sa tábla thíos líon na bhfaighteoirí i Scéim Pinsin na Múinteoirí a fuair ró-íocaíocht mar gheall ar fhógra déanach maidir leis an Íos-Phinsean Ráthaithe (GMP) sa bhliain airgeadais 2008/09.

The number of Teachers' Pension Scheme recipients who have been overpaid as a result of late notification of Guaranteed Minimum Pension (GMP) in the 2008/09 financial year is detailed in the table below.

Financial Year	Number of Teachers Overpaid
2008/09	511

Information regarding overpayments to pensioners is not held by Education and Library Board area as once retired, pensioners are no longer paid by board area. To collate this information would be at a disproportionate cost to the Department.

### Teachers Pension Scheme

**Mr Storey** asked the Minister of Education when her Department discovered that pensioners in the Northern Ireland Teachers' Pension Scheme were overpaid. (AQW 7106/09)

**Minister of Education:** Chuir an Oifig um Ranníocaíochtaí Árachais Náisiúnta (NICO) in iúl don Roinn Oideachais i mí Aibreáin 2008, mar a cuireadh in iúl do gach scéim pinsin eile i dTuaisceart na hÉireann a bhí ábhartha, go raibh ró-íocaíocht sa phinsean a íocadh do phinsinéirí a bhí páirteach i Scéim Pinsin na Múinteoirí, mar gheall ar an fhógra déanach maidir leis an Íos-Phinsean Ráthaithe (GMP).

The Department of Education, in common with all other affected pension schemes in the north of Ireland was informed by the National Insurance Contributions Office (NICO) in April 2008 that pensioners in the Teachers' Pension Scheme were overpaid pension as a result of late notification of Guaranteed Minimum Pension (GMP).

### Entitlement Framework and Area Planning

**Mr Storey** asked the Minister of Education what are the employment issues identified by her Department in relation to the implementation of (i) the entitlement framework and: (ii) Area Planning. (AQW 7170/09)

**Minister of Education:** One of the key objectives of the Entitlement Framework (EF) is to ensure that there is a better match between young people's interests, aptitudes and talents and the courses available to them to study at Key Stage 4 and post-16. This, coupled with the inclusion of the Learning for Life and Work area of learning, within the revised curriculum will enable many more young people to acquire the skills and qualifications that will help them find work once they have completed their education. Importantly, improving the balance between general and applied courses will I believe provide a better match between the outcomes that young people achieve and the needs of individual employers and the wider economy.

Trí chur chuige comhtháite ceantarbhunaithe i leith planála, tá mé ag iarraidh a chinntiú go soláthraítear oideachas ar bhealach a chinntíonn go mbíonn gach duine óg ábalta teacht ar chosáin chomhtháite agus go ndéanann siad roghanna bunaithe ar ghairmoideachas, eolas, comhairle agus treoir d'ardchaighdeán.

Through a coherent, area-based approach to planning, I want to ensure that education is delivered in a way that ensures that all young people have access to coherent pathways and that their choices are informed by good

quality careers education, information advice and guidance. It is important that schools concentrate on the quality and coherence of their curricular offer and it will be for schools themselves, working with other schools and providers, to decide what that offer should be. It will also be a matter for schools, working within the resources available to them, to determine the staffing complement required to enable them to meet the needs of their pupils through the EF.

### Common Funding Formula

**Mr Storey** asked the Minister of Education if the review of the common funding formula will consider including nursery schools in the small schools support factor. (AQW 7171/09)

**Minister of Education:** Tá toisc Tacaíochta na Scoileanna Beaga curtha san áireamh laistigh den Fhoirmle Cómhainithe le haitheantas a thabhairt do na tosca eile laistigh den Fhoirmle atá bunaithe go mór ar líonta daltaí agus go ginéarálta ciallaíonn seo nach soláthraíonn an cistiú a fhaightear faoi na míreanna seo go leor acmhainní airgeadais do scoileanna beaga le go mbeidh siad ábalta an curaclam ina iomláine a chur ar fáil agus an caiteachas á choinneáil laistigh den bhuiséad.

The inclusion of a small schools support factor within the common funding formula is in recognition that other factors within the formula are largely based on pupil numbers which generally means that the funding generated under these elements does not provide sufficient financial resources for small schools to enable them to deliver the full curriculum while containing expenditure within budget. Nursery schools are currently ineligible for support under this factor. This arrangement reflects the assessment of the Department and the LMS steering group that the higher AWPU weighting for nursery school pupils takes account of the particular needs of these schools.

However, the common funding formula is kept under continual review and where additional needs are identified, or refinements can be made, these can be considered in line with the principles of LMS common funding scheme.

### Overhead Power Cables

**Mr Gardiner** asked the Minister of Education to detail all the primary and post-primary schools which are situated within 200 metres of overhead power cables, broken down by education and library board area. (AQW 7198/09)

**Minister of Education:** Léirítear thíos sonraí ar scoileanna atá taobh istigh de 200 méadar ó cháblaí leictreachais lasnairde de réir Limistéar na mBord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne:

Details of schools within 200 metres of overhead power cables by education and library board area are shown below:

#### Belfast Education and Library Board

- Elmgrove Primary School, 289 Beersbridge Road, Belfast
- Avoniel Primary School, Avoniel Road, Belfast
- Orangefield Primary School, Marina Park, Belfast
- Vere Foster Primary School, Moyard Parade, Belfast
- St Aidan's Christian Brothers Primary, Whiterock Road, Belfast
- St Anne's Primary School, Kingsway, Lisburn Road, Belfast
- St John the Baptist Girls' Primary School, Finaghy Road North, Belfast
- St John the Baptist Boys' Primary School, Finaghy Road North, Belfast
- Holy Child Primary School, South Green, Andersonstown, Belfast
- St Teresa's Primary School, Glen Road, Belfast
- St Oliver Plunkett Primary School, Glen Road, Belfast
- Holy Trinity Primary School, Monagh Road, Belfast
- Gaelscoil na Móna, 1 Monagh Link, Belfast
- St Teresa's Nursery School, 24 Bernagh Glen, Belfast



- Holy Child Nursery School, 40 Slievegallion Drive, Andersonstown Road, Belfast
- Matt Talbot Nursery School, New Barnsley Green, Belfast
- St Oliver Plunkett Nursery School, Glen Road, Belfast
- St Gerard's Education Resource Centre, 12 Upper Springfield Road, Belfast
- Grosvenor Grammar School, Cameronian Drive, Belfast

**Western Education and Library Board**

- St Canice's Primary School, 34 Glenedra Road, Feeny, Derry
- Craigbrack Primary School, 75 Craigbrack Road, Eglinton, Derry
- St Columba's Primary School, 30 Curley Road, Dromore, Omagh
- Recarson Primary School, 68 Arvalee Road, Omagh
- Strathfoyle Nursery School, Clonmeen Drive, Strathfoyle, Derry
- Altnagelvin Hospital School, Altnagelvin Area Hospital, Derry

**North Eastern Education and Library Board**

- Ballycarry Primary School, 23 Hillhead Road, Ballycarry, Carrickfergus
- Carnaghts Primary School, 48 Valley Road, Shankbridge, Ballymena
- Castleroe Primary School, 120 Castleroe Road, Coleraine
- Camphill Primary School, 65 Carolhill Park, Ballymena
- Toreagh Primary School, 62 Raloo Road, Larne
- Mossley Primary School, Hazelburn Road, Newtownabbey
- Ballyhenry Primary School, Ballyhenry Avenue, Glengormley, Newtownabbey
- Anahorish Primary School, 120 Deerpark Road, Toomebridge, Antrim
- St Macnissi's Primary School, Christine Road Off Manse Road, Newtownabbey
- Kilcoan Primary School, 163 Browns Bay Road, Larne
- Acorn Integrated Primary School, 110 Victoria Road, Carrickfergus
- Mossley Nursery School, Hazelburn Road, Mossley, Newtownabbey
- Carrickfergus College, 110 North Road, Carrickfergus
- Ballee Community High School, Ballee Road West, Ballymena
- North Coast Integrated College, 21 Cloyfin Road, Coleraine

**South Eastern Education and Library Board**

- Belvoir Park Primary School, Belvoir Drive, Belfast
- Lead Hill Primary School, Casaeldona Park, Belfast
- Ballymacash Primary School, 16 Brokerstown Road, Lisburn
- St Luke's Primary School, Glasvey Drive, Twinbrook, Dunmurry, Belfast
- St Ita's Primary School, 4 Alderwood Hill, Purdysburn Road, Belfast
- Rowandale Integrated Primary School, 18 Clarehill Road, Moira
- St Luke's Nursery School, Glasvey Drive, Twinbrook, Dunmurry, Belfast
- St Therese Nursery School, Brianswell Road, Belfast
- Lagan College, 44 Manse Road, Castlereagh, Belfast
- Brookfield Special School, 6 Halfpenny Gate Road, Moira, Craigavon

**Southern Education and Library Board**

- Bleary Primary School, 1 Dean's Road, Lurgan, Craigavon
- St Mary's Primary School, 16 Lisnagowan Road, Dungannon
- Gaelscoil Uí Néill, 104 Washingbay Road, Coalisland

## Bain Report

**Mr Gardiner** asked the Minister of Education to detail the (i) primary and (ii) post-primary schools that do not fall within the criteria established in the Bain report for viable schools in both rural and urban areas, broken down by Education and Library Board area. (AQW 7201/09)

**Minister of Education:** The Sustainable Schools Policy specifies six criteria with associated indicators to be used in helping to assess a school's educational viability. Rural schools are taken into account, in particular, in the enrolment thresholds and accessibility criterion. Schools are not assessed therefore solely on enrolments but against all six criteria included in the Policy, with each case being considered on its individual circumstances. The overriding consideration is the quality of education that a school provides.

Léirítear sa tábla thíos líon na scoileanna i ngach Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne atá faoin íosthairseach rolluithe, bunaithe ar rolluithe don bhliain 2008/09.

The table below shows numbers of schools within each Education and Library Board area which are currently below the minimum enrolment thresholds based on 2008/09 enrolments.

	Urban Primary	Rural Primary	Post Primary
Enrolment Threshold	140	105	500
BELB	23		8
WELB	13	87	22
NEELB		88	23
SEELB		40	19
SELB		101	23
Total	36	316	95

### Notes:

- 1 Belfast and Derry City Council areas are defined as urban and all other areas as rural.
- 2 Primary school enrolments are for years 1-7, ie excluding nursery and reception pupils.

## School Buildings and School Estates

**Mr Gardiner** asked the Minister of Education to provide details of (i) school buildings; and (ii) school estates that have been disposed of in the past five years, broken down by Education and Library Board area. (AQW 7208/09)

**Minister of Education:** I gcásanna nuair a diúscaíodh iar-fhoirgnimh scoile laistigh de chúig bliana anuas, cuireadh an suíomh ar a raibh an scoil lonnaithe san áireamh leis an díolachán. Níor díoladh foirgneamh scoile ar bith ar bhonn scartha.. Sonraítear mar a leanas na diúscairtí a rinneadh ag na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne le cúig bliana anuas:

In cases where former school buildings have been disposed of in the past five years the sale has included the site on which the school was located. No school buildings have been sold as separate entities. Disposals by Education and Library Boards over the past five years are detailed as follows:

### 2004/05 ELB DISPOSALS

<b>NEELB</b>	Land at Irish Society PS, Coleraine Land at Ballykeel PS, Ballymena Land at Dunclug College, Ballymena Land at Culnady PS, Upperlands, Maghera
<b>SEELB</b>	Former Legacurry PS site. Former Ardglass PS site.

<b>SELB</b>	Former Inishmagh PS site. Former Rathfriland Hill Special School site.
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**2005/06 ELB DISPOSALS**

<b>BELB</b>	Land at Lowwood PS Land Cliftonville PS Land at Castle HS
<b>NEELB</b>	Former Mosside PS, Ballymoney site
<b>SEELB</b>	Former Magheraknock PS, Ballynahinch site
<b>SELB</b>	Land at Craigavon Senior HS
<b>WELB</b>	Templemore Secondary School site Land at Killen PS, Castlederg Land at Erne Special School

**2006/07 ELB DISPOSALS**

<b>NEELB</b>	Former Gracehill PS, Ballymena site Former Ballymena Boys' and Girls' HS, Playing Fields at Ballykeel Land at Ballykeel PS, Ballymena Land at Crumlin PS
<b>SEELB</b>	Former Scrabo HS, Newtownards site Ballynahinch Music Centre
<b>SELB</b>	Former Tullyroan PS, Dungannon site Former Ballydown PS, Banbridge site
<b>WELB</b>	Former Dervaghroy PS, Sixmilecross site Former Sixmilecross PS site Former Earl of Erne PS, Enniskillen site Former Hutton PS, Beragh site Land at Bready Jubilee PS

**2007/08 ELB DISPOSALS**

<b>BELB</b>	Former Finiston PS site
<b>SEELB</b>	Former Carricknaveagh PS, Boardmills site
<b>SELB</b>	Former Granville PS, Dungannon site Former Loughbrickland PS site Land at Fountain Road, Cookstown on the Coolnafranky Demesne (Site of Cookstown HS, Cookstown PS and Cookstown Nursery School)

**2008/09 ELB DISPOSALS**

<b>BELB</b>	St Vincent's Centre, Sunnyside Street, Belfast site
<b>SELB</b>	Land at Tandragee PS Land at Newry HS including Carnbane Playing Fields
<b>WELB</b>	Former Clondermot HS site

Schools in the other education sectors are owned by the respective school Trustees or Boards of Governors. While the Department recovers grant paid as appropriate in respect of closed schools in these sectors it does not maintain a record of disposals.

### Grammar School Places

**Miss McIlveen** asked the Minister of Education how many grammar school places are available for the 2009/10 academic year, broken down by (i) gender; and (ii) school, in the (a) South Eastern Education and Library Board; and (b) Belfast Education and Library Board . (AQW 7232/09)

**Minister of Education:** Sonraítear sa tábla thíos líon na n-áiteanna i scoileanna gramadaí don bhliain acadúil 2009/10, de réir (ii) na scoile, (a) i mBord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Oirdheiscirt; agus (b) i mBord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne Bhéal Feirste.

The grammar school places available for the 2009/10 academic year, broken down by (ii) school, in the (a) South Eastern Education and Library Board; and (b) Belfast Education and Library Board are detailed in the table below. There is no requirement on schools to admit a specified number of male / female pupils however there are a number of single gender schools within the South Eastern Education and Library Board and Belfast Education and Library Board areas and these are identified in the table below.

(ii) School	Single Gender / Co-Educational	2009/10 Approved Admissions Number
<b>(a) SOUTH-EASTERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD</b>		
Regent House School	Co-Educational	210
Down High School	Co-Educational	128
Glenlola Collegiate School	Girls	157
Bangor Grammar School	Boys	125
Sullivan Upper School	Co-Educational	150
Friends' School	Co-Educational	140
Wallace High School	Co-Educational	170
Assumption Grammar School, Ballynahinch	Girls	120
St Patrick's Grammar School, Downpatrick	Boys*	96
Our Lady & St Patrick's College	Co-Educational	180
<b>(b) BELFAST EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD</b>		
Grosvenor Grammar School	Co-Educational	155
Wellington College	Co-Educational	110
Bloomfield Collegiate School	Girls	100
Campbell College	Boys	140
St Mary's Christian Brothers' Grammar School	Boys	175
Methodist College	Co-Educational	240
Royal Belfast Academical Institution	Boys	150
Belfast Royal Academy	Co-Educational	200
St Dominic's High School	Girls	145
St Malachy's College	Boys	150
Dominican College	Girls	150
Strathearn School	Girls	110
Rathmore Grammar School	Co-Educational	180



(ii) School	Single Gender / Co-Educational	2009/10 Approved Admissions Number
Victoria College	Girls	130
Hunterhouse College	Girls	100
Aquinas Diocesan Grammar School	Co-Educational	110

\* Co-Educational Sixth Form

### Unfilled Posts

**Mr Gardiner** asked the Minister of Education how many posts there are; and how many are unfilled in each category in the Upper Bann constituency in (a) primary schools; and (b) post-primary schools. (AQW 7249/09)

**Minister of Education:** Ní bhailíonn an Roinn eolas ar líon na bpost teagaisc nó ar cá mhéad acu nach bhfuil líonta i dTuaisceart na hÉireann. Bailíonn an Roinn líon na múinteoirí agus is trí shuirbhé ar leith a bhíonn eolas maidir le folúntais múinteoirí bailithe.

The Department does not collect data on the number of teaching posts or how many of these posts are unfilled in the north of Ireland. The Department does collect the numbers of teachers and in a separate survey collects information on teacher vacancies.

The number of teachers in each primary and post-primary school in the Upper Bann parliamentary constituency in the academic year 2007-2008 is given in the table below:

#### NUMBER OF TEACHERS FILLING POSTS DURING THE 2007/08 ACADEMIC YEAR IN SCHOOLS IN THE UPPER BANN PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY

School Name	Town	Teachers filling or temporarily filling posts in 2007-2008
<b>Primary Schools</b>		
Abercorn Ps	Banbridge	18
Ballyoran Ps	Portadown	15
Birches Ps	Portadown	4
Bleary Ps	Lurgan	5
Bocombra Ps	Portadown	15
Bridge Integrated Ps	Banbridge	20
Carrick Ps	Lurgan	21
Craigavon Ps	Gilford	6
Dickson Ps	Lurgan	7
Donacloney Ps	Donacloney	11
Drumgor Ps	Brownlow	12
Edenderry Ps	Portadown	18
Edenderry Ps	Banbridge	24
Hart Memorial Ps	Portadown	14
King's Park Ps	Lurgan	29
Lurgan Model Ps	Lurgan	9
Maralin Village Ps	Magheralin	12
Millington Ps	Portadown	26
Milltown Ps	Banbridge	4
Moyallon Ps	Portadown	8

Portadown Integrated Ps	Portadown	10
Presentation Ps	Portadown	6
Richmount Ps	Portadown	6
Scarva Ps	Craigavon	4
Seagoe Ps	Portadown	16
St Anthony's Ps	Legahory	24
St Brendan's Ps	Craigavon	17
St Colman's (Bann) Ps	Gilford	4
St Francis Ps	Lurgan	36
St Francis' Ps, Aghhderg	Banbridge	6
St John The Baptist Ps	Portadown	17
St John's Ps	Gilford	7
St Mary's Ps	Dungannon	4
St Mary's Ps	Gawley's Gate	6
St Mary's Ps	Lurgan	4
St Mary's Ps	Banbridge	20
St Patrick's Ps	Aghaccommon	11
St Patrick's Ps	Magheralin	6
St Patrick's Ps	Aughagallon	6
St Teresa's Ps	Lurgan	12
Tannaghmore Ps	Lurgan	31
Tullygally Ps	Tullygally	10
Waringstown Ps	Craigavon	16
<b>Primary Schools Total</b>		<b>557</b>
<b>Post-Primary (Secondary And Grammar) Schools</b>		
Banbridge Academy	Banbridge	92
Banbridge High School	Banbridge	50
Brownlow Int College	Craigavon	34
Clounagh Junior High School	Portadown	48
Craigavon Senior High School	Portadown	48
Drumcree College	Portadown	24
Killicomaine Junior High School	Portadown	35
Lismore Comprehensive School	Craigavon	71
Lurgan College	Lurgan	28
Lurgan Junior High School	Lurgan	46
New-Bridge Integrated College	Loughbrickland	36
Portadown College	Portadown	54
St Mary's High School	Lurgan	39
St Michael's Grammar	Lurgan	42
St Patrick's College	Banbridge	36

St Paul's Junior High School	Lurgan	34
<b>Post-Primary Schools Total</b>		<b>717</b>

The Department seeks information on teacher vacancies from all grant-aided schools on an annual basis. The information provides a “snapshot” of vacancies at a specific date each year. Details for unfilled vacancies in each primary and post-primary school in the Upper Bann parliamentary constituency as at 3rd November 2008 are set out below:

**NUMBER OF TEACHER VACANCIES STILL TO BE FILLED DURING THE 2008/09 ACADEMIC YEAR AT 3RD NOVEMBER 2008 IN SCHOOLS<sup>1</sup> IN THE UPPER BANN PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY**

School Name	Town	Number of teacher vacancies still to be filled
<b>Primary Schools</b>		
Ballyoran Ps	Portadown	1
Craigavon Ps	Gilford	1
Edenderry Ps	Portadown	1
St John The Baptist Ps	Portadown	1
St Mary's Ps	Dungannon	1
<b>Primary Schools Total</b>		<b>5</b>
<b>Post-Primary (Secondary And Grammar) Schools</b>		
Banbridge Academy	Banbridge	2
<b>Post-Primary Schools Total</b>		<b>2</b>

<sup>1</sup> Only schools with existing vacancies have been included.

## Special Educational Needs

**Miss McIlveen** asked the Minister of Education how many pupils have special educational needs statements in the South Eastern Education and Library Board. (AQW 7279/09)

**Minister of Education:** Tá an t-eolas a iarradh sa tábla thíos.

The information requested is detailed in the table below.

**PUPILS WITH A STATEMENT OF SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND TOTAL ENROLMENTS AT SCHOOLS IN THE SEELB AREA – 2008/09**

School type	Pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Total enrolment
Preschool sector	21	4,387
Primary (Y1 - Y7)	1,121	32,893
Post primary	1,032	25,731
Special	1,061	1,181
Total	3,235	64,192

Source: School census.

Note:

- Figures for the preschool sector include funded children in voluntary and private preschool centres, nursery schools and nursery and reception classes in primary schools.
- Children with a statement of special educational needs are those at Stage 5 of the Special Education Needs Code of Practice.

### Non-UK Nationals Enrolled in Primary Schools

**Miss McIlveen** asked the Minister of Education how many non-UK nationals have been enrolled in primary schools in the (i) controlled sector; (ii) maintained sector; (iii) integrated sector; and (iv) Irish-medium sector, broken down by (a) total enrolment; and (b) percentage of the total numbers of pupils enrolled in each sector.

(AQW 7280/09)

**Minister of Education:** Ní bhailítear an t-eolas a iarradh. Ach tá eolas ar fáil ar chúlra eitneach na ndaltaí agus líonta na ndaltaí a bhfuil Béarla mar theanga bhreise acu. Is féidir teacht ar an eolas seo ar na naisc idirlín seo a leanas.

The information requested is not collected. However, information on the ethnic background of pupils and the numbers of pupils with English as an additional language is available. These may be accessed via the following web links.

Pupil Ethnicity by ELB 2008/09

[http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/32-statisticsandresearch\\_pg/32-statistics\\_and\\_research\\_statistics\\_on\\_education\\_pg/32\\_statistics\\_and\\_research-numbersofschoolsandpupils\\_pg/32\\_education\\_and\\_library\\_board\\_level/statistics\\_and\\_research\\_education\\_and\\_library\\_board\\_data\\_2008\\_09.htm](http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/32-statisticsandresearch_pg/32-statistics_and_research_statistics_on_education_pg/32_statistics_and_research-numbersofschoolsandpupils_pg/32_education_and_library_board_level/statistics_and_research_education_and_library_board_data_2008_09.htm)

Pupils with English as an additional language 2001/02 – 2008/09

[http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/32-statisticsandresearch\\_pg/32-statistics\\_and\\_research\\_statistics\\_on\\_education\\_pg/32\\_statistics\\_and\\_research-numbersofschoolsandpupils\\_pg/32\\_statistics\\_and\\_research-northernirelandsummarydata\\_pg.htm](http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/32-statisticsandresearch_pg/32-statistics_and_research_statistics_on_education_pg/32_statistics_and_research-numbersofschoolsandpupils_pg/32_statistics_and_research-northernirelandsummarydata_pg.htm) .

### MLA Representations

**Mr T Clarke** asked the Minister of Education how many representations she has made to her Department as a constituency MLA, since she took up office.

(AQW 7319/09)

**Minister of Education:** Ní dhearna mé uirill ar bith chuig an Roinn Oideachais i m'fheidhmeannas mar MLA do thoghcheantar Dhún Theas ó chuaigh mé i mbun oifige.

I have not made any representations to the Department of Education in my capacity as a constituency MLA for South Down since taking up office

### Newry and Mourne Schools

**Mr P J Bradley** asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to her answer to AQO 2532/09, to list the schools from the South Down section of Newry and Mourne that signed up to the statement on Friday 24 April 2009.

(AQW 7333/09)

**Minister of Education:** Mar fhreagra do chuireadh a fuair mé ó phríomhoide bunscoile an Iúir, d'fhreastail mé ar chruinniú phríomhoidí bunscoile ó cheantar Iúir agus Múrna ar 24 Aibreán 2009. Níl líosta na ndaoine a bhí i láthair iarbhair ag an Roinn.

In response to an invitation from a primary school principal in Newry I attended a meeting of primary-school principals from the Newry and Mourne area on 24 April 2009. The Department does not hold a list of those who actually attended.

### South Eastern Education and Library Board

**Mr Craig** asked the Minister of Education (i) how much the two refresher days last June for suspended Board Members cost the South Eastern Education and Library Board; and (ii) why were these training days organised considering the board is still suspended.

(AQW 7335/09)

**Minister of Education:** Tá curtha in iúl ag Bord Oideachais agus Leabarlainne an Oirdheiscirt gur thabhaigh an Bord costas £1,428 mar gheall ar an dá lá atraenála agus gur chlúdaigh an costas seo caiteachas na mball



maidir le liúntas freastail, le costais taistil agus costais theagmhasacha; d'íoc mo Roinn £2,878.75 as costas atraenála an Rialachais Chorporáidigh.

The South Eastern Education and Library Board has advised that the two refresher days cost the board £1,428 which covered members claims for attendance allowance, travel and incidental costs; the cost of the corporate governance refresher training was £2,878.75 and this was met by my Department. These training days were organised as part of the decision making process as to whether the board should be reinstated. That decision remains under consideration and will be announced at the appropriate time.

### Suspended Teachers

**Mr Elliott** asked the Minister of Education how many teachers are currently suspended; and what is the length of these suspensions. (AQW 7355/09)

**Minister of Education:** Thug Príomhfheidhmeannaí na n-údarás fostaíochta faoi seach eolas dom ar na fionraí reatha agus sonraítear an t-eolas seo sa tábla thíos.

I have been advised by the chief executives of the respective employing authorities of the current suspensions detailed in the table below.

Employing Authority	BELB	WELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB	CCMS
Number of Current Suspensions	1	0	0	0	2	9
Duration of Suspension	23/02/09 Ongoing	-	-	-	12/07 04/09 All ongoing	11/07 16/04/07 16/04/07 14/03/08 27/08/08 22/12/08 16/03/09 25/03/09 04/09 All ongoing

### Suspended Teachers

**Mr Elliott** asked the Minister of Education how many teachers have been suspended from teaching; and to outline the reason for the suspensions, in each of the past 5 years. (AQW 7357/09)

**Minister of Education:** Tá an t-eolas a iarradh sonraithe sa tábla thíos. Chuir Príomhfheidhmeannaí na n-údarás fostaíochta faoi seach an t-eolas ar fáil.

The information requested is detailed in the table below. This information has been provided by the chief executives of the respective employing authorities.

Employer	BELB		WELB		NEELB	
	Suspension Reason	No.	Suspension Reason	No.	Suspension Reason	No.
2008	Assaulting and shouting at pupil	1		0	Termination of teacher on grounds of ill health	1
2007	Child protection (2)	2	Misconduct	1	Disciplinary reasons	1
2006		0		0	Disciplinary reasons	1
2005	Unsuitable person to be working with young people	1		0	Disciplinary reasons	1

Employer	BELB		WELB		NEELB	
	Suspension Reason	No.	Suspension Reason	No.	Suspension Reason	No.
2004	Allegations of assault against a pupil	1		0	Disciplinary reasons	1
TOTAL		5		1		5

Employer	SEELB		SELB		CCMS	
	Suspension Reason	No.	Suspension Reason	No.	Suspension Reason	No.
2008		0	Child protection	1	Medical (absence procedure) (12) Child protection (1)	
2007	Inappropriate conduct	1	Conduct at work	1	Harassment of colleagues (2) Child protection (2) Financial mismanagement (1) Malpractice (1)	6
2006	Inappropriate conduct,(1) Child protection (1)	2	Conduct at work	1	Child protection	1
2005		0	Investigation by Social Services, Investigation	2	Disciplinary	1
2004	Pending police investigation	1	Child protection	1	Sexual assault of pupil (3) Harassment of colleagues (2) Child protection (1) Financial mismanagement (1) Physical assault of adults (1)	8
TOTAL		4		6		29

### Translating Services

**Mr Elliott** asked the Minister of Education Minister (i) how many pupils did not have English as their first language; (ii) how many translators her Department employs either full-time or part-time; and (iii) what is the projected cost of translating services, for the 2008/09 school year, in (a) primary; and (b) secondary schools. (AQW 7358/09)

**Minister of Education:** Tuairiscíodh san áireamh scoile Mhéan Fómhair 2008 go raibh 6,995 dalta nach raibh an Bhéarla mar phríomhtheanga acu.

The October 2008 school census recorded 6,995 newcomer pupils, who do not have English as their first language.

My Department does not employ translators or interpreters for newcomer pupils. Rather, it funds the regional Inclusion and Diversity Service (IDS), which was established by the five Education and Library Boards, to provide support to schools that have newcomer pupils.

Part of the support IDS provides involves supplying schools with access to interpreting services. IDS currently has contracts with four providers, namely Step (Dungannon), Flex (Jordanstown), Central Translations (Belfast) and NICEM Connect (Belfast). These organisations provide interpreters to assist teachers and parents of

newcomer children, for example during parent/teacher meetings. Schools are not charged for using this service, as the IDS pays the service providers directly.

The actual spend in the financial year 2008/09 was £48,000 on interpreting services. Half of the invoices that were presented for payment were for services provided to primary schools and the other half were for post-primary schools.

In addition to this, the IDS has developed a multi-lingual education support website for teachers and parents, which is available in English, Irish and the 15 most frequently identified languages that are currently spoken in the north of Ireland. Key letters and policy documents, which schools have to issue to parents, have been translated by the IDS into the languages available and are accessible to all teachers via the website.

### Teacher Retirement

**Mr Elliott** asked the Minister of Education how many teachers have left the profession before retirement age, in each year since 2000. (AQW 7359/09)

**Minister of Education:** Tá an t-eolas a iarradh mionsonraithe sa tábla thíos.

The information requested is detailed in the table below.

Year	Teachers Who Left
2000	551
2001	547
2002	533
2003	523
2004	523
2005	609
2006	604
2007	631
2008	627

### Children Suspended or Expelled from Schools

**Mr Ross** asked the Minister of Education how many children have been (i) suspended; or (ii) expelled from schools in each month, in the last school year, because of violence towards (a) other pupils; and (b) teachers. (AQW 7390/09)

**Minister of Education:** Bailíonn an Roinn staitisticí a bhaineann le fhionraí agus le díbirt ó gach Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne ar bhonn bhliantúil. Ní féidir an t-eolas a sholáthar ar bhonn mhíosúil. Táispeánann an tábla thíos líon na ndaltaí ar fionríodh iad nó ar díbríodh iad sa scoilbhliain 2007/08, agus ionsaí ar dhalta eile nó ar bhall fhoirne ab chúis leis an fhionraí nó an dhíbirt:

The Department collects statistics on suspensions and expulsions on an annual basis from each of the Education and Library Boards. It is not possible to provide this information by month. The table below shows the number of pupils suspended or expelled where the reason given was a physical attack on a pupil or school staff in the 2007/08 school year:

	Physical Attack on a Pupil	Physical Attack on Staff
Number of pupils expelled	5	1
Number of pupils suspended*	1,477	186

Notes:

\*denotes pupils suspended on at least one occasion

All figures relate to pupils undertaking Key Stage 1 to 4 in primary, post-primary and special schools.

## Education and Library Boards

**Mr O'Dowd** asked the Minister of Education what measures are in place to ensure the confidentiality of Education and Library Board and departmental business, if and when their former senior staff take up employment with political parties. (AQW 7397/09)

**Minister of Education:** Tá Cód Iompair ag na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne do gach ball foirne. Tá rannáin ar bhainistíocht eolais oifigiúil agus ar na freagrachtaí a bhíonn ag foireann i ndiaidh dóibh éirí as fostaíocht an Bhoird curtha san áireamh leis an Chód seo.

The Education and Library Boards have a Code of Conduct for all staff. This Code includes sections on managing official information and the responsibilities that remain with staff after they leave Board employment.

The Code states that Board staff owe a general duty of confidentiality to the employer at common law and that they are required to protect official information held in confidence. It also states that all notes, computer discs, tapes, memoranda, correspondence, records, documents and other tangible items made, used or held by staff during the course of their employment which relate directly, or indirectly, to the business and activities of the Board shall be and remain at all times the property of the Board. The section of the Code which relates to leaving employment states that staff should continue to observe their duty of confidentiality after they have left the employment of the Board.

Departmental letters of resignation or retirement refer to the fact that former civil servants continue to be bound by the provisions of the law that protects official information.

## DEPARTMENT FOR EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING

### Holylands

**Mr Newton** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what discussions he has had with the Minister of the Environment about how the Holylands area has developed into an area where 80% of the housing is multiple occupancy. (AQW 6683/09)

**Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey):** I have not discussed this particular issue with the The Minister of the Environment. However, a formal invitation will shortly be issued to the Minister inviting him to the stakeholder forum I have planned for 7 May in relation to the events of 17 March.

### North West Regional College

**Mr McQuillan** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if (i) he is aware of; or (ii) involved in resolving, the current impasse that exists between staff and the Director of the North West Regional College. (AQW 7096/09)

**Minister for Employment and Learning:** I am aware of this dispute between some members of the College staff and the Principal. However, it is the responsibility of the Governing Body of the College to deal with disputes of this kind and whilst my Department can offer the Governing Body such advice as it might request, ordinarily the Department would not seek to intervene.

In this instance, the Department has been assured by the Chair of the Governing Body that it is taking urgent steps to address the problem.

The Department will remain in contact with the Governing Body as it strives to bring this matter to a satisfactory conclusion.

### Further Education Colleges

**Mr Storey** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to confirm that no staff, made redundant following the Further Education College mergers, were re-employed by the colleges. (AQW 7102/09)



**Minister for Employment and Learning:** Thirty-seven of the 190 Further Education lecturers granted premature retirement in 2008/09, under the terms of the Teachers' Premature Retirement Compensation Scheme, have been re-employed by colleges in a part-time capacity, to meet short term business needs.

The Department has obtained assurances from Colleges that there has been no abuse of the terms of the Scheme and that the posts declared redundant have been permanently suppressed. Although there is no legal impediment to former lecturers applying for College positions, the Department of Education (DE) is considering the scope for applying further restrictions to the re-employment of teachers and lecturers who have benefited from the Scheme's provisions. My Department fully supports DE's intention in this regard.

## Ofqual NI

**Mr Storey** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what regulatory role the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) or the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) will have following the establishment of Ofqual NI as Vocational Qualifications (VQ) regulator. (AQW 7103/09)

**Minister for Employment and Learning:** When the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) is established in legislation, CCEA as an organisation will cease to exist and its functions will transfer to ESA, with the exception of the regulation of Vocational Qualifications. These regulatory functions will fall under the statutory remit of Ofqual when it is established, which is expected to be in January 2010.

When this happens, the ESA will be responsible for a range of non-regulatory, advisory, functions associated with vocational qualifications. These functions include keeping under review, advising, publishing and disseminating information relating to vocational qualifications. Instructions to Counsel are being prepared for the inclusion of clauses within the forthcoming NI Education Bill to enable the ESA to carry out these functions.

## Lifelong Learning UK

**Mr Storey** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) to list the Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) NI projects supported by his Department and (ii) to detail the costs and the agreed outcomes. (AQW 7104/09)

**Minister for Employment and Learning:** The Department is currently providing funding support to the Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) Sector Skills Council to support three projects. They are:

A Labour Market Information on Work Based Learning and Youth Work project is currently underway. This project is undertaking research to identify and address workforce skills gaps and to achieve a holistic Sector Skills Agreement covering all areas in the footprint. £74,350 funding is being provided.

A Continuing Professional Development Pilot project is currently underway. This project is enabling LLUK to carry out an assessment of a CPD online tool; to recruit participants for the testing process; and to complete a project report on the online CPD tool. £26,800 funding support is being provided.

A Developing of Application Guides for the uses of Technology project is underway which will produce guides to support those teachers, tutors and trainers working with the new professional standards. It has a primary focus on Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects. £29,720 is being provided.

## Modern Apprentices

**Mr Storey** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if he would (i) confirm that his Department intends to amend the regulations for modern apprentices attending Further Education Colleges; and (ii) outline his Department's plans to accommodate the large number of apprentices without full time employment. (AQW 7105/09)

**Minister for Employment and Learning:** Apprentices are in employment and as part of their training will attend a Further Education College or other training provider for at least one day per week, to study for the technical certificate and essential skills if required. The remainder of the week is spent with the business on work based learning. Unless demanded by industry I see no justification to consider changing this well tried and tested training model.

There are a number of interventions in place to help redundant apprentices to continue with their training. I am also giving active consideration to proposals which will encourage those people placed on short time working in the manufacturing sector, to gain qualifications whilst receiving a training allowance. Officials are also exploring full time training options for school leavers and those progressing from Training for Success' pre-apprenticeship provision. When this work is complete I will make the conclusions known.

### Stranmillis College and St Mary's College

**Mr Elliott** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many (i) applicants; and (ii) accepted students there were in (a) Stranmillis College; and (b) St Mary's College in 2008, broken down by course title and gender. (AQW 7107/09)

**Minister for Employment and Learning:** The following information has been provided by the respective institutions;

(i) Stranmillis University College;

Course	Applicants		Students Accepted in 2008	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
BEd Primary	149	480	10	68
BEd Post Primary	60	126	18	33
BA Early Childhood Studies	9	339	3	54
BSc Health & Leisure Studies	99	71	21	16
PGCE	8	153	1	14

(ii) St Mary's University College;

Course	Applicants		Students Accepted in 2008	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
BEd Primary	128	394	12	68
BEd Secondary	43	81	11	39
BA Liberal Arts	122	285	34	57

### Visteon Car Plant Workers

**Mr Butler** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline what his Department has done to date to address the future training needs of those workers made redundant at the Visteon car plant in Belfast. (AQW 7270/09)

**Minister for Employment and Learning:** My officials offered to provide an on-site redundancy service to Visteon workers with the administrator but were unable to gain access to the site. Copies of the DEL leaflet "We can help you back to work" and the addresses of their local offices were provided to the employees through the administrator. A significant number of employees have since been interviewed by Advisers where employment opportunities, training options, CV preparation and job-search were discussed. Some of these employees have already availed of Short Accredited Courses through Steps to Work.

The Further Education Sector is currently liaising with former Visteon staff and their Trade Union Unite, to determine what practical assistance the Colleges can offer to address their future training needs.

## Students Attending Universities Outside of Northern Ireland

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many students leave Northern Ireland to attend universities in other parts of the United Kingdom. (AQW 7300/09)

**Minister for Employment and Learning:** In the 2007/08 academic year there were 6,310 Northern Ireland domiciled first year enrolments at Great Britain Higher Education institutions.

**Source:** Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

**Notes:**

- (1) This figure has been rounded to the nearest 5.
- (2) This figure excludes NI domiciled first year enrolments at the Open University.
- (3) The latest available data are for 2007/08.

## MLA Representations

**Mr T Clarke** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many representations he has made to his Department as a constituency MLA, since he took up office. (AQW 7318/09)

**Minister for Employment and Learning:** In response to queries raised by constituents, my constituency office has approached the Department for Employment and Learning on my behalf on seven occasions since I took up my current position as Minister.

## Student Accommodation

**Mr A Maskey** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what provision is being made for student accommodation in anticipation of an expanding university student enrolment at, for example, Queen's University, Belfast. (AQW 7375/09)

**Minister for Employment and Learning:** The Queen's University of Belfast has advised me that it regularly reviews its student accommodation provision as an integral part of its Estate Strategy. The University has invested some £45m to date in creating the Elms Village and a planning application, for 260 postgraduate and international student bed spaces at the Elms Village, has recently been submitted.

## DEPARTMENT OF ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

### Wind Turbines

**Mr K Robinson** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans her Department has to offer incentives to farmers and landowners who own or install wind turbines, to help meet the European Union's Renewable Directive targets for 2020. (AQW 7054/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs A Foster):** All generators of electricity from eligible renewable sources, including wind, can avail of the support provided by the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation (NIRO). In the case of micro-generators, this support has been doubled since 1 April 2009 with the introduction of banding arrangements to the NIRO.

### Waste Incinerator at Glenavy

**Mr McLaughlin** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in relation to Rose Energy's proposal for a chicken waste incinerator at Glenavy, to detail (i) what funding it has requested from her Department; (ii) what funding, if any, has her Department considered; and (iii) the time-scale for funding decisions. (AQW 7347/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** (i) Rose Energy originally submitted their proposal for support under the DETI administered Environment and Renewable Energy Fund (EREF). The company was seeking £16m of assistance towards the commission and operating of the waste incinerator. Its application was, however, declined. The company subsequently approached Invest NI for support.

- (ii) Invest NI is currently considering an application for support towards the project and has requested revised costings for the project. I am not in a position to disclose an amount under consideration at this juncture. Any support package would be subject to Invest NI's appraisal and approval processes.
- (iii) The timescale for any funding decisions will depend on the availability of project information and on the time required to finalise an appraisal and obtain any necessary approvals.

### Waste Incinerator at Glenavy

**Mr McLaughlin** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in light of her announcement on 3 April 2009, with regards to the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation (NIRO), if she could detail what impact, if any, this will have on the possibility of Rose Energy receiving funding from her Department for its proposed waste incinerator at Glenavy. (AQW 7350/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** Invest NI is currently considering the provision of a package of support in respect of this project but, as yet, no decision has been taken on the extent of the support, if any, that will be offered.

The availability of support under the NIRO is a material consideration in the appraisal process and the potential income from it will, as in any business case, be taken into account in determining the extent of any funding to be provided by Invest NI.

My 3 April 2009 announcement of changes to the operation of the NIRO, which has been in place since 2005, does not have any impact on the possibility of Rose Energy receiving funding for the project.

### Waste Incinerator at Glenavy

**Mr McLaughlin** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if she has held any discussions with Rose Energy concerning subsidising operational costs on an ongoing basis if its application for a chicken waste incinerator at Glenavy were to receive planning approval. (AQW 7351/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** As The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment I have held no discussions with Rose Energy.

### Visteon

**Ms J McCann** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if there has been any success in sourcing new markets for the car parts made at the Visteon plant in West Belfast. (AQW 7401/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** Invest NI officials explored the potential for developing new markets on a number of occasions over the years. No opportunities were identified.

On 31st March 2009 Visteon UK Ltd filed for administration because the UK manufacturing plants had accumulated losses approaching £800 million and because the loss making situation could not be turned around. This resulted in the employees at Belfast being made redundant.

### Senior Civil Servant Bonuses

**Mr McGlone** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much was paid in bonuses to senior Civil Servants in her Department in (i) 2003/04; (ii) 2004/05; (iii) 2005/06; (iv) 2006/07; and (v) 2007/08. (AQW 7516/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment paid the following in bonuses to Senior Civil Servants:



2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
£32,500	£44,750	£40,500	£56,000	£69,500

(Note: The Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland is included in the figures)

## DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT

### Planning Service Management Board

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of the Environment what legal advice the Planning Service Management Board has sought in relation to his comments on the refusal of the Aurora planning application. (AQW 7036/09)

**Minister of the Environment (Mr S Wilson):** Any legal advice of this nature if sought would be confidential in line with normal protocol.

### Planning Approval

**Mr Elliott** asked the Minister of the Environment how many homes in rural areas do not comply with the conditions stipulated in their planning approvals in relation to integration of the developments into the countryside through tree planting and landscaping or the retention of trees and hedges. (AQW 7043/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** My Department does not know how many do not comply with such conditions. However, those brought to my Department's attention will be subject to investigation and enforcement action, where appropriate.

To provide figures for the information requested would require manual checking of files which is not only disproportionate in terms of time and cost but would result in un-validated statistics being released. This would be contrary to the Code of Practice for the release of official statistics published in January 2009 ahead of the enactment of the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 on 1 April 2009.

My Department has been working to improve the recording of enforcement cases on the IT system, including modifying the existing database and the inputting of data is ongoing, but this will take some time. When this exercise is complete certain data validated statistics will be available.

### Planning Regulations in Rural Areas

**Mr Elliott** asked the Minister of the Environment how much is spent each year on enforcement of planning regulations in rural areas in relation to housing developments that have not complied with the conditions of their planning approvals. (AQW 7044/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** The total cost of enforcement of planning control to the Agency from 2005 until 2008 was £4,613,658.

My Department does not have costs broken down in terms of the type of enforcement cases.

To provide accurate figures for the information requested would require a manual search of our enforcement files and an estimation of the total staff time which is not only disproportionate in terms of time and costs but would result in un-validated statistics being released. This would be contrary to the Code of Practice for the release of official statistics published in January 2009 ahead of enactment of the Statistics and Registration Act 2007 on 1 April 2009.

### Planning Approval

**Mr Elliott** asked the Minister of the Environment what action is required to introduce a bond scheme for ensuring that building sites in the countryside are completed to the standard specified in their planning

permission in relation to (i) retention of existing vegetation; and (ii) new landscaping and tree planting.

(AQW 7045/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** Such a scheme could only be put in place following new primary and subordinate legislation. However, my Department has no plans to consider new legislation in relation to this matter.

### Planning Approval

**Mr Elliott** asked the Minister of the Environment what measures are in place to ensure that new rural dwellings comply with the conditions of their planning approval.

(AQW 7046/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** Further to my answer to AQW/7047, my Department has enforcement powers set out in Article 76A of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991. This allows my Department to issue a Breach of Condition Notice where planning permission has been granted subject to conditions, but one or more of these conditions has not been complied with. This notice requires the recipient to secure compliance with the conditions specified in the notice.

It is important to note that my Department has a general discretion to take enforcement action against a breach of planning control when it regards it as expedient to do so and will attempt to resolve such cases through negotiations before taking formal enforcement action.

### Planning Approval

**Mr Elliott** asked the Minister of the Environment what enforcement penalties are used by his Department in relation to rural housing developments that do not comply with the conditions of their planning approvals.

(AQW 7047/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** Article 76A of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 allows my Department to issue a Breach of Condition Notice where planning permission has been granted subject to conditions, but one or more of these conditions has not been complied with. This notice requires the recipient of the notice to secure compliance with the conditions specified in the notice. Failure to secure compliance is an offence.

Under Article 76A (12) of the 1991 Order, anyone found guilty of such an offence may be liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding £1000. My Department does not impose penalties in any circumstance; that is the responsibility of the courts.

### Review of Public Administration

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the anticipated timetables for each piece of the legislation required for the implementation of the review of public administration.

(AQW 7089/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** My Department has identified its legislative requirements and is in the process of taking forward 3 proposed Bills to facilitate local government reform proposals:

- The Local Government Bill (formerly the Local Government (Contracts and Compulsory Purchase) Bill;
- The Local Government (Finance) Bill; and
- The Local Government (Reorganisation) Bill.

Policy approval has been obtained from the Executive in respect of two of the three Bills - the Local Government Bill, and the Local Government (Finance) Bill. It is anticipated that these will be introduced to the Assembly in June 2009 and January 2010, respectively.

Legislative proposals for the Local Government Bill (Reorganisation Bill) are subject to consideration by the Executive and therefore, as indicated in my previous reply of 21 January 2009 (AQW 3809/09), it would not be appropriate or possible to pre-empt this consideration at this stage.

## Noise Pollution

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of the Environment what publicity his Department plans to use to combat the problem of noise pollution in domestic cases. (AQW 7090/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** My Department ran an award winning Noise Awareness advertising campaign in 2005 and 2006 with the message “To loud”. The campaign aim was to highlight the issue of noise and make the public aware of what they can do and who to contact, if they believe themselves to be noise sufferers.

A further 3 year campaign is under consideration which, subject to resources, would commence following the implementation of the RPA in 2011.

In addition my Department has for the last 5 years published the annual Noise Complaint Statistics for Northern Ireland report, which presents the number of noise complaints each of the 26 councils have received and the level of legal action that has been instigated. The latest of these reports covering the period April 2007 – March 2008 was published in December 2008 and circulated to all district councils and to the various press agencies.

A number of noise information leaflets have also been published for wider public circulation: “Bothered by Noise there’s no need to suffer” contains a wide range of information about what can be done about noise; and “Is your dog barking too much?” provides advice and guidance on how to deal with noise disturbance from barking dogs.

Both leaflets and further information on noise can be viewed on the Departments website.

## Draft Planning Policy Statement 4

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of the Environment when draft Planning Policy Statement 4 will be formally adopted. (AQW 7116/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** I submitted PPS 4 in January for Executive clearance and will issue it when that clearance is received.

## Planning Service

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of the Environment, in relation to applications to the Planning Service, to detail (i) what consideration is given to the economic benefits of projects; (ii) if his Department intends to introduce a policy to allow economic benefits and timescales to be taken into account; and (iii) the impact an economic benefits policy would have on planning applications. (AQW 7172/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** The economic benefits of a development project are one of a number of material considerations which must be fully assessed in the processing of a planning application.

I have asked officials to look at how we can give greater weight to economic considerations when it comes to dealing with planning applications, whether through a revision or addenda to PPS 1 or through a Ministerial Statement.

## Tourism Planning Policy

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of the Environment if his Department is working on a draft tourism planning policy statement and, if so, (i) what is its progress; (ii) when the statement will be implemented; and (iii) what impact this would have on planning applications. (AQW 7173/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** The total cost of enforcement of planning control to the Agency from 2005 until 2008 was £4,613,658.

My Department does not have costs broken down in terms of the type of enforcement cases.

To provide accurate figures for the information requested would require a manual search of our enforcement files and an estimation of the total staff time which is not only disproportionate in terms of time and costs but would result in un-validated statistics being released. This would be contrary to the Code of Practice for the

release of official statistics published in January 2009 ahead of enactment of the Statistics and Registration Action 2007 on 1 April 2009.

### Lough Neagh

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of the Environment if his Department will examine future options for the ownership of the bed and soil of Lough Neagh, including possible public or local stakeholder based ownership. (AQW 7217/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** I am satisfied that the environmental assets and biodiversity of Lough Neagh are adequately protected through statutory designations and other mechanisms. I therefore have no plans to pursue the acquisition of the bed and soil of the Lough.

### European Recycling Targets

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of Councils meeting their European recycling targets. (AQW 7261/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** Article 11(2) of the revised Waste Framework Directive (WFD), which came into force on 12 December 2008 and is due to be transposed into national law by 12 December 2010, specifically establishes the following target for household and similar wastes:

- by 2020, the preparing for re-use and the recycling of waste materials such as paper, metal, plastic and glass from households and possibly from other origins as far as these waste streams are similar to waste from households, shall be increased to a minimum of overall 50 % by weight.

There has been a steady increase in Northern Ireland's recycling rate for household waste in recent years from 4.9% in 1998/99 to 31.9% in 2007/08. In view of this, I am confident that continuing progress can be made towards achieving the 2020 target as set out in the revised WFD.

### Drinks Manufacturers

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the broken glass problem in towns; and if any work is underway to persuade drinks manufacturers to switch to plastic or toughened glass. (AQW 7265/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** Broken glass, if left lying on the ground, is obviously a potentially hazardous form of litter. Litter in all of its forms continues to be a concern for many people and I appreciate the good work by our Councils to keep our land and roads, so far as is practicable, clear and clean. My Department does not have any evidence to suggest that broken glass is a significant problem or one that is causing particular difficulties for Councils.

My Department is not aware of any work under way to persuade drinks manufacturers to switch to plastic or toughened glass.

### River Pollution Incidents

**Mr Ford** asked the Minister of the Environment how many high severity river pollution incidents occurred in 2007 and 2008, and how many of these resulted in a prosecution. (AQO 2608/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** In 2007 there were 22 high severity pollution incidents and in 2008 there were 20 high severity incidents.

Only cases where the polluter has been identified and which are not subject to Crown Immunity can be considered for prosecution. In 2007, 11 of the 22 cases met these criteria. Following the application of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency enforcement policy, 9 of these incidents were passed by the Agency to the Public Prosecution Service (PPS). One case has since been withdrawn by the PPS and the remainder are at various stages of the prosecution process. The final outcomes however have not yet been determined.



In 2008, 8 of the 20 cases met the prosecution criteria. The case files for 3 of these incidents have been passed to PPS and prosecution action is planned by the Agency in another 5 cases.

At present, 8 of the high severity incidents which occurred during 2007-2008, and for which the polluter has yet to be identified, are still under active investigation by Agency.

### Planning Policy Statement 18

**Dr Farry** asked the Minister of the Environment when he will publish PPS 18. (AQO 2612/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** Subject to Executive clearance, I intend to publish PPS18 in June.

### Road Safety

**Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of the Environment what assessment he has made of the success of road safety campaigns carried out by his Department over the last year. (AQO 2613/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** The effectiveness of each road safety campaign is assessed annually through independent research to determine the effects on public attitudes and behaviours.

In the last year campaigns have focused on drink driving, speeding, drug driving, seatbelts, mobile phones, motorbikes and inattention. The latest research results show that the various campaigns have achieved levels of influence ranging between 87% and 100%, indicating that road safety advertising has been influential in improving driver attitudes and in producing positive change in behaviour. The industry norm for levels of influence is 30%.

My Department uses casualty statistics and research results to develop a media plan at the beginning of each financial year to target all road safety campaigns to where they are most needed and likely to be most effective.

### Planning Service

**Mr Cobain** asked the Minister of the Environment if he is committed to transferring the functions of the Planning Service to the new councils in 2011. (AQO 2614/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** In accordance with the review of public administration decisions, I remain committed to transferring the relevant planning functions to the new district councils. The transfer of these planning functions is a key element of my wider programme of reform of the planning system. However, as Members will be aware, there have been delays in getting the planning reform proposals cleared by the Executive and published for consultation, which means the timetable for delivering on the legislative programme for planning reform, including the transfer of planning functions to local government, by 2011, is now in jeopardy.

### Nuclear Energy: Sellafield

**Ms Anderson** asked the Minister of the Environment, what discussions he has had with Ministers in the Republic of Ireland and in Britain on environmental concerns in relation to the Sellafield Power Plant. (AQO 2615/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** I have not had any discussions with my counterparts in Great Britain or with Ministers in the Republic of Ireland on any environmental concerns in relation to the Sellafield site.

### Road Safety

**Mr Storey** asked the Minister of the Environment what assessment his Department has made of the total number of drivers who have been involved in road traffic collisions within three years of passing their driving test, over the last five years. (AQO 2616/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** It is not current PSNI practice to record how long a driver has been qualified at the time of a road traffic collision (RTC), so I am unable to provide precisely the data requested. However, we

do know that around 75% of drivers pass their tests between the ages of 17 and 24 and therefore we can assume that the majority of drivers who have passed their tests within the last three years will be in this age group. Our research shows that 17 to 24 year olds comprise less than 16% of the driving population in Northern Ireland (as at December 2006). Out of 20,911 RTCs involving a car or light goods vehicle in the five-year period 2003-07, a total of 5,471 (26%) were the responsibility of a driver aged 17 to 24 years.

### **Planning: Retail Development**

**Mr Savage** asked the Minister of the Environment to outline his planning policy on retail development; and for his assessment of the length of time it is taking for PPS5 to be revised, updated and adopted as policy. (AQO 2617/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** Draft PPS 5 was originally published by the Department for Regional Development in July 2006 for a four month consultation period. My Department assumed responsibility for PPS 5 fifteen months ago, in January 2008 and work has been ongoing since then to update and revise the PPS. It is difficult to provide detail of the content of the PPS, or a definitive date for its adoption, pending the outcome of a judicial challenge which was heard in the High Court in January 2009, the judgement for which has yet to be handed down.

### **Programme for Government**

**Mr Elliott** asked the Minister of the Environment what discussions he has had with the First Minister and the deputy First Minister in relation to the Programme for Government. (AQO 2618/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** I have taken part in Executive discussions about the Programme for Government including consideration of a framework designed to ensure delivery of the key goals and PSA targets.

### **Local Government**

**Mr Ross** asked the Minister of the Environment whether he intends to introduce legislation to prevent MLAs from also being councillors after May 2011. (AQO 2619/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** I do not intend to legislate on this matter as I consider that it should be up to political parties to decide if their members should be allowed to seek election to more than one body. Ultimately, of course, this is a matter on which the electorate will decide.

### **National Park Authority**

**Mr Bresland** asked the Minister of the Environment what assurance he can give that any National Park Authority will not be the Planning Service. (AQO 2620/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** I will outline my ideas about National Parks to the Executive in due course.

In the meantime, I can reassure the Member that I do not intend to propose that any National Park Authority would be the Planning Service.

### **Planning Policy Statement 4**

**Mr I McCrea** asked the Minister of the Environment for an update of progress with PPS 4 (Draft): Industry, Business and Distribution. (AQO 2621/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** I look forward to publishing Revised PPS 4, now called Planning and Economic Development, following Executive clearance.

## Planning Applications

**Mr Butler** asked the Minister of the Environment to provide an assessment of how effective the new streamlined planning application process has been in improving the timescale for planning applications receiving approval. (AQO 2622/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** The new Streamlined Consultation Scheme has been highly effective in improving the timescale for issuing approvals on streamlined planning applications. The current average timescale for issuing approvals has reduced to 24 working days which represents a dramatic improvement on our PSA 22 target for minor applications which currently stands at 80% in 18 weeks (90 working days).

As streamlining beds in throughout all Council areas, I fully expect our overall performance against the PSA target to substantially improve from its current level of approximately 70% in 18 weeks. Indeed there are already indications that the Streamlined Scheme efficiencies are helping to improve the timescales in other categories of applications.

Indirectly the Scheme has also been very helpful in developing partnership working arrangements between the Planning Service and the Councils and is also helping build the capacity of local councils in preparation for the proposed return of planning powers under RPA.

## Driving Tests

**Mr Simpson** asked the Minister of the Environment what measures his Department has in place to ensure that a uniform standard of driving is required to pass the driving test at each test centre. (AQO 2623/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** All driving examiners throughout the UK are trained at the Cardington driving training establishment in Bedfordshire which is run by the Driving Standards Agency (DSA).

To ensure standards are maintained and delivered in a correct and consistent manner DVA carry out quality assurance checks on all driving examiners by accompanying them during some tests. In addition DVA has a rolling programme of refresher training, during which trainers carry out role play, to ensure standards are maintained and examiners knowledge and skills are current and consistent.

## National Parks

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of the Environment if his Department has identified any areas which could be potential National Parks. (AQO 2624/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** I have yet to discuss with Executive colleagues whether or not we might establish national parks in Northern Ireland. If it is decided to proceed, the first step would be to introduce new enabling legislation to set out a framework for establishing National Parks. I have no plans at this stage for any specific area.

## Planning Applications

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the situation regarding the backlog of planning applications. (AQO 2625/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** Very good progress has already been made in reducing the number of live planning applications. I am pleased to say that from April to December 2008, over 15,000 applications were received, but over 20,000 applications were processed to decision or withdrawal over the same period. This builds on a similar pattern over the previous 2 years which means that the number of live cases has been steadily reduced.

In addition processing times related to PSA targets are continuing to show a month by month improvement and are well on track for achieving the 2011 target.

## DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

### Capital Expenditure Projects

**Mr Savage** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to list the capital expenditure projects; and how much will be spent on each project in the financial year 2009/10. (AQW 5427/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr N Dodds):** The information you are seeking is not held centrally within the Department of Department of Finance and Personnel.

Capital investment covers a wide range of expenditure and thousands of individual projects. The information routinely provided by Departments in financial monitoring returns does not therefore separately identify each individual project.

I would therefore advise you to obtain the information directly from the relevant Departments.

Regarding my own Department, DFP Properties Division has indicated that it has planned to incur expenditure across a number of capital projects during the financial year 2009/10. These projects are listed at Annex A.

You may also wish to note that work on the ISNI Information Portal is underway and, when available, it will provide the public, and in particular the construction industry, with access to specific information relating to public sector contracts.

ANNEX A

#### DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

AQW 5427/09

#### CAPITAL INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT - TOTAL EXPENDITURE 2009/10

#### DFP – PROPERTIES DIVISION

Project Title	Location	Total Capital Investment Value £m	Total Estimated Spend 2009/10 £m
Goodwood House	Belfast	£0.55	£0.55
Stables Stormont	Belfast	£0.15	£0.15
PD fit out Causeway Exchange	Belfast	£1.44	£1.44
Causeway reception	Belfast	£1.32	£1.32
New Roads Building Cookstown	Cookstown	£0.49	£0.49
Foyle JBO	L'derry	£1.00	£1.00
Capital Projects with individual values less than £1m.	Various	£0.41	£0.41
<b>Departmental Total Estimated Spend 09/10</b>		<b>£5.35</b>	<b>£5.35</b>

### Capital Infrastructure Projects

**Mr Savage** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to his answer to AQW4873/09, (i) how much is being spent on each capital infrastructure project; (ii) what the total spend is; and (iii) what new monies will be injected into the schemes. (AQW 5428/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel:** The information you are seeking is not held centrally within the Department of Department of Finance and Personnel.

Capital investment covers a wide range of expenditure and thousands of individual projects. The information routinely provided by Departments in financial monitoring returns does not therefore separately identify each individual project.

I would therefore advise you to obtain the information directly from the relevant Departments.

Regarding my own Department, DFP Properties Division has indicated that it will incur expenditure across a number of capital projects during the financial year 2008/09. These projects are listed at Annex A.



You may also wish to note that work on the ISNI Information Portal is underway and, when available, it will provide the public, and in particular the construction industry, with access to specific information relating to public sector contracts.

The funding for the significant capital investment programme, delivered during the financial year 2008/09, was that allocated in the Budget 2008-11, with additional funding available from the Executive to allocate during the year, arising from the £11.2 million from the 2008 UK Budget and Pre-Budget reports, as well as access to our capital EYF stock and the use of current expenditure.

ANNEX A

## DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

AQW 5428/09

## CAPITAL INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT - TOTAL EXPENDITURE 2008/09

## DFP - PROPERTIES DIVISION

Project Title	Location	Total Capital Investment Value £m	Total Estimated Spend 2008/09 £m
Ballymena JBO	Ballymena	£2.18	£2.18
Andersonstown JBO	Belfast	£1.41	£1.41
Lesley Exchange	Belfast	£0.55	£0.55
Academy House	Ballymena	£1.54	£1.54
Bradley Thallon House	N'townards	£0.43	£0.43
Killymeal House	Belfast	£2.88	£2.88
Stables, Stormont	Belfast	£0.75	£0.75
Biomass renewables	Various	£0.99	£0.99
Calvert House	Belfast	£0.38	£0.38
Causeway Exchange	Belfast	£1.66	£1.66
Goodwood House	Belfast	£0.08	£0.08
<b>Departmental Total Estimated Spend 08/09</b>		<b>£12.84</b>	<b>£12.84</b>

## Senior Civil Servant Bonuses

**Mr McGlone** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much was paid in bonuses to senior Civil Servants in each Department in (i) 2003/04; (ii) 2004/05; (iii) 2005/06; (iv) 2006/07; and (v) 2007/08.

(AQW 6506/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel:** The total amount paid in non-consolidated bonus payments to Senior Civil Servants in the Department of Finance and Personnel in respect of performance years 2003/2004 through to 2007/2008 is as shown in the table below. The table also includes the number of payments made.

## DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Performance Year	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Total number of Bonuses	23	31	36	33	36
Total Value of Bonuses	£99,250	£139,250	£206,000	£222,500	£273,000

Please contact each individual Department for their respective non-consolidated bonus award statistics.

### Bonus Payments

**Mr McGlone** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how bonus payments are calculated; and how they are provided for in each Department's budget. (AQW 7050/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel:** The proportion of the Senior Civil Service pay bill to be used for non-consolidated performance bonus payments in the Northern Ireland is determined by the independent Senior Salaries Review Body and any supplementary guidance from the Cabinet Office. The parameters recommended are then applied in the development of a range of bonus levels incorporated into the annual Senior Civil Service Pay Strategy for approval by the The Minister for Finance and Personnel. Departments are then advised of an indicative quota for each bonus level. In 2008 the recommended quantum available for non-consolidated bonus payments was 8.6% of the Senior Civil Service pay bill, which is approximately 2.3% of the total civil service pay bill.

The annual increase to the Senior Civil Service pay bill, including the provision of non-consolidated bonus payments, is provided for in the management of respective annual Departmental budgets.

This answer is in respect of Senior Civil Service non-consolidated bonus payments only.

### Civil Service

**Mr Newton** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel the average salary of full-time employees in the Civil Service, excluding all non-departmental bodies and quango's. (AQW 7233/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel:** The average salary of full time employees in the Northern Ireland Civil Service as at 1 April 2009 is not yet available. The most up to date figure therefore, is that provided in my response to AQW 6289/09.

### Relocation of Public Sector Jobs

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the status of the Bain Report into the Relocation of Public Sector jobs; and what discussions have taken place in the Executive about its recommendations and implementation. (AQW 7264/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel:** I have recently circulated a paper to Executive Ministers containing proposals on the way forward for the relocation of public sector jobs. In developing the proposals I have considered the views of other Ministers, the Committee for Finance and Personnel, and MLAs who have contributed to the Assembly debates on the matter. I hope that the paper will be scheduled shortly for discussion at an Executive meeting.

### Quangos and Public Bodies

**Ms Anderson** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to list all Quangos and Public Bodies that are currently operating. (AQW 7295/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel:** For the purposes of this question, I have included all public bodies sponsored by Northern Ireland departments, which are listed in the annual public bodies report.

The latest published information is contained in [http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/public\\_bodies\\_2008-6.doc](http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/public_bodies_2008-6.doc). A copy is also available in the NI Assembly library.

A further report, which will include details of public bodies as at 31 March 2009, is due to be published at the end of August.

### Planning Service

**Lord Browne** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to provide an assessment of the work carried out by the Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit, in conjunction with the Department of the Environment, on the Planning Service. (AQO 2631/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel:** PEDU started work in September last year, in close collaboration with Planning Service, looking at ways of improving planning processing times to deliver against challenging PSA targets. Eight weeks later, PEDU presented its findings and recommendations to the Environment Minister and I, and the Planning Service responded by setting out an Action Plan outlining how it would address these findings.

The Environment Minister and I met recently to review progress on implementing the Action Plan and assess its impact on performance. Both he and I were very impressed by the level of progress which Planning Service had made on implementing key actions which in some cases had exceeded the timescales anticipated by the Review. I firmly

believe that the action which the Service has taken will deliver real improvement in performance against the PSA targets.

### Business Rates

**Mr Irwin** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to provide an update on the work of the Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit. (AQO 2633/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel:** PEDU was established as a means to help ensure delivery of the commitments made in the Programme for Government and Budget. To this end, PEDU has led my department's work, in conjunction with OFMDFM, on the development of a robust framework to monitor and drive effective delivery against PSA targets. I am happy to record that this framework was agreed by the Executive in March.

Late last year PEDU completed its first substantive delivery review in collaboration with the Planning Service. This was a successful piece of work which I am confident will deliver measurable improvements in performance on key PSA processing targets in the short term.

As I recently announced, PEDU has also commenced a review in collaboration with Land and Property Services (LPS). The Review team is currently framing its conclusions and is due to report back to me this month with recommendations, where necessary, aimed at enhancing the capacity of the agency to meet the challenges it faces. Alongside this, LPS will present me with an action plan outlining how it plans to address the Review's findings.

### Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit

**Mr B McCrea** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how the Chancellor's budget has affected Northern Ireland's budget in the current comprehensive spending review period. (AQO 2634/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel:** The funding available to the Executive will be reduced by £122.8 million as a consequence of the £5 billion increase in efficiency savings for UK departments announced in the Chancellor's budget. The potential impact has been offset by the allocation of £116.4 million in additional Barnett consequential.

### Executive Capital Programme 2009-2010

**Mr O'Loan** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the financial risks in implementing this year's capital programme of the Executive. (AQO 2635/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel:** The primary responsibility for the delivery of the Executive's capital investment plans lies with the individual departments concerned.

In this context, the main financial risk is that departments are unable to secure sufficient value for money in the procurement of capital projects, particularly in the context of lower construction price inflation.

### Procurement Task Group

**Mr Spratt** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to give an assessment of the work of the Procurement Task Group. (AQO 2636/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel:** In response to the economic downturn, I announced the formation of a Construction Industry Forum for Northern Ireland (CIFNI) - Procurement Task Group in the Assembly on the 15 December 2008. The Task Group held its inaugural meeting on the 17 December 2008 and has since met on five further occasions.

The Task Group was constituted to develop practical principles to be applied to future construction procurement activity undertaken by all bodies governed by Northern Ireland Public Procurement Policy. In particular, the Task Group has considered how to:-

- further develop the partnership between Government and the construction industry;
- facilitate the delivery of projects to the marketplace as quickly as possible;
- deliver best value for money projects that meet the sustainability objectives set out in the Programme for Government; and
- provide wider stakeholders with confidence that the procurement process is modern, robust and fair.

The Task Group has produced an interim report and I attended a meeting of the Construction Industry Forum on 9 April 2009 to hear, at first hand, the progress made.

The interim report includes seven key principles to be applied to future public sector construction procurement. The principles aim to:

- enhance the visibility of Government construction procurement opportunities to facilitate industry workload planning;
- provide recurrent opportunities for enterprises of all sizes;
- maximise the opportunities for enterprises to benefit from public sector contracts through participation in the supply chain;
- reduce the cost and timescale of the pre-qualification process for selection of tender short-lists;
- reduce tender bid costs;
- deliver projects that represent best value for money; and
- reduce the likelihood of a legal challenge.

In addition to the seven principles, the interim report includes some 25 actions with dates for implementation. Whilst some of these actions can be introduced with immediate effect, it is acknowledged that full implementation of some will require further detailed development work. It is therefore proposed that a number of CIFNI Working Groups be established to complete this further work and that the actions be introduced in an incremental manner and in full by 31 December 2009.

The final report from the CIFNI - Procurement Task Group will be tabled at the Procurement Board, on 7 May 2009.

As Chair of the Procurement Board, I will be instructing the Central Procurement Directorate and other Centres of Procurement Expertise to ensure that all Government construction clients comply with the principles of construction procurement established by the CIFNI – Procurement Task Group.

### Retired Civil Servants

**Mr Cobain** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail his Department's policy on retired civil servants being re-employed by his Department as consultants. (AQO 2637/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel:** DFP's latest guidance on the Use of Consultants states that using retired civil servants as external consultants can offer good value for money. It recognises that this may be an appropriate route if a quick study is needed and where there might be concerns over security. Any appointment of a retired civil servant should, as with all public expenditure, be made on value for money grounds.

### Pleural Plaques

**Mr Ross** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what action he intends to take to support people who are diagnosed with pleural plaques. (AQO 2638/09)



**Minister of Finance and Personnel:** In *Johnston v NEI International Combustion Ltd* and conjoined cases [2007] the House of Lords ruled that asymptomatic pleural plaques did not constitute damage for the purpose of the law of negligence and were, therefore, no longer actionable as a personal injury.

My Department is responsible for reviewing the implications for Northern Ireland of the House of Lords' decision and I am aware of the concerns which have arisen in light of it. As part of the review process my Department issued a consultation paper which sought comments on a range of options from legislation to overturn the decision to the introduction of a no-fault compensation scheme. The consultation period closed on 12 January 2009 and I am currently considering the responses made and the available policy options, with a view to agreeing the way forward.

### Senior Civil Service: Remuneration

**Mr A Maskey** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if he will consider a review of senior civil service remuneration from the Head of Civil Service down (Circa 200 posts), in light of public concern and controversy over the level of salaries and bonuses. (AQO 2639/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel:** I have already asked my officials to examine how the recommendations of a fundamental review of the Senior Civil Service workforce and reward strategy in Whitehall, published earlier this year and known as the Normington Review, will be taken forward and to assess their applicability to Northern Ireland. My officials will be engaging with the Cabinet Office on the work required to flesh out the recommendations emerging from the review.

### Capital Projects

**Mr T Clarke** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what steps his Department is taking to ensure that local construction firms benefit from opportunities presented by major capital projects. (AQO 2640/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel:** Government recognizes the important contribution that small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) make to the NI economy. It is estimated that some 98% of construction works contracts awarded by Departments in the financial year 2008-09 were won by local firms, many of which are SMEs.

Public procurement is however, subject to the EU Treaty, which requires freedom of movement, transparency and non-discrimination on the basis of nationality. Public sector buyers therefore cannot restrict their purchases of construction works and services to favour local firms.

However, I established the Construction Industry Forum – Procurement Task Group in December 2008 to agree the principles to be applied to future construction procurement. The interim report of the Task Group, which I reviewed at a meeting of the Forum on the 9 April 2009, places particular emphasis on:-

- enhancing the visibility of opportunities to all construction firms;
- ensuring that there are recurrent opportunities for construction firms to bid; and
- maximising the opportunities for construction firms, of all sizes, to benefit from public sector contracts through participation within supply chains

Centres of Procurement Expertise (CoPEs) are already required to advertise all construction procurement opportunities in excess of designated thresholds (£5k for construction professional services and £30k for construction works) on their websites and in the local Press. Where the value of a contract is in excess of the EU thresholds (£90k for construction professional services and £3.5m for construction works), it must also be published in the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU).

The Procurement Board, which I Chair, approved the use of the eSourcing NI web portal as a single sourcing tool for all CoPEs. eSourcingNI offers all registered construction firms “24/7” access to view all procurement opportunities and facilitates the submission of electronic tenders. In my Department, the Central Procurement Directorate has been using eSourcing NI since May of last year. All CoPEs will be using the system by 2010.

In addition, the ISNI information website has been developed to provide the public, and in particular the construction industry, with specific project information drawn from the Delivery Tracking System. The website will include details of ISNI projects including their type, location, value and delivery timescales.

Government also recognises that not all organisations will contract directly with the public sector and has introduced a requirement into all new public sector construction contracts, since December 2008, for main contractors to publish opportunities within their supply chains on their websites and/or in the local Press.

The CIFNI Procurement Task Group interim report recommends the establishment of a Working Group to:-

- examine how procurement and contract strategies can be structured to provide further recurrent opportunities for enterprises of all sizes to bid for construction related public sector contracts; and
- examine how the effectiveness and efficiency of current pre-qualification and tendering processes can be improved to reduce bidding costs and introduce a greater degree of standardisation and streamlining of procurement processes.

I believe that the activities outlined above, activities driven by the Central Procurement Directorate in DFP, demonstrates the commitment of my Department, and other Government construction clients, to ensure that construction firms, have a higher degree of visibility of construction procurement opportunities and that they will be able to fully engage in the take up of these opportunities through modern, efficient and cost effective construction procurement processes.

### Irish Language

**Mr Butler** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline what steps his Department has taken to provide Irish-language facilities under the obligations laid down in the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages. (AQO 2641/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel:** The Member asked the same question in December 2008 (AQW 3462/09). Since then the situation has remained unchanged and I have nothing further to add.

### Capital Projects: Tracking System

**Ms J McCann** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to provide an update on the tracking system for capital projects which was to be rolled out in August 2008. (AQO 2642/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel:** The Strategic Investment Board (SIB) and the Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) have developed a Delivery Tracking System (DTS) for major ISNI projects. The DTS provides a platform, to record delivery progress of major projects from pre-tender to completion.

The DTS was rolled out to all Departments and related public bodies in October 2008. This followed substantive completion of the technical design of the system by SIB, and initial training of public sector users.

The information held on the DTS will be of great benefit to Departments and the construction industry – particularly as we work together to help protect jobs and businesses in the current economic climate.

The ISNI website, or Information Portal, has been developed to provide the general public, and in particular the construction industry, with detailed, up to date information drawn from the DTS. Information held includes departmental ownership, the number and nature of projects, timeline for delivery and project costs.

A ‘soft launch’ of the ISNI Information Portal has taken place, and target construction industry stakeholders, including some members of the Construction Employers Federation, have provided feedback to SIB on the content and functionality of the website. It is expected that constructive feedback will facilitate any necessary refinement of the website ahead of its formal launch.

Over 500 projects are currently logged on the DTS. A number of departments are currently reviewing and updating project/programme details on the system, and implementing procedures to embed the DTS more fully in their business planning processes.

It is planned to complete the implementation of the system by 30 June 2009, with the publicly available website also available at, or around, the same time.

Following my announcement to the Assembly, on the 15 December 2008, a Procurement Task Group was established under the auspices of the Construction Industry Forum for Northern Ireland. A primary aim of the Task Group is to monitor the progress made by Departments in bringing projects to the marketplace.

As an interim measure ahead of the formal launch of the ISNI website, CPD has, on behalf of Departments, provided the construction industry representatives at the Procurement Task Group with a significant amount of information with respect to projects that will be advertised in the coming months or are already at various stages of the procurement process.

### Public Sector Jobs

**Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the review of the location of public sector jobs. (AQO 2643/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel:** I have recently circulated a paper to Executive Ministers containing proposals on the matter of location of public sector jobs. I hope to have it scheduled shortly for discussion at an Executive meeting. Professor Bain's independent report provides a useful framework but it will be for the Executive to make decisions on the way forward, particularly in the current difficult economic climate.

### Departmental Underspends

**Mr Kennedy** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail all potential departmental underspends in the last financial year, of which he has preliminary knowledge before the June monitoring round. (AQO 2644/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel:** The level of underspend by departments for the 2008-09 financial year will not be confirmed until Provisional Outturn in June.

### Retired Civil Servants

**Mr Elliott** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of civil servants, over the past 5 years, who were in receipt of retirement remuneration packages, but who then gained further remunerated employment in the public sector. (AQO 2645/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel:** The Department of Finance and Personnel does not hold details of number of civil servants, over the last 5 years, who were in receipt of retirement remuneration packages, but who then gained further remunerated employment in the public sector.

## DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

### Health and Social Care Trust Properties

**Mr Storey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many times pest control experts were called out to Health and Social Care Trust properties in (i) North Antrim; and (ii) South Antrim, in each of the last three years. (AQW 7056/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr M McGimpsey):** This information is not held centrally by my Department.

### Hospital Acquired Infections

**Mr Storey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients were diagnosed with hospital acquired infection between (i) January and July; and (ii) August and December, in each of the last three years. (AQW 7057/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** It is not possible to state how many patients acquired infections in hospital.

The information is not available in the format requested.

### Royal Victoria Hospital

**Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) which authority is investigating last year's outbreak of listeria in the Royal Victoria Hospital; (ii) who is the lead investigator and (iii) is it independent of the Royal Victoria Hospital. (AQW 7060/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre (CDSC) for Northern Ireland is carrying out this investigation, which was commissioned by the Eastern Health and Social Services Board. The lead investigator is the CDSC Consultant Regional Epidemiologist. This investigation is independent of the Royal Victoria Hospital and of the Belfast Health Trust.

### Health Service

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) to provide the number; and (ii) the cost, of operations done on behalf of the Health Service outside Northern Ireland. (AQW 7070/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The information is not held centrally and could only be collected at disproportionate cost

### Pharmacists

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many pharmacists are operating in Northern Ireland. (AQW 7071/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** There are currently 1,912 pharmacists registered with the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland. This figure includes community pharmacists, locums, and those working in hospital, academia, industry, and administrative roles. Pharmacists who are retired, or for whom no employment status is recorded, are excluded.

### Treating Epilepsy

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much money is spent by the Health Service on treating epilepsy. (AQW 7072/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** This information is not available centrally. The cost of treating epilepsy includes the cost of A&E attendances, outpatients, inpatients, primary and community care and personal social services. The Department does not collect expenditure or activity for all these services related to people with specific conditions.

### Diabetes Service Framework

**Mr Bresland** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) for his assessment of the future impact of diabetes on health and social care resources; (ii) what plans are being put in place to deal with the possible additional burden on Health Service; and (iii) if there are any plans to introduce a Diabetes Service Framework in line with the rest of the UK. (AQW 7074/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The increase in the number of people with diabetes will have a major impact on the demand for health and social care services but I am determined that steps are taken to address this issue. Various Departmental strategies have been put in place to address the key elements in preventing diabetes and in slowing down the onset of some of the conditions which may arise from diabetes –



good nutrition, exercise and smoking cessation. An additional £44m has also been made available over the CSR period for the development of services for people with chronic conditions, including people with diabetes.

A service framework for cardiovascular health and well-being will be launched within the next few weeks. The framework contains 3 standards relating to diabetes which will have a positive impact on the prompt diagnosis and ongoing treatment and management of people with diabetes. It is anticipated that further areas for service framework development will be taken forward next year. These will be selected from the remaining priority areas identified and evaluated by the Department. Diabetes is one of the priority areas for consideration.

### Child Protection

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many social workers there are; and (ii) how many are trained in child protection, in the Southern Health and Social Trust area.

(AQW 7101/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** Southern Health and Social Care Trust has advised that there are 622 (519.14 Whole-Time Equivalent) Social Workers employed in their Trust area. All of these Social Workers are trained in Child Protection as part of their Social Work course. In addition, the Trust provides all Social Work students and all newly qualified Social Work Staff with a Social Services Induction Programme which includes a session on Child Protection, including local procedures. They also provides two other in-service training programmes which include sessions on Child Protection (Multi-disciplinary Child Protection Programme and Children's Order).

### Family Support Workers

**Mr Craig** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many children in the Lagan Valley constituency are receiving assistance from a family support worker.

(AQW 7137/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The information is not available in the format requested.

### Health and Social Care Trust Transport Costs

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the cost of taxis used to transport (i) blood; (ii) medical record files; and (iii) staff in each Health and Social Care Trust, in the last financial year.

(AQW 7150/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The information is not centrally collected and is not available as requested.

### Treatment of Alzheimer's Disease

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what new drugs are available for the treatment of Alzheimer's disease.

(AQW 7152/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has a formal link with the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE), which is an independent organisation responsible for rigorously assessing the effectiveness of new drugs that are licensed for the treatment of particular conditions, and providing guidance on their use for those conditions. The Department is not aware of any current assessment by NICE of new treatments for Alzheimer's disease.

### Treatment of Alzheimer's Disease

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what opportunities are there for patients to take part in trials for new drugs for the treatment of Alzheimer's disease.

(AQW 7153/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The main opportunity for patients to take part in drug trials for the treatment of Alzheimer's disease is through the Northern Ireland Clinical Research Network (Dementia), currently based in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.

Patients are usually recruited into trials from the memory clinic in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust. As the entry criteria for trials are often very well defined, it may not be possible for every patient who wishes to take part in a trial to do so.

The Belfast Trust plans to send information sheets to clinicians working in hospitals and to the Alzheimer's Society, to inform them of the Network's trial portfolio.

### Service Level Agreement

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the progress of negotiations for a Service Level Agreement between the Western Health and Social Care Trust and Creggan Pre-School Training Trust. (AQW 7190/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** A meeting between the Western Health and Social Care Trust and the Creggan Pre-School Training Trust (CPTT) is to be held week commencing 27 April.

The CPTT is an Early Years organisation and as such falls within the remit of the Department of Education which has policy responsibility for Early Years.

### Paralateral Cyst with Paralateral Tear Surgery

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what funding has been set aside for Paralateral Cyst with Paralateral Tear surgery. (AQW 7197/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** It is assumed this question refers to the conditions paralabral cyst and a paralabral tear, which are related to hip symptoms and may be treated by hip arthroscopy. I refer the Member to my previous answer to AQO 2411/09.

### Respite Care

**Miss McIlveen** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many young people aged 18 and over, are on waiting lists for respite care, in each Health and Social Care Trust area. (AQW 7222/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** Information is not available centrally on the number of young people aged 18 and over waiting for respite care in each of the Health and Social Care Trust areas.

### Respite Care

**Miss McIlveen** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many young people aged 18 and over, currently receive respite care, intended for use by older people, in each Health and Social Care Trust area. (AQW 7223/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The information is not available in the form requested.

### Daisy Hill Hospital, Newry

**Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has to modernise and expand Daisy Hill Hospital, Newry. (AQW 7309/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** Due to the much publicised funding constraints for capital schemes I commissioned a Review of Capital Priorities. Before Christmas I announced that funding for Southern Trust was £63 million and £315 million over the CSR and ISNI respectively. Within this amount funding for developments at Daisy Hill Hospital has been identified in the latter years of the ISNI. The Trust will in due course develop the proposals for the redevelopment for consideration and approval.

## Stroke Units

**Mr P J Bradley** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the (i) number; and (ii) location of all stroke units. (AQW 7322/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** Information on (i) the number; and (ii) the location of all stroke units in Northern Ireland, at 30th April 2009, is shown in the table below.

Hospital	Number of Stroke Units Available <sup>1</sup>
Belfast City Hospital	1
Royal Group of Hospitals	1
Mater Hospital	1
Erne Hospital	1
Altnagelvin Hospital	1
Craigavon Area Hospital	1
Daisy Hill Hospital	1
Ulster Hospital	1
Lagan Valley Hospital	1
Antrim Area Hospital	1
Causeway Hospital	1
Northern Ireland	11

**Source:-** Northern Ireland Health and Social Care Trusts

<sup>1</sup> This is the number of dedicated acute stroke units. A number of hospitals in Northern Ireland also have a dedicated stroke rehabilitation unit.

**Note:-** A dedicated acute stroke unit will open in Downe Hospital in Autumn 2009 as part of the new hospital.

## Hospital Hygiene Audits

**Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he has given consideration to the mandatory publishing of monthly hospital hygiene audits. (AQW 7329/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** RQIA carry out a programme of unannounced independent inspections which include cleanliness; these reports are published and readily available to the public.

I have no plans to publish the results of monthly hospital hygiene audits.

## Royal Victoria Hospital

**Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to confirm if an East Londonderry constituent was harassed by a member of security staff at the Royal Victoria Hospital in April 2008; and, if so, if this member of staff was disciplined. (AQW 7330/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** Unfortunately, I am unable to respond to the question as the Member has not provided sufficient information for the Trust to investigate this matter.

## Vermin Infestation

**Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety who the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust contacts to report vermin infestation. (AQW 7331/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** Vermin problems are reported by staff to the appropriate local authorised officer in the Belfast Trust. The authorised officer contacts the relevant centrally contracted pest control contractor in order to ensure remedial action is taken urgently.

## Environmental Health Inspections

**Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if food preparation areas and restaurants in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust area are subjected to environmental health inspections by Belfast City Council. (AQW 7332/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** All food preparation areas within the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust are registered with the appropriate district council and subject to regular and unannounced inspections by environmental health officers from these councils.

## IVF-Related Treatment

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what consideration he will give to excluding IVF-related treatment and sickness from absenteeism when calculating employees' redeployment and redundancy points in the Health Service. (AQW 7426/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The selection criteria for staff redeployments and redundancies is a matter for individual Trusts to agree in consultation with local Trade Union representatives.

## Ambulances

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what life-saving equipment is provided in ambulances that are called to a life-threatening situation involving a baby or young child with severe respiratory problems. (AQW 7428/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The information requested is shown in the table below:

Respiratory Equipment & Consumables	Respiratory Drugs
Oxygen masks re-breather (100%)	Oxygen
Nebuliser masks & acorn	Salbutamol /2.5mg neb.
Uncuffed endotracheal tubes	Ipratropium bromide 500mcg
Paediatric bag/valve/mask	Hydrocortisone 100mg as per age of child
Paediatric oropharyngeal airways	Adrenaline 1:1000 as per age of child
Paediatric stylus	*Adrenaline 1:10,000
Paediatric laryngoscope blades	*Atropine 1mg – 3mg
Tongue depressors	*Chlorphenamine 10mg in 1ml
Suction unit (paediatric settings/soft catheter tubing)	*Hydrocortisone 100mg
Paediatric spo2 probe	*Ipratropium atrovent 500mcg
Oxygen size F cylinder	*Narcan variable dependent on age
Microvent resuscitator	*Salbutamol 2.5 mg
Paediatric stethoscope	
*Zoll defibrillator (paediatric pads)	
*Paediatric intravenous cannulae (vegafix)	
Paediatric intraosseous needles (EZ- IO intraosseous device)	
*Broselow tape	

\* Asterisked items may, depending on medical judgement, be used also to manage respiratory emergencies in children and young people.

It is important to note that life-threatening emergencies involving severe respiratory problems can arise from a variety of causes and, therefore, not all the equipment listed above will be used in all cases. The actual equipment/drugs used will be determined by the presentation and condition of the baby or young child at the time.



## Ambulances

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) whether all emergency ambulance vehicles have been fitted with the latest, satellite navigation systems; (ii) when this equipment was installed; and (iii) if the systems installed recognise townlands. (AQW 7430/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The installation of satellite navigation (SatNav) in the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service emergency vehicle fleet was completed in September 2008. The system installed is fully able to recognise townlands.

## DEPARTMENT FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### Door to Door Transport Scheme

**Miss McIlveen** asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of members of the Door to Door Transport Scheme in the Comber area. (AQW 7183/09)

**Minister for Regional Development (Mr C Murphy):** On 28 April 2009 there were 57 members in the Comber operational area.

### Door to Door Transport Scheme

**Miss McIlveen** asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of members of the Door to Door Transport Scheme in the Newtownards area. (AQW 7184/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** On 28 April 2009 there were 237 members in the Newtownards operational area.

Drafted by: Brian White	40651	30/04/2009
Cleared by Head of Division: Doreen Brown	40100	30/04/2009
Cleared by Special Adviser: Stephen McGlade		30/04/2009
Copied to:		
Paul Priestly		
Doreen Brown		
Trevor Robinson		
Andrew Adams		

## Water Supply

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister for Regional Development how many interruptions to the water supply there have been per constituency, in the last four months. (AQW 7193/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that during the period 1 January 2009 to mid-April 2009, 535 interruptions to customers' water supplies were recorded across all constituencies. Of these, 258 were planned with customers in advance of the work taking place and 277 were the result of emergencies for which advance warning could not be given. The table below provides a breakdown of the interruptions per constituency.

Constituency	Planned Interruptions	Unplanned Interruptions	Third-Party Interruptions	Total Interruptions
North Belfast	1	6	0	7
East Belfast	1	9	0	10

Constituency	Planned Interruptions	Unplanned Interruptions	Third-Party Interruptions	Total Interruptions
South Belfast	0	5	0	5
West Belfast	2	14	1	17
North Down	6	5	0	11
Strangford	23	25	3	51
South Down	11	14	0	25
Lagan Valley	19	10	0	29
Upper Bann	89	6	0	95
Newry & Armagh	4	74	0	78
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	52	23	1	76
West Tyrone	22	14	3	39
Mid Ulster	6	16	0	22
South Antrim	1	5	0	6
East Antrim	5	7	0	12
Foyle	5	8	2	15
East Londonderry	4	9	0	13
North Antrim	7	17	0	24
Total	258	267	10	535

## Water Supply

**Mr Robinson** asked the Minister for Regional Development what are the sources of potable water to households in (i) Newtownabbey; (ii) Carrickfergus; and (iii) Larne, broken down by District Electoral area.

(AQW 7199/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that it cannot readily provide information on the sources of potable water to households by District Electoral Area and is therefore unable to provide the information in the format requested.

The information is, however, available by local Council area and I can confirm that Newtownabbey and Larne Borough Council areas are supplied from Killylane, Dunore and Dorisland Water Treatment Works, while Carrickfergus Borough Council is supplied from Dorisland and Killylane Water Treatment Works only.

The raw water sources for Killylane, Dunore and Dorisland Water Treatment Works are Killylane Impounding Reservoir, Lough Neagh and Woodburn Dam respectively.

## Northern Ireland Water

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the (i) temporary contract; and (ii) permanent contract staff at Northern Ireland Water in Derry, broken down by division, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 7245/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that the number of temporary and permanent contract staff employed in Derry are as detailed in the tables below. The details for the temporary contract staff have been based on average figures due to the transitory nature of temporary workers.

**(I) TEMPORARY CONTRACT STAFF**

Directorate	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Asset Management	1	3	3
Customer Services	1	2	2
Operations	3	10	17
Engineering & Procurement	0	1	0
TOTAL	5	16	22

**(II) PERMANENT CONTRACT STAFF**

Directorate	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Asset Management	35.5	36.5	35.5
Customer Services	11	3	3
Operations	76	104	124
Engineering & Procurement	9	8	8
TOTAL	131.5	151.5	170.5

**A6 Randalstown to Castledawson Road Improvement Scheme**

**Mr Dallat** asked the Minister for Regional Development if there are changes planned to the A6 Randalstown to Castledawson Rd improvement scheme, and, if so, what they are. (AQW 7310/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** The changes planned to this scheme will be identified in the Departmental Statement which is expected to issue later this year. This statement will take account of the Inspector's recommendations that the scheme should proceed with some modifications.

**Translink**

**Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister for Regional Development what costs have been incurred by Translink in buying fuel oil for buses and trains over (i) the last two quarters and (ii) what is the estimate for the next three quarters. (AQW 7325/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** Translink has advised me of the actual and estimated costs as set out below.

Fuel Gross Costs	Ulsterbus £'000	Citybus £'000	NIR £'000	TOTAL £'000
Q/E Dec 2008 - actual	5,698	1,847	1,717	9,262
Q/E Mar 2009 - actual	6,066	1,979	2,060	10,105
Q/E Jun 2009 - estimate	6,088	2,034	2,050	10,172
Q/E Sept 2009 - estimate	5,021	1,887	1,922	8,830
Q/E Dec 2009 - estimate	5,958	2,035	1,917	9,910

## DEPARTMENT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

### Ministerial Visits

**Ms Anderson** asked the Minister for Social Development how many Ministerial visits she made to each constituency from 1 April 2008 to 31 March 2009. (AQW 7035/09)

**Minister for Social Development (Ms M Ritchie):** My diary records show for the period 31 March 2008 to 1 April 2009 I attended 218 events during 172 Ministerial visits. The following table details the breakdown of my visits by constituency.

Constituency	Number of visits during the period 1 April 2008 to 31 March 2009
Belfast East	8
Belfast North	27
Belfast South	33
Belfast West	13
East Antrim	2
East Londonderry	2
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	5
Foyle	11
Lagan Valley	11
Mid Ulster	3
Newry and Armagh	10
North Antrim	2
North Down	7
South Antrim	9
South Down	17
Strangford	2
Upper Bann	5
West Tyrone	5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>172</b>

### LPG Scheme in Antrim Town

**Mr McLaughlin** asked the Minister for Social Development whether finance has been secured to ensure the installation of the planned LPG scheme in Antrim Town. (AQW 7038/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The Housing Executive has 51 homes in Antrim heated with LPG gas fired boilers. They propose to replace these with new gas heating systems. The Housing Executive is currently reviewing its upcoming programme of planned improvement schemes and is unable to confirm when this work will commence. The delivery of this scheme will be dependent on obtaining appropriate approvals and the availability of finance.

### Heating Systems

**Mr McLaughlin** asked the Minister for Social Development if she is aware that the heating systems in Springfarm and Parkhall, Antrim fail to meet health and safety standards; and if this is an issue that she will address. (AQW 7039/09)



**Minister for Social Development:** All heating systems, including those in Springfarm and Parkhall, Antrim meet Health and Safety standards.

Annual Health and Safety checks are carried out on the heating systems and any identified repairs are remedied by the Housing Executive to ensure their ongoing safe operation.

### Heating Systems

**Mr McLaughlin** asked the Minister for Social Development (i) if heating systems that are installed in Housing Executive properties in Antrim and rely on bottled gas are less cost effective than other forms of heating; and (ii) if families on low incomes are being forced to pay above the average rate for fuel, resulting in fuel poverty for these families. (AQW 7040/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The Housing Executive accepts that LPG heating systems are less cost effective than other forms of heating. They propose replacing the current units with improved gas heating systems.

### Benefit Fraud

**Mrs I Robinson** asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the total amount of benefits that were fraudulently obtained each year, in the last five years. (AQW 7097/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** It is not possible to give a definitive figure for the full amount of benefit that has been fraudulently obtained, as undetected fraud cannot be included. The Social Security Agency estimates the amount of fraud in the benefit system and this has decreased from 0.84% of expenditure in 2005 to 0.35% in 2007, the last year for which an estimate is currently available.

‘The total amount of benefits’ that is confirmed as fraudulently obtained is the benefit paid in those cases where individuals have been convicted in court, or have accepted either an administrative penalty or a formal caution. As can be seen from the table below, the value of benefits claimed fraudulently that were detected has risen as the Agency has become better at detecting and stopping fraudulent benefit claims.

The information requested is only available for the last four, years, details are provided in the table below.

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Amount of money	£1,063,552	£1,693,521	£2,585,667	£2,950,965

### Benefit Fraud

**Mrs I Robinson** asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the number of people convicted of benefit fraud; and (ii) the amount of money that was fraudulently obtained, each year, in the past five years. (AQW 7098/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The information requested is only available for the last four years. The tables below show (i) the number of people convicted of benefit fraud; and (ii) the amount of money that was fraudulently obtained in those cases.

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Convicted	235	299	409	495

It is not possible to give a definitive figure for the full amount of benefit that has been fraudulently obtained, as undetected fraud cannot be included. The Social Security Agency estimates the amount of fraud in the benefit system and this has decreased from 0.84% of expenditure in 2005 to 0.35% in 2007, the last year for which an estimate is currently available.

‘The total amount of benefits’ that is confirmed as fraudulently obtained is the benefit paid in those cases where individuals have been convicted in court, or have accepted either an administrative penalty or a formal

caution. As can be seen from the table below, the value of benefits claimed fraudulently that were detected has risen as the Agency has become better at detecting and stopping fraudulent benefit claims.

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Amount of money	£1,063,552	£1,693,521	£2,585,667	£2,950,965

### Traveller Accommodation

**Mr Moutray** asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to her answer to AQW 6888/09, if during the meetings organised by the Housing Executive with Craigavon residents groups to discuss future plans for Traveller accommodation in the area it was indicated that this would have a (i) positive; (ii) negative; or (iii) indeterminate impact on community relations. (AQW 7145/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** During meetings between the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Good Relations Officers from Craigavon Borough Council and residents groups from the Brownlow Area to address issues raised by members of the settled community relating to Travellers in which current and future plans for Traveller Accommodation in the Craigavon area were discussed, there was no measurement made as to the impact that these meetings would have on community relations.

### Traveller Accommodation

**Mr Moutray** asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to her answer to AQW 6888/09, if work carried out by the Housing Executive with (i) Good Relations Officers from the Craigavon Borough Council; and (ii) residents groups, indicated that the impact on community relations of Traveller accommodation in the area would be (i) positive; (ii) negative; or (iii) indeterminate. (AQW 7146/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The purpose of the work carried out by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive with Good Relations Officers from Craigavon Borough Council and with all residents groups in the Brownlow Area was to address issues raised by members of the settled community relating to Traveller Accommodation in the Craigavon area. The impact on community relations was not measured.

### Travellers Sites in Craigavon

**Mr Simpson** asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to her answer to AQW 6894/09, if (i) her Department; or (ii) the Housing Executive has ever carried out an assessment of the environmental impact of Travellers sites in Craigavon. (AQW 7162/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The Northern Ireland Housing Executive has operational responsibility for Traveller Accommodation on behalf of my Department. The Housing Executive has never carried out an environmental impact assessment of Travellers sites in Craigavon.

The 1999 Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations advise that “Permanent camp sites and caravan sites” which exceed 1 hectare (about 2½ acres) are designated as Schedule 2 projects and therefore likely to require such an assessment. These planning requirements are the responsibility of the Planning Service. The Housing Executive has little or no control over the implementation of Environmental Impact Assessments and one would only be carried out at the specific request of the Planning Service for a new development.

### Welfare Reform Bill

**Mr Irwin** asked the Minister for Social Development what plans she has to introduce the amendments to the Welfare Reform Bill, recently agreed by the U.K. Government which will permit blind people to access the higher rate of mobility component, to ensure Northern Ireland is in line with the rest of the United Kingdom when the changes become operational on 1 April 2011. (AQW 7168/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** I had raised this matter with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and stressed the case for additional help in relation to blind people’s mobility. Therefore, I warmly welcomed the

Government's decision to accept the amendment to the Welfare Reform Bill currently going through Parliament which will allow those with severe sight impairment to have access to the higher rate mobility component of Disability Living Allowance in Great Britain. Subject to Executive approval, I intend to bring corresponding legislation before the Assembly later this year which will help visually impaired people in Northern Ireland with additional mobility costs. I anticipate that the change will be introduced in Northern Ireland at the same time as in Great Britain.

### Bonfire Programmes

**Miss McIlveen** asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the bonfire programmes which are being funded by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in 2009 (AQW 7185/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The Office of the First Minister/deputy First Minister funds Council bonfire programmes. However, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive provides financial support of £500 per Housing Executive District Office area for communities whose Councils have not yet put in place a bonfire initiative.

### Housing Benefit Claims

**Miss McIlveen** asked the Minister for Social Development how many addresses in the Strangford constituency have been found to be unoccupied and resulted in housing benefit claims being terminated, since May 2007; and the total number of claims benefit that have been terminated as a result. (AQW 7187/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The information is not available on a constituency basis. The Housing Executive completed a one-off exercise during 2008, to identify properties which were suspected of being unoccupied. Details of the numbers of properties recovered and the housing benefit claims terminated for the Newtownards, Castlereagh and Downpatrick District Office areas (which include the areas which comprise the Strangford Constituency) as a result of this exercise shows that seven properties were unoccupied resulting in six Housing Benefit claims being terminated.

The Housing Executive has developed a programme of counter-fraud work covering the next two years. Included in that programme is a further exercise investigating non-residency which is due to commence later this year.

### Disability Living Allowance

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister for Social Development to detail how many people have received the Disability Living Allowance Indefinite Period Awards and had their entitlements withdrawn in the last three financial years, broken down by constituencies. (AQW 7196/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The table below provides detail of the number of indefinite awards of Disability Living Allowance where entitlement was removed in each of the last three years broken down by constituencies.

#### DISABILITY LIVING ALLOWANCE

Parliamentary Constituency	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Belfast East	15	24	31
Belfast North	15	36	40
Belfast South	7	19	40
Belfast West	42	41	61
East Antrim	14	16	46
East Londonderry	33	22	60
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	20	15	25
Foyle	37	42	67
Lagan Valley	14	21	43

Parliamentary Constituency	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Mid Ulster	18	17	29
Newry and Armagh	34	34	46
North Antrim	15	26	33
North Down	10	12	19
South Antrim	9	20	38
South Down	14	33	36
Strangford	7	16	37
Upper Bann	23	30	38
West Tyrone	24	16	46

### Housing Executive

**Miss McIlveen** asked the Minister for Social Development (i) if any further assessment has been carried out of public housing being used as ‘giro drop’ housing, since the 2008 investigation; and, if so, (ii) what the findings are of the assessment. (AQW 7221/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** Following the 2008 investigation, the Housing Executive has developed a programme of counter-fraud work covering the next two years. Included in that programme is a further exercise investigating non-residency which is due to commence later this year.

### Town Centre Living Initiative Areas in Newtownstewart

**Mr Bresland** asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to her answer to AQW 4584/08, to outline progress in implementing the Town Centre Living Initiative Areas in Newtownstewart. (AQW 7267/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** Within Newtownstewart three initial enquiries from members of the public, have been received and inspected by Northern Ireland Housing Executive, and further information has been requested by the Housing Executive with regard to these applications.

### Visteon Car Plant Workers

**Mr Butler** asked the Minister for Social Development how many redundant workers of the Visteon car plant in Belfast have made claims at benefits offices. (AQW 7268/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The information requested is not available as the Social Security Agency does not routinely record the detailed circumstances why individuals make a claim to benefit.

### Social Housing

**Ms Anderson** asked the Minister for Social Development, in relation to Table 17 (p.41) in the Draft EQIA of the Social Housing Development Programme Strategic Guidelines, how many social housing units are forecast to be built annually for the areas of (i) North Belfast; (ii) West Belfast; and (iii) Derry; under (a) the current ‘ring-fencing’ methodology; (b) the proposed method of social housing newbuild allocation ‘Housing Needs Assessment’; and (c) the proposed method of social housing newbuild allocation ‘Housing Needs Assessment Weighted by Waiting Time’. (AQW 7272/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** Ring fencing was previously used to support the delivery of new homes as part of wider housing strategies in Belfast and Derry.

The EQIA recommended the cessation of this methodology, preferring a new “weighting” to reflect the time applicants waited for housing irrespective of where that was for.



The table below shows the number of homes allocated to the areas in question with and without this new “weighting”.

As the previous ring fencing allocation has now been discontinued, no figures of homes to be delivered in 2009/10 exist for that methodology.

	North Belfast	West Belfast	Derry
Housing Needs Assessment	130	192	110
Housing Needs Assessment Weighted by Waiting Time	123	250	98

### Jobseeker’s Allowance

**Ms Anderson** asked the Minister for Social Development if, under the strategic business review proposals, she intends to remove jobseeker’s allowance processing responsibilities from the Derry SSA office and, if so, how can this be facilitated without relocating or making staff redundant, given that more than 50 per cent of jobseeker’s allowance claims are processed in the Derry office. (AQW 7273/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** I refer the member to my recent statement to the Assembly on 20th April 2009 and to the equality impact assessment document on the strategic business review which was released by my Department on 23rd April 2009.

I have made it explicitly clear in both that I can achieve the proposed changes to processing work in the SSA office in Foyle through retraining. No staff in Foyle will therefore be relocated. The strategic business review proposals have clearly stated that there will be no staff redundancies.

### Warm Home Schemes

**Mr Ross** asked the Minister for Social Development how many Warm Home Schemes grants were awarded to homes in East Antrim, for each month, in the last three years. (AQW 7275/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The information requested is set out in the table below.

	Heating	Insulation	Total Jobs	Heating Value	Insulation Value	Total Value
Apr-06	6	13		£17,171.00	£6,977.00	
May-06	5	19		£17,476.00	£7,417.00	
Jun-06	1	30		£4,203.00	£12,614.00	
Jul-06	7	26		£21,476.00	£11,730.00	
Aug-06	4	35		£12,844.00	£14,759.00	
Sep-06	12	26		£38,168.00	£13,400.00	
Oct-06	8	41		£26,517.00	£16,070.00	
Nov-06	7	73		£23,284.00	£35,435.00	
Dec-06	4	55		£14,622.00	£26,765.00	
Jan-07	6	21		£22,681.00	£8,862.00	
Feb-07	9	27		£32,461.00	£10,047.00	
Mar-07	11	34		£37,235.00	£17,856.00	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>480</b>	<b>£268,138.00</b>	<b>£181,932.00</b>	<b>£450,070.00</b>
Apr-07	25	23		£101,042.00	£11,918.00	
May-07	34	31		£144,345.00	£11,443.00	
Jun-07	14	35		£59,456.00	£17,957.00	

	Heating	Insulation	Total Jobs	Heating Value	Insulation Value	Total Value
Jul-07	8	15		£30,871.00	£6,772.00	
Aug-07	5	10		£18,348.00	£4,184.00	
Sep-07	2	11		£7,061.00	£5,593.00	
Oct-07	10	12		£34,218.00	£3,701.00	
Nov-07	14	14		£46,175.00	£6,482.00	
Dec-07	2	34		£7,734.00	£11,178.00	
Jan-08	6	32		£20,581.00	£12,266.00	
Feb-08	9	41		£31,738.00	£18,638.00	
Mar-08	10	45		£36,995.00	£19,170.00	
	<b>139</b>	<b>303</b>	<b>442</b>	<b>£538,564.00</b>	<b>£129,302.00</b>	<b>£667,866.00</b>
Apr-08	12	41		£44,184.00	£18,971.00	
May-08	14	19		£55,502.00	£8,966.00	
Jun-08	18	34		£68,689.00	£19,938.00	
Jul-08	12	51		£49,122.00	£26,813.00	
Aug-08	17	49		£68,355.00	£22,627.00	
Sep-08	7	27		£27,892.00	£11,276.00	
Oct-08	20	44		£74,088.00	£20,558.00	
Nov-08	12	43		£41,571.00	£23,704.00	
Dec-08	16	31		£54,481.00	£17,055.00	
Jan-09	12	25		£44,624.00	£15,808.00	
Feb-09	19	44		£68,509.00	£21,908.00	
Mar-09	16	11		£53,747.00	£4,730.00	
	<b>175</b>	<b>419</b>	<b>594</b>	<b>£650,764.00</b>	<b>£212,354.00</b>	<b>£863,118.00</b>

### Applications for Co-Ownership

**Mr Craig** asked the Minister for Social Development how many applications for Co-Ownership (i) were submitted; and (ii) were successful, in the Lagan Valley constituency in (a) 2006/07; (b) 2007/08; (c) 2008/09; and (d) 2009/10 to date. (AQW 7285/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** Co-Ownership Housing has advised me that it records statistics according to local council area, rather than by constituency. The table below details the information requested in both the Lisburn and Banbridge council areas which are situated, at least in part, in the Lagan Valley constituency.

Year	Applications made	Successful
2006/07	35	31
2007/08	234	162
2008/091	96	57
2009/102	37	19

The number of applications for the 2008/09 financial year was affected by the suspension of new applications to the scheme between April and November 2008.

A number of applications received during April 2009 are currently being processed. Therefore, the number of successful applications may increase.

### Housing Benefit Claims in Limavady

**Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister for Social Development how many people are claiming housing benefits in Limavady; and how this compares with a year ago. (AQW 7328/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** On 1 April 2009 there were 2393 active claims for Housing Benefit in Limavady, compared to 2266 active claims at 1 April 2008.

### Women's Groups

**Mrs McGill** asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the women's groups funded by Her Department and amount of funding received by each group in 2007/08 and 2008/09. (AQW 7343/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** My Department has awarded funding to 51 women's organisations under various funding programmes in 2007/2008 and 2008/2009. Funding for these financial years is detailed in the table below.

Group Name	Funding in 2007/08 £	Funding in 2008/09 £
Ardoyne Women's Group	45,567	46,969
Ashton Community Trust	27,588	38,536
Atlas Women's Centre	129,020	126,667
Ballybeen Women's Centre	251,650	255,270
Ballymurphy Women's Centre	88,180	87,538
Bessbrook & Divernagh Women's Association	3,978	0
Bogside and Brandywell Women's Group	36,183	16,781
Carrickfergus Women's Forum	925	0
Chrysalis Women's Centre	75,920	78,099
Coyles Cottage Women's Group	2,578	1,213
Currynrierin Women's Action Committee	1,000	0
Falls Women's Centre	223,426	202,716
Fermanagh Women's Aid	26,937	4,485
First Steps Women's Group	121,986	118,145
Footprints Women's Centre	361,758	380,943
Foyle Women's Information Network	50,315	51,232
Friends of Inver Women's Group	2,076	0
Galliagh Women's Group	36,856	15,756
Granaghan & District Women's Group	450	0
Greenbank Circle of Women	2,556	3,132
Greenway Women's Group	156,592	145,016
Health & Wellbeing for Women in Kinturk (HAWWK)	1,000	0
Highfield Women's Group	11,564	8,150
Hizone Women's Group	5,340	5,808
Kilcooley Women's Centre	1,000	25,153
Killen Women's Group	1,771	0
Lenadoon Women's Group	87,250	58,673

Group Name	Funding in 2007/08 £	Funding in 2008/09 £
Link Women's Group	10,168	0
Magherafelt Women's Group	197,165	198,744
Mosside Women's Group	1,000	0
Newbuildings Women's Group	1,000	0
Newtownabbey Women's Group	29,345	41,683
Newtownards Road Women's Group Ltd	119,532	115,078
Newtownstewart Women's Institute	1,200	2,072
North Belfast Women's Initiative & Support Group	25,050	31,331
Omagh Women's Aid	0	14,415
Omagh Women's Area Network	25,000	55,000
Roe Valley Women's Network	20,911	0
Shankill Women's Centre	173,854	216,874
Strabane & Lifford Women's Centre	1,000	0
Strathfoyle Women's Activity Group Ltd	84,020	85,933
The Women's Centre Derry	102,375	110,488
Voices Women's Group	30,516	33,876
Waterside Women's Centre	90,318	91,692
Windsor Women's Centre	248,319	211,822
Women's Aid Belfast & Lisburn	30,000	30,000
Women's Information Group	21,840	0
Women's Institute Pomeroy	450	0
Women's News	28,321	41,183
Women's TEC	90,714	55,203
Women's Centres Regional Partnership	321,632	353,942

## Volunteering Strategy

**Mr McCartney** asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the volunteering strategy.

(AQW 7344/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** We have a vibrant voluntary sector and a strong and active volunteer base. Volunteers are the lifeblood of our communities and the binding force in our community life. For the first time Northern Ireland will have a Volunteering Strategy to support the hundreds of thousands of people who freely give their time to help others. I hope it succeeds in encouraging more people to become volunteers, enriching their own lives as well as the lives of those they are helping.

The Strategy will focus on making it easier for everyone to become involved and have a more rewarding volunteering experience. It will recognise the value and the benefits of volunteering for individuals and society. It will support and strengthen the infrastructure that supports volunteers and volunteer involving organisations.

Officials presented a consultation document to the Social Development Committee on 26 February. I will now take the consultation document to the Executive. I hope to publish the consultation document in June. There will be a full public consultation and a series of consultation events across the country.



## Winter Fuel Payments

**Mr McCartney** asked the Minister for Social Development who is eligible for the winter fuel payment.

(AQW 7345/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** Winter Fuel Payments are payable to people who are aged 60 and over and normally living in Great Britain or Northern Ireland during the designated qualifying week each winter which is normally towards the end of September. Individuals can expect to receive their payment automatically if they are in receipt of a State Pension or other Social Security benefit (excluding Housing Benefit or Child Benefit) and their circumstances have not changed. All others who have not received a payment before need to submit a claim to the Winter Fuel Team within the Department for Work and Pensions in Great Britain which administers these payments on a national basis. All new applications must be received by the closing date which this year was 30 March 2009.

## Income Support Claims

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Development to list the number of fresh claims for Income Support received in each month since April 2008, broken down by (i) parliamentary constituency; or (ii) benefits office.

(AQW 7353/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The information requested is not available by parliamentary constituency. The Table below provides the requested information by individual benefit office.

TABLE1: INCOME SUPPORT CLAIMS RECEIVED

Office	Apr 2008	May 2008	June 2008	July 2008	Aug 2008	Sept 2008	Oct 2008	Nov 2008	Dec 2008	Jan 2009	Feb 2009	Mar 2009	Totals
Andersonstown	95	100	81	99	83	102	151	97	56	61	83	65	1073
Antrim	70	80	86	67	69	97	94	70	53	61	40	61	848
Armagh	78	74	82	79	66	88	96	53	43	67	41	44	811
Ballymena	99	90	84	64	69	97	85	60	39	46	58	59	850
Ballymoney	73	76	56	58	52	70	100	62	31	27	31	37	673
Ballynahinch*	30	33	37	42	24	35	20	43	7	23	19	21	334
Banbridge	61	50	64	62	72	68	77	52	43	55	31	32	667
Bangor	84	69	84	79	61	81	93	53	39	51	43	40	777
Carrickfergus**	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Coleraine	78	61	77	86	98	91	120	76	48	47	61	58	901
Cookstown	38	42	49	44	26	75	56	33	25	28	33	21	470
Corporation St	186	131	167	180	164	171	219	112	87	86	83	87	1673
Downpatrick	47	35	58	52	43	62	53	57	16	33	24	29	509
Dungannon	82	63	68	53	82	79	109	61	33	44	37	38	749
Enniskillen	121	96	81	75	80	118	100	89	34	50	60	25	929
Falls Rd	119	110	95	124	107	121	113	64	56	65	61	67	1102
Foyle	147	112	148	111	123	150	132	84	59	81	61	72	1280
Hollywood Rd	97	97	99	96	84	107	112	91	45	62	67	63	1020
Kilkeel	28	25	28	24	23	23	39	25	18	17	15	16	281
Knockbreda	75	83	79	96	86	90	95	79	43	43	55	33	857
Larne	111	86	104	77	61	174	80	65	58	58	62	46	982
Limavady	50	64	53	41	51	53	76	37	18	35	32	33	543

Office	Apr 2008	May 2008	June 2008	July 2008	Aug 2008	Sept 2008	Oct 2008	Nov 2008	Dec 2008	Jan 2009	Feb 2009	Mar 2009	Totals
Lisburn	93	88	97	78	94	90	76	74	49	49	44	56	888
Lisnagelvin	64	84	99	90	74	87	86	62	30	54	59	57	846
Lurgan	87	79	96	72	122	77	103	74	44	87	49	53	943
Magherafelt	76	59	68	51	57	72	60	62	32	29	28	30	624
Newcastle***	32	36	26	42	29	34	41	31	20	29	16	10	346
Newry	121	110	103	192	91	126	135	104	56	46	68	69	1191
Newtownabbey	83	58	108	79	58	92	108	67	50	52	40	57	852
Newtownards	66	56	57	88	52	69	52	48	49	39	52	24	652
Omagh	64	57	79	114	70	95	92	47	33	37	47	34	769
Portadown	75	62	78	54	55	80	69	61	39	30	42	42	687
Shaftesbury Sq	86	71	63	96	80	80	79	43	45	37	45	34	759
Shankill	76	49	60	54	65	72	83	44	31	49	48	38	669
Strabane	85	51	85	82	76	86	89	46	34	37	34	31	736
Totals	2777	2437	2699	2671	2447	3012	3093	2126	1363	1615	1569	1482	27291

**Notes:**

\* Income Support claims for Ballynahinch are administered by Downpatrick (accounted in Ballynahinch)

\*\* Income Support claims for Carrickfergus are administered and accounted by Larne

\*\*\*Income Support claims for Newcastle are administered by Kilkeel (accounted in Newcastle)

**Employment and Support Allowance Claims**

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Development to list the number of fresh claims for Employment and Support Allowance received in each month, since October 2008, broken down by (i) parliamentary constituency; or (ii) benefits office. (AQW 7354/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The information requested is not available by parliamentary constituency or by individual benefit office location. The table below provides details of the number of fresh claims received each month since the benefit was launched on 27 October 2008.

Month	Number of claims
October	56
November	940
December	1729
January	2435
February	2993
March	3313
April	2894
Total	14,360

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## NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY COMMISSION

### Members' Laptops

**Miss McIlveen** asked the Assembly Commission what research has been carried out in relation to installing software on Members' laptops to allow for distribution of Assembly Committee papers and to enable them to be viewed during Committee meetings. (AQW 7129/09)

**The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Rev Dr R Coulter):** Currently a trial is underway to permit Members to access research material provided prior to Plenary meetings without the need for any additional software. The IS Office and the Central Committee Office have been working on behalf of the Assembly Commission to investigate ways to enhance the secure distribution of Committee papers electronically.

The use of laptops to view papers during Committee meetings is constrained by the current room design which limits the ready access to power and data points and the current furniture which is not designed for long periods of computer usage. The Chairpersons Liaison Group has considered the use of computer equipment in committee rooms on several occasions and will continue to receive updates on the matter.

The IS Office has initiated a research project to look at alternatives to the use of laptops.

### Members' E-mail Accounts

**Miss McIlveen** asked the Assembly Commission what consideration has been given to increasing the memory size on Members' e-mail accounts. (AQW 7130/09)

**The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Rev Dr R Coulter):** The Assembly Commission provides a centrally managed e-mail system for use by Members and Secretariat staff, on Assembly business. The system was last updated in 2006 and configured to provide the required storage based on the e-mail usage at that point and predictions of future growth. Since installation the e-mail mailboxes capacity have been increased to the maximum available with the current system and it is not possible to extend these.

The current hardware and software is now three years old and due for replacement with the latest version. It is anticipated that the implementation of the new system will be completed by 31 March 2010. It will be planned to ensure Members incur minimal disruption to their use of the system. As part of that work the capacity of Members' e-mail mailboxes will be increased in line with current needs and in anticipation of future growth.





# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 15 May 2009

## Written Answers to Questions

### OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

#### Strategy for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration

**Dr Farry** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the factors that are delaying the release of a draft strategy for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration. (AQW 5536/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mr P Robinson and Mr McGuinness):**

Improving relationships between and within communities and building a shared and better future remains a high priority for our Department and the Executive. We are continuing to develop and refine the programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration to examine how we can build on the achievements of previous initiatives and programmes.

Our work at Ministerial level in OFMDFM as well as throughout the Department at all levels, has demonstrated our commitment to building cohesive, inclusive communities. The fact that we have been delivering substantial additional funding secured in the Executive's budget is just one of our achievements. We have increased funding by a third for the period 2008-2011, from £21 million in the previous CSR period to almost £30 million in the current one. That means that vital work on the ground and with both existing and new communities is better resourced than ever. We also want to ensure that these resources are used in an effective way, so we have been assessing existing programmes and considering new approaches to ensure tangible outcomes from our funding and actions.

We have increased funding to minority ethnic groups by two-thirds and increased funding for youth and interface workers by one-quarter. Statistics show that the work that we fund and resource, is delivering real and meaningful outcomes. There has been a 13.2% reduction in sectarian motivated crimes and three out of five young people in 2007 reported that relationships between Protestants and Catholics were getting better.

However, we are not complacent – we are leading and driving change in our society and in our work – through the Department and the Executive to deliver a shared and better future for all our people.

We are still determined to bring the programme forward as soon as possible, but not before we are satisfied that we have got the detail right.

#### Northern Ireland Children's Commissioner

**Mr Simpson** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether it intends to place any ceiling on the amount of public money available to the Northern Ireland Children's Commissioner to initiate legal cases. (AQW 6884/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** The Children and Young People's Unit (CYPU), Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) is the sponsoring body for the Commissioner for Children and Young People for Northern Ireland.

The Commissioner is independent of Government. Under the Commissioner for Children and Young People's (NI) Order 2003 the Commissioner has the power to bring, intervene in or assist in legal proceedings and

carry out a “General review of advocacy, complaint, inspection and whistle-blowing arrangements of relevant authorities”.

Relationships between the Commissioner, Ministers and OFMDFM are governed by the ‘arm’s length’ principle, wherein the primary role of Ministers is to set the Commissioner’s legal and financial framework and the structure of her funding and management. Within this framework it is the role of the Commissioner to determine her policy and activities in keeping with her statutory responsibilities and the requirements of Assembly policy.

When the Commissioner decides how she is going to allocate her funds against key targets and milestones for the year ahead she presents this information in advance to OFMDFM and DFP in her annual business plan for approval. The Commissioner receives a capped grant every year which she draws down monthly. CYPUP monitors actual against planned expenditure, and the Commissioner’s drawdown requests are accompanied by monthly profiles and explanations, which are scrutinised before approval of payment is given.

OFMDFM has regular contact meetings with the Commissioner. The work of the Commissioner’s office is discussed during these meetings, including any ongoing legal action initiated by the Commissioner and financial management. The Commissioner has advised OFMDFM that she is currently considering whether her legal challenge to the legislation on the physical punishment will proceed further at this time.

### Northern Ireland Children’s Commissioner

**Mr Simpson** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister if it has had any discussions with the NI Children’s Commissioner about whether she intends to lodge an appeal in the House of Lords following the failure of her attempts to outlaw smacking. (AQW 6891/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** The Children and Young People’s Unit (CYPUP), Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) is the sponsoring body for the Commissioner for Children and Young People for Northern Ireland.

The Commissioner is independent of Government. Under the Commissioner for Children and Young People’s (NI) Order 2003 the Commissioner has the power to bring, intervene in or assist in legal proceedings and carry out a “General review of advocacy, complaint, inspection and whistle-blowing arrangements of relevant authorities”.

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### Northern Ireland Children’s Commissioner

**Mr Simpson** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what contact it has had with the NI Children’s Commissioner about the attempts to criminalise smacking. (AQW 6892/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** The Children and Young People’s Unit (CYPUP), Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) is the sponsoring body for the Commissioner for Children and Young People for Northern Ireland.

The Commissioner is independent of Government. Under the Commissioner for Children and Young People's (NI) Order 2003 the Commissioner has the power to bring, intervene in or assist in legal proceedings and carry out a "General review of advocacy, complaint, inspection and whistle-blowing arrangements of relevant authorities".

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### **Northern Ireland Children's Commissioner**

**Mr Simpson** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what control it has over whether any campaign on the part of the NI Children's Commissioner ought to be funded by public money. (AQW 6893/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** The Children and Young People's Unit (CYPUP), Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) is the sponsoring body for the Commissioner for Children and Young People for Northern Ireland.

The Commissioner is independent of Government. Under the Commissioner for Children and Young People's (NI) Order 2003 the Commissioner has the power to bring, intervene in or assist in legal proceedings and carry out a "General review of advocacy, complaint, inspection and whistle-blowing arrangements of relevant authorities".

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### **Investment Strategy**

**Mr Hamilton** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what consideration he has given to improving communication of the investment strategy such as site signage at infrastructure projects, similar to that used by the national development plan in the Republic of Ireland. (AQW 6957/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** We are currently considering the best way forward with a view to ensuring that the investment strategy and the almost £20bn worth of projects contained in it are highly visible to the public and are therefore seen to be making a difference.

### Strategy for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration

**Mrs D Kelly** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister when the strategy on cohesion, sharing and integration be published. (AQW 7138/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** Improving relationships between and within communities and building a shared and better future remains a high priority for our Department and the Executive. We are continuing to develop and refine the programme for cohesion, sharing and integration to examine how we can build on the achievements of previous initiatives and programmes.

Our work at Ministerial level in OFMDFM as well as throughout the Department at all levels, has demonstrated our commitment to building cohesive, inclusive communities. The fact that we have been delivering substantial additional funding secured in the Executive's budget is just one of our achievements. We have increased funding by a third for the period 2008-2011, from £21 million in the previous CSR period to almost £30 million in the current one. That means that vital work on the ground and with both existing and new communities is better resourced than ever. We also want to ensure that these resources are used in an effective way, so we have been assessing existing programmes and considering new approaches to ensure tangible outcomes from our funding and actions.

We have increased funding to minority ethnic groups by two-thirds and increased funding for youth and interface workers by one-quarter. Statistics show that the work that we fund and resource, is delivering real and meaningful outcomes. There has been a 13.2% reduction in sectarian motivated crimes and three out of five young people in 2007 reported that relationships between Protestants and Catholics were getting better.

However, we are not complacent – we are leading and driving change in our society and in our work – through the Department and the Executive to deliver a shared and better future for all our people.

We are still determined to bring the programme forward as soon as possible, but not before we are satisfied that we have got the detail right.

### Gender Advisory Panel

**Mr Weir** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the terms of reference of the Gender Advisory Panel. (AQW 7178/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** The membership and terms of reference of the Gender Advisory Panel (April 2008 – June 2009) are as follows:

#### Background

In the Programme for Government 2008-2011, the Northern Ireland Executive commits to tackling remaining gender inequalities, implementing the cross departmental Gender Equality Strategy and working towards the total elimination of the gender pay gap.

To ensure continued engagement and a partnership approach to working with our stakeholders on these issues, this document sets out the role, membership and business of the gender advisory panel over the period April 2008 – June 2009.

#### Role of the Gender Advisory Panel

Working in partnership with the Gender Equality Unit, the panel will advise and assist in the development and monitoring of cross-departmental gender equality action plans for women and men, to deliver the Gender Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland 2006-2016 ("the Strategy"). In doing so, the Panel will take account of the provisions of the Programme for Government, including those regarding effective programmes and strategies aimed at achieving the eradication of all forms of violence against women; at combating the lack of women's representation in political and public life; and at ensuring access to affordable quality childcare.



In advising the Gender Equality Unit, members of the Panel will ensure that they reflect the views and opinions of their organisations and ensure that the multiple identities of their members are considered. The Gender Equality Unit will ensure that the views of the Panel are reflected in advice to the Ministers.

Members of the Panel will ensure that information is appropriately provided by them to other interested groups and stakeholders.

### **Membership**

Invited as members to the Gender Advisory Panel are representatives of women's organisations, representatives of men's organisations, the ECNI, NIC/ICTU and CBI.

The Gender Equality Unit will ensure that membership is sufficiently broad to cover all issues relevant to the Strategy and action plans; and will also maintain contacts across the voluntary and community sector as required. For reasons of manageability, as a general rule there will be a limit of 25 on numbers attending regular Panel meetings (except for seminars etc which the Panel may convene).

The Panel will review its membership as work on the two action plans progresses.

### **Chair**

A senior official from OFMDFM will chair the meetings with the Panel.

### **Meetings**

Meetings will be held to facilitate progress on the development and completion of the cross departmental action plans for women and men. Members of the advisory panel will be given two optional dates 4 weeks in advance of a meeting. Discussion can also be completed by e-mail and post. Meetings with particular panel members may be held separately.

### **Support**

The Gender Equality Unit will support meetings of the panel.

### **Review**

These terms of reference will be kept under review as the work on the action plans progresses.

Current membership of the Gender Advisory Panel, which is chaired by a senior OFMDFM official, comprises representation from the following organisations:

- Coalition on Sexual Orientation
- Disability Action
- Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
- Family Planning Association NI
- Women's Forum NI
- NIC/ICTU
- Lesbian Advocacy Services Initiative
- NI Rural Women's Network
- Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities
- Northern Ireland Women's European Platform
- Older Women's Network
- The Men's Project
- Women's Resource and Development Agency
- Women's Support Network
- Youth Action
- Men's Action Network
- CBI
- Women's National Commission
- Women's Aid Federation NI

## Gender Advisory Panel

**Mr Weir** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the membership of the Gender Advisory Panel and the organisations they represent. (AQW 7179/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** The membership and terms of reference of the Gender Advisory Panel (April 2008 – June 2009) are as follows:

### Background

In the Programme for Government 2008-2011, the Northern Ireland Executive commits to tackling remaining gender inequalities, implementing the cross departmental Gender Equality Strategy and working towards the total elimination of the gender pay gap.

To ensure continued engagement and a partnership approach to working with our stakeholders on these issues, this document sets out the role, membership and business of the gender advisory panel over the period April 2008 – June 2009.

### Role of the Gender Advisory Panel

Working in partnership with the Gender Equality Unit, the panel will advise and assist in the development and monitoring of cross-departmental gender equality action plans for women and men, to deliver the Gender Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland 2006-2016 (“the Strategy”). In doing so, the Panel will take account of the provisions of the Programme for Government, including those regarding effective programmes and strategies aimed at achieving the eradication of all forms of violence against women; at combating the lack of women’s representation in political and public life; and at ensuring access to affordable quality childcare.

In advising the Gender Equality Unit, members of the Panel will ensure that they reflect the views and opinions of their organisations and ensure that the multiple identities of their members are considered. The Gender Equality Unit will ensure that the views of the Panel are reflected in advice to the Ministers.

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### Membership

Invited as members to the Gender Advisory Panel are representatives of women’s organisations, representatives of men’s organisations, the ECNI, NIC/ICTU and CBI.

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- Older Women's Network
- The Men's Project
- Women's Resource and Development Agency
- Women's Support Network
- Youth Action
- Men's Action Network
- CBI
- Women's National Commission
- Women's Aid Federation NI

### Flags and Emblems

**Mr Butler** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what progress has been made to date on developing a new flags and emblems protocol between her Department and other statutory agencies; and to give details as to when this protocol will be in place. (AQW 7266/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** The inter-agency Flags Protocol that was launched in 2005 is still current and operational. The draft Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration may have implications for flags protocol work and it is evident that future work and planning could be premature in advance of the public consultation on the Programme of Cohesion, Sharing and Integration. Therefore, the work on the review of the protocol shall resume after that consultation is complete and the outcome is known.

### Quangos and Public Bodies

**Ms Anderson** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the Board members of all Quangos and Public Bodies that are currently operating. (AQW 7299/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** The names of all board members serving on public bodies sponsored by Northern Ireland departments can be found in the Public Appointments Annual Report. The most recent edition provides information at 31 March 2008.

Copies of the latest version of the Public Appointments Annual Report are available from the Assembly Library and can be found on the internet at [www.ofmdfmni.gov.uk/public-appointments](http://www.ofmdfmni.gov.uk/public-appointments).

The Public Appointments Annual Report for 2008/09 will be published later this year.

### North/South Ministerial Council

**Mrs D Kelly** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the issues that have been added to the work of the North/South Ministerial Council. (AQW 7311/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** Apart from Child Protection, which was discussed at the NSMC Plenary on 7 February 2008 and then referred for consideration within the NSMC Health Area for Co-operation, no additional issues have been added to the work plans of NSMC.

### Strategic Investment Board

**Mrs D Kelly** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what progress has been made by the Strategic Investment Board to bring forward projects to boost employment. (AQW 7312/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** The Strategic Investment Board works in support of departments in the delivery of the investment strategy, including the provision of expert assistance to departments on capital projects.

Since the approval of the investment strategy for Northern Ireland in February 2008 departments have delivered record levels of capital investment in the region of £1.5 billion. Despite the current economic challenges, this investment is over double what it was only 5 years previously and 30% higher than in 2007/2008.

In the last financial year capital investment related to the investment strategy accounted for some 31% of the total output of the construction industry and, on this basis, we estimate that public expenditure supported some 24,000 construction sector jobs.

### Review of Public Administration

**Ms Anderson** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail if any quango or public body is expected to be cut under the review of public administration. (AQW 7313/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** Under the review of public administration action has been taken to abolish/merge/transfer the functions of 17 public bodies.

The public bodies impacted are:

- Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency
- Driver and Vehicle Testing Agency
- Valuation and Lands Agency
- Rate Collection Agency
- Land Registers NI
- Ordnance Survey of NI
- Public Record Office NI
- Business Development Services
- Enterprise Ulster
- Pig Production Development Committee
- Advisory council in Infrastructure Investment
- NI Events Company
- Fisheries Conservancy Board
- Disability Living Allowance Board
- Central Services Agency
- Mental Health Commission for NI
- Health Estates Agency

### Regeneration of the Maze/Long Kesh

**Mrs D Kelly** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister when it will bring forward proposals for the regeneration of the Maze/Long Kesh. (AQW 7314/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** The Maze/Long Kesh site is one of regional significance located in a strategic position at the junction of the main arterial routes North/South and east-west. It is essential to maximise the site's economic, historical and reconciliation potential. We will establish a Development Corporation which will take this project forward and will build on the work previously undertaken by OFMDFM and the All-Party Maze/Long Kesh Consultation Panel and which will have regard to all the

elements of the site, including any listed buildings. To this end, consideration of the issues are at an early stage. Proposals will be brought forward as soon as possible.

### Public Procurement Contracts

**Ms J McCann** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the companies that were successful in securing public procurement contracts in works, services and goods through the Department, in the last two years and the percentage of those that were from the SME or the social economy sectors.

(AQW 7435/09)

**Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:** The companies that were successful in securing public procurement contracts in works, services and goods through the Department, including through its sponsored bodies, in the last two years are as follows:

Media Market	Brian Morrison Photography Ltd
CRE8 Photography Ltd	Doggart Adams Ltd
Harrison Photography	Houston Green Photography
Michael Cooper Photography	Mooney Media Ltd
Pacemaker Press International	Parkway Photography
Peter Morrison Photography	Peter Muhly
Phil Smyth Photography	Photopress
Press Eye Ltd	Stanley Matchett Photography
Lyle Bailie	Belfast Welcome Centre
FGS McClure Watters	Deloitte MCS Ltd
ASM Horwarth	Institute of Irish Studies, Queen's University
ARK	KPMG
Peter Shirlow / Brendan Murtagh	O'Reilly Stewart Solicitors
Partnerships UK	ED Vernon
BTW Shiells	Peter Coyne
Geronimo	AFBI
UUJ	Ciaran Cunningham
TMD Supply Chain Consultancy Ltd	Ballykeel Environmental
Primary Foundation	Groundworks
Arthur Cox	Bevan Brittan
L'Estrange & Brett	Scott Wilson
Comedia	Eversheds
bmf Business Services	ICLRD
Dilston Management	Addleshaw
Veredus	Penna PLC
BT	ESRI
Ernst & Young	VFM Consultancy
PriceWaterHouseCoopers	Gardiner & Theobald
Penna Recruitment	GVA Grimley
Derry City Council	City of Derry Airport



International Capital Partnerships	Eyesparks
West Belfast & Greater Shankill funding support	East Belfast Partnership funding support
Mosaic NI	West Belfast Partnership Board

Based on the information available to us we believe that 36% of the companies detailed above were from the SME or the Social Economy sectors.

## DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

### Bovine Tuberculosis

**Mr McCallister** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to provide details of the substantive and indisputable evidence that shows the transmission of tuberculosis from badgers to cattle. (AQW 7252/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms M Gildernew):** The two major recent scientific studies conducted in the south of Ireland and Britain (the Four Areas Trial and the Randomised Badger Culling Trial, respectively) have provided evidence of an association between bovine TB in badgers and bovine TB in cattle. The results of these studies have been published. Whilst this evidence indicates a link between bovine TB in both species, it is uncertain as to the direction of disease transmission i.e. whether the infection moves from badgers to cattle, from cattle to badgers, or in both directions.

The key question we are seeking to address in the north of Ireland in respect of badgers and TB in cattle is whether a badger intervention strategy would help to achieve a cost-effective reduction in bovine TB incidence in cattle.

Having assessed all the available information from work in Britain and in the South, my Department has concluded that it is not possible to extrapolate the information we need from the work that has been done in Britain and in the South. There are still key gaps in our scientific knowledge that need to be filled to inform what we do to deal effectively with the reservoir of infection in badgers, and to enable us to deal with TB comprehensively and conclusively.

In December, I announced a number of information gathering actions that will provide baseline information on disease and the costs of badger intervention, and inform where any intervention may be most effectively targeted. The additional expenditure that is needed for these actions will have to be supported by a robust business case and successful bids for the necessary resources. I will review the evidence these actions produce to inform my decision about what we do to reduce the transmission of TB between wildlife and cattle.

### Bovine Tuberculosis

**Mr McCallister** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if the culls in England or Ireland established substantive and indisputable evidence to show a badger to cattle transmission of bovine tuberculosis. (AQW 7254/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** The two major recent scientific studies conducted in the south of Ireland and Britain (the Four Areas Trial and the Randomised Badger Culling Trial, respectively) have provided evidence of an association between bovine TB in badgers and bovine TB in cattle. The results of these studies have been published. Whilst this evidence indicates a link between bovine TB in both species, it is uncertain as to the direction of disease transmission i.e. whether the infection moves from badgers to cattle, from cattle to badgers, or in both directions.

The key question we are seeking to address in the north of Ireland in respect of badgers and TB in cattle is whether a badger intervention strategy would help to achieve a cost-effective reduction in bovine TB incidence in cattle.

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what we do to deal effectively with the reservoir of infection in badgers, and to enable us to deal with TB comprehensively and conclusively.

In December, I announced a number of information gathering actions that will provide baseline information on disease and the costs of badger intervention, and inform where any intervention may be most effectively targeted. The additional expenditure that is needed for these actions will have to be supported by a robust business case and successful bids for the necessary resources. I will review the evidence these actions produce to inform my decision about what we do to reduce the transmission of TB between wildlife and cattle.

### **Bovine Tuberculosis**

**Mr McCallister** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she was aware that the NIAO report “The Control of Bovine Tuberculosis in Northern Ireland” published in March 2009, devotes an entire section (section 5) to the question of fraud in relation to bovine tuberculosis testing; and the enormous sum of public money (£86 million from 1997 to 2006) spent in compensating farmers with infected cattle.(AQW 7255/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** I welcome the NIAO Report and its recommendations regarding the control of bovine TB. I am aware that Section 5 of the Report deals with compensation, enforcement and fraud. My Department takes the risk of fraud very seriously and operates a “zero tolerance” policy. Where there are reasonable grounds for suspicion that a fraud has been committed the case is investigated vigorously. If, following an investigation, there is sufficient evidence to proceed with legal action; cases are referred to the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) for direction.

The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) hearing to consider the NIAO report took place on Thursday 26 March following the publication of the report on 18 March. The next stage in the process is for the PAC to publish their report in due course. My Department will then consider the PAC report and a formal Memorandum of Reply will be laid before the Assembly within two months of receipt of the Report, giving our commitment to the recommendations that have been made.

My Department is continuing to work in partnership with our key stakeholders to develop the agreed industry/Government approach to TB that I announced in December.

My Department will take full account of the recommendations of the Report as we develop the detail of the strategy.

### **Bovine Tuberculosis**

**Mr McCallister** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if research has been carried out by, or on behalf of, her Department, on the issue of cattle to badger transmission of bovine tuberculosis; and if so, to detail the outcome of the research. (AQW 7258/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** There has been no research carried out specifically on the issue of cattle to badger transmission of bovine tuberculosis in the North.

There is ongoing research being conducted by the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) to determine the bovine TB strain types of both cattle and road kill badgers. This work provides indirect evidence of an association between bovine TB infections in cattle and badgers in the North. However, it does not provide evidence of the direction of the transmission of bovine TB between cattle and badgers. While this work is not yet complete a summary of the work is available on the Departments website at: [www.dardni.gov.uk](http://www.dardni.gov.uk)

### **Bovine Tuberculosis**

**Mr McCallister** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she is aware that the Northern Ireland Audit Office report quotes the 2002 Policy Review and concludes that bovine tuberculosis is spread by “the nature of farming in Northern Ireland, with small fragmented farms, strong dependency on rented pasture and a high level of animal movement between and within herds; and that the report lists (i) neighbouring cattle markets (i.e. nose-to-nose infection); (ii) vehicles; (iii) equipment; (iv) leased fields; (v) winter housing; (vi) slurry and; (vii) purchased cattle, as potential routes by which bovine tuberculosis may be spread. (AQW 7262/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** I am aware that Section 3 of the NIAO Report refers to the potential routes by which bovine TB may spread to or from the farm. There is a multitude of factors which can potentially affect the level of TB. TB is a complex disease and it is not clear what the relative significance is of the various risk factors involved including husbandry practices, the pattern of movement into and out of the herd, and the presence of wildlife. To eradicate TB, we will need to deal effectively with all factors. The current NI TB control programme is based largely on cattle control measures. The new strategic approach to TB that I announced in December is a phased and holistic approach based on addressing three key strands together – real partnership between government and industry, controlling the spread of TB between cattle, and addressing the wildlife factor.

### MLA Representations

**Mr T Clarke** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many representations she has made to her Department as a constituency MLA, since she took up office. (AQW 7320/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** As Minister for the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development I have responded to 8 representations from my constituency office since the date of the restoration of Devolved Administration (8 May 2007).

### Price of Fertilizers

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what her Department is doing to help to reduce the price of fertilizers for farmers. (AQW 7385/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** Fertiliser prices are driven by the interaction of international demand and supply conditions and by energy prices. Therefore, it is not possible for me, or for government, to influence these drivers.

My Department is, however, working with farmers to help them minimise their requirements for fertiliser input. In the past year the College of Agriculture Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) delivered Nutrient Management Planning workshops to over 1000 farmers. These workshops focused on the interpretation of soil analysis, the value of slurry and manure, chemical fertiliser requirements to grow successful crops, understanding the Nitrates Directive and hands-on use of nutrient management decision support programmes.

These decision support programmes have been developed by the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) and CAFRE and are available to farmers through the RuralNI website.

Research at AFBI has shown that slurry application by a trailing-shoe system gave a 26% improvement in total Nitrogen utilisation compared to spreading by conventional splash plate method. The resulting improved grass yield is equivalent to applying chemical nitrogen fertiliser at a rate of 44 kg per hectare. During the summer of 2008 CAFRE organised Slurry Efficiency workshops for farmers which focused on trailing-shoe technology.

The Manure Efficiency and Technology Sub Programme (METS) of the Farm Modernisation Programme provides capital grant support for advanced slurry spreaders such as the trailing-shoe. These technologies will help farmers to achieve greater nutrient efficiency from manures and slurry. This will decrease chemical fertiliser requirements and reduce input costs for farmers.

A well managed grass / clover sward can produce the same output as a grass sward which has had a seasonal dressing of up to 200kg of nitrogen per hectare, potentially saving around £210 / hectare over the grazing season.

In 2008 my Department through the NI Red Meat Industry Task Force's Grass / Clover Initiative delivered nine grass / clover on-farm workshops across the north of Ireland which were attended by over 500 farmers. Also in 2008 AFBI held an Open Day on Grass / Clover at the NI Horticulture and Plant Breeding Station in Loughall. These activities, which were supported by articles in the farming press, aimed to demonstrate to farmers the benefits of clover in reducing the amount of fertiliser required and to explain to farmers how grass / clover swards should be managed.

My Department also recently participated in an NI Red Meat Industry Task Force best practice mission to New Zealand. A topic that featured during this mission was grassland management practices with particular reference to the establishment and management of clover-based systems. A recommendation made in respect of this topic was that the initial work by the Task Force on grass / clover should be developed through the establishment of

Grass / Clover Monitor farms and increased publicity via internet, publications, Balmoral Show and local shows in 2009.

As a result of this recommendation CAFRE will shortly be launching a Grass / Clover Monitor Farm technology project. This project will assist local groups of farmers who wish to work closely with a Technology Monitor farm in their area. The Technology Monitor farmer will be a grass clover enthusiast who will agree to develop and demonstrate clover based systems and be willing to illustrate the results to the local group. Details of this project have already featured in the farming press and further information will follow as the project gets underway. The benefits of using clover within grassland systems in the North will also feature in the DARD stand at Balmoral Show this month and at local agricultural shows throughout the summer.

### Bovine Tuberculosis

**Mr Ross** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many cases of tuberculosis have been confirmed in the East Antrim constituency, in each month, in each of the last three years. (AQW 7389/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** The number of confirmed cases of bovine tuberculosis by month.

Year	Month	Cases
2006	1	4
2006	3	1
2006	4	2
2006	5	1
2006	7	1
2006	8	2
2006	10	1
2006	12	1
2007	1	2
2007	2	1
2007	4	1
2007	5	1
2007	8	1
2007	10	2
2007	12	2
2008	4	1
2008	8	1
2008	9	1
2008	12	1
2009	1	1

This represents cases that have been detected, in the relevant patches of the Larne Division, at an official Tuberculosis test or meat inspection and had the disease confirmed by culture of the causal organism in the AFBI Laboratory. Months with no confirmed cases have been omitted from the table.

### Farm Nutrient Scheme

**Mr Bresland** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many farm businesses, which are in receipt of the Farm Nutrient Scheme, were awaiting an inspection at 30th April. (AQW 7431/09)

**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:** At the 30 April 2009 there were some 1,600 claimants still to be inspected under the Farm Nutrient Management Scheme (FNMS). My Department will be writing shortly to these farmers explaining when they can expect their inspection.

## DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

### Capital Investment in Lagan Valley

**Mr Craig** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what are (i) the projects; and (ii) the amounts of capital investment planned for the Lagan Valley constituency, in the next three years. (AQW 6570/09)

**Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr G Campbell):**

Ongoing and Planned Projects				
Name	Value of Investment	Start Date	2009/10 - Expenditure	2010/11 - Expenditure
Building Sport Dromara GFC	£245,000	02/09/08	£46,000	£0
Places for Sport Lisburn Racquets Club	£124,914	22/01/09	£3,123	£0

### LAGAN VALLEY CONSTITUENCY

### Funding for Festivals and Events

**Mr Gardiner** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail his Department's funding for festivals and events in the Upper Bann area, broken down by each event, since May 2007. (AQW 7248/09)

**Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** The information requested is set out at Annex A.

#### ANNEX A

#### ARTS COUNCIL AND COMMUNITY FESTIVALS FUNDING FOR FESTIVALS AND EVENTS IN THE UPPER BANN AREA

##### 2007/08

Festival/Event	Funding
2007 Twelfth of July Festival	5,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,000</b>

##### 2008/09

Festival/Event	Funding
Banbridge Performing Arts Festival	* 4,000
Banbridge show	* 2,000
International Ploughing Championships	* 3,000
Co Down Pipe Band Championships	* 4,500
Stagestruck Festival Showcase	* 3,000
Lurgan Show	6,000
Big Lough Sunday	5,105
Gaelic Week	2,475
Stonewall Jackson Anniversary Event	391



Festival/Event	Funding
Country Comes to Town	11, 000
<b>Total</b>	<b>41, 471</b>

\*These figures include at least 50% match funding by the Local Council

NB. Donaghcloney Rural Needs Development Group received a grant of £36, 763 in 2008/09 from the Arts Council of which an element was for events/festivals, however, it is not possible to provide a breakdown of the precise allocation for events and festivals.

### Public Procurement Contracts

**Ms J McCann** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) which companies; and (ii) what percentage of companies from the SME or the Social Economy Sector were successful in securing public procurement contracts in works, services and goods through his Department, in the last two years. (AQW 7415/09)

**Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** The following list details, where it has been possible to identify companies as being from the SME or Social Economy Sector, those who were successful in securing public procurement contracts through my Department in the last two years.

Name of Company	Category (Works; Services; or Goods)
David Patton & Sons Ltd	Works
Hamilton Architects	Services
Glasgiven Contracts Ltd	Works
Beck Interiors Ltd	Works
Hydrosphere	Goods
LEICA Geosystems Ltd	Goods
International Marine Supplies	Goods
CMS	Services
Deloitte	Services
ESRI Ireland	Services
AV Browne	Services
Street Monkey	Services
ASM Howath	Services
Cadan Solutions	Services
Full Circle	Services
KPMG	Services
Goldblatt McGuigan	Services
Scottish Cultural Enterprise	Services
Aiken PR	Services
TDP Advertising	Services
John Edmund	Services
Arthur Cox	Services
Press Eye Ltd	Services
Chambre Public Affairs	Services
APEM	Services

Name of Company	Category (Works; Services; or Goods)
Grant Thornton	Services
Ipos Mori	Services
Neueda	Services
Fire IMC	Services
Farrell Products	Goods
Electronic Metering Equipment & Control (EMEC)	Goods
GP Security	Goods
Tracey Concrete	Goods
BJT Commercial	Goods
RTU Mortar	Goods
Refreshing Springs	Goods
David Christie & Son	Goods
Nightsearcher Ltd	Goods
Gilpin Farm machinery	Goods
P Clarke & Sons Ltd	Goods
McCullagh Ltd	Goods
Walter Campbell Builders	Works
Tricon Engineering	Works
Tom Woods Contracts	Works
Wallace Engineering	Works
Fitzroy Contracts	Works
Corramore	Works
Noel Hara	Works
Hanna Boats	Works
V&R Interior Design	Services
ITS Craigavon	Services

The Department does not hold a definitive list of the total number of SMEs, or other organisations engaged in the Social Economy Sector, and is therefore not in a position to express the total number of companies listed in this answer as an overall percentage figure.

### Regional Minority Languages

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the 3rd Periodical Report on the European Charter for Regional Minority Languages; and when his Department expects to submit its report to be included in the UK 3rd Periodical Report on the European Charter. (AQW 7502/09)

**Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** The European Charter is an international convention designed to protect and promote regional and minority languages as a threatened aspect of Europe's cultural heritage. The Charter does not establish any individual or collective rights for the speakers of regional or minority languages.

The Northern Ireland input to the UK's Third Periodical Report is a factual record of relevant actions implemented between July 2005 and July 2008 in relation to Ulster-Scots and Irish. Issues that were not taken forward and events that occurred outside the timeframe are beyond the scope of this report.

The Northern Ireland input is still being considered by the Deputy First Minister. I raised this issue at the Executive Meeting on Thursday 23 April but agreement has still not been achieved. At this stage I am unable to specify when the report might be finalised.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has advised my Department that the UK Report will issue to the Council of Europe in the near future, including input from the Northern Ireland Office, but without input from the Northern Ireland Executive.

### Departmental Land

**Dr McDonnell** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if in light of the current economic crisis, and with rising fuel and food prices, he has any plans to release departmental land for the use of local communities to grow affordable food and make local food more sustainable. (AQW 7617/09)

**Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:** DCAL does not retain the ownership of land which would be suitable for the purposes of growing food.

However the Department maintains a Public Angling Estate which gives the public access to very reasonably priced angling for fish species which are popular for eating.

## DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

### Mobile Classrooms

**Mr Gardiner** asked the Minister of Education how many mobile classrooms are used for teaching, broken down by school, in the Upper Bann Constituency. (AQW 6678/09)

**Minister of Education (Ms C Ruane):** Seo mar a leanas líon iomlán na seomraí ranga soghluaiste a mbíonn in úsáid fã choinne teagaisc i dtoghcheantar na Banna Uachtar, miondealaithe de réir na scoile.

The total number of mobile classrooms used for teaching broken down by school in the Upper Bann Constituency is as follows:

Lurgan Model Primary School	1
King's Park Primary School	2
Edenderry Primary School (Portadown)	3
Scarva Primary School	1
Edenderry Primary School (Banbridge)	3
Millington Primary School	1
Drumgor Primary School	2
Ballyoran Primary School	3
Tannaghmore Primary School	9
St Teresa's Primary School (Lurgan)	8
St Mary's Primary School (Magherry)	1
St Patrick's Primary School (Aghacommon)	3
St Anthony's Primary School	1
St Mary's Primary School (Derrymore)	2
St Mary's Primary School (Banbridge)	5
St Brendan's Primary School	2

St Francis' Primary School (Aghaderg)	1
Seagoe Primary School	2
Banbridge Primary School	5
Lurgan Junior High School	1
St Patrick's College (Banbridge)	4
St Paul's Junior High School (Lurgan)	4
Lismore Comprehensive School	4
New-Bridge Integrated College	6
St Michael's Grammar School	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>83</b>

My department's capital budget for the next 2 years is £488M. Within this allocation work will be carried out to improve temporary accommodation in the school's estate. It is however, necessary to have modular accommodation to meet unmet demand and offset other deficiencies in accommodation. The new improved modular accommodation should go some way to addressing the issues associated with this type of accommodation.

### Mobile Classrooms

**Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Education how many mobile classrooms are being used in schools in each constituency. (AQW 6740/09)

**Minister of Education:** Seo mar a leanas líon iomlán na seomraí ranga soghluaiste a mbíonn in úsáid ag scoileanna i ngach toghcheantar parlaiminte.

The total number of mobile classrooms being used in schools in each parliamentary constituency is as follows:

<b>Belfast East</b>	<b>11</b>
Belfast North	40
Belfast South	38
Belfast West	76
East Antrim	92
East Derry	97
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	131
Foyle	98
Lagan Valley	74
Mid Ulster	131
Newry and Armagh	151
North Antrim	122
North Down	46
South Antrim	108
South Down	166
Strangford	77
Upper Bann	83
West Tyrone	130
<b>Total</b>	<b>1671</b>

My department's capital budget for the next 2 years is £488M. Within this allocation work will be carried out to improve temporary accommodation in the school's estate. It is however, necessary to have modular accommodation to meet unmet demand and offset other deficiencies in accommodation. The new improved modular accommodation should go some way to addressing the issues associated with this type of accommodation.

### Asbestos

**Mr Savage** asked the Minister of Education what the criteria is for the selection of companies to (i) investigate; (ii) detect; and (iii) remove asbestos from schools in each education and library boards. (AQW 6994/09)

**Minister of Education:** Seo a leanas na freagraí a thug na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne:

The education and library boards have provided the following responses:

	Criteria for the selection of companies to:
Belfast Education and Library Board	<b>(i) investigate asbestos in schools</b> After a publicly-advertised tendering process, and in accordance with Board procurement procedures, six qualified and suitably experienced surveyors were appointed to carry out Type 2 asbestos surveys on the entire board estate. All surveyors were required to hold a P402 asbestos surveying qualification or should work for an accredited organisation as an Inspection Body to ISO 17020, or hold personnel certification for asbestos surveying from a Certification Body accredited to ISO 17024. They must adhere to Methods for the Determination of Hazardous Substances (MDHS) 100 Surveying, Sampling & Assessment of Asbestos Containing Materials guidance produced by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).
	<b>(ii) detect asbestos in schools</b> As a quality control measure and due to the large number of surveyors, all samples taken as part of the survey process were analysed in accordance with MDHS 77 within the same laboratory, holding accreditation to ISO 17025, which offered a 24 hour/same day return of results in the event of an emergency situation. Site specific reports were required to detail all analytical and risk and material assessment data.
	<b>(iii) remove asbestos from schools</b> Due to the urgent need for asbestos removal and management works, suitably qualified and licensed asbestos removal contractors were co-opted from the publicly advertised & tendered lists compiled by other Education & Library Boards.
Western Education and Library Board	<b>(i) investigate asbestos in schools</b> Suitably qualified and experienced surveyors, drawn from Constructionline, were appointed by WELB to carry out Type 2 asbestos surveys of all its premises in accordance with MDHS 100 "Surveying, sampling and assessment of asbestos containing materials". As part of the Board's Asbestos Management Plan asbestos is managed in-house by qualified Board Officers.
	<b>(ii) detect asbestos in schools</b> Samples of suspected asbestos containing materials were taken as part of the surveying process. These samples were analysed in accordance with the method given (MDHS 77) at a laboratory holding accreditation to ISO 17025. The subsequent reports provided a clear statement of whether asbestos was found and the type of asbestos identified. As part of the Board's Asbestos Management Plan asbestos is managed in-house by qualified Board Officers.



Western Education and Library Board	<p><b>(iii) remove asbestos from schools</b></p> <p>After a publicly advertised tendering process where asbestos removal contractors licensed by the Health and Safety Executive were invited to tender, eight suitably experienced contractors were appointed to carry out all asbestos removal in WELB premises in accordance with HSG 2007 (Health and Safety Guidance) 247 “Asbestos Removal”.</p>
North Eastern Education and Library Board	<p>Selection of all contractors is in compliance with NEELB’s Standing Orders. Contractors must be registered with Constructionline.</p>
	<p><b>(i) investigate asbestos in schools</b></p> <p>Suitably qualified and experienced surveyors were appointed as a result of public tender by NEELB to carry out Type 2 asbestos surveys of all its premises in accordance with MDHS 100 “Surveying, sampling and assessment of asbestos containing materials”. Contractors must hold appropriate public liability insurance cover of £10m.</p>
	<p><b>(ii) detect asbestos in schools</b></p> <p>Samples of suspected asbestos containing materials were taken as part of the surveying process. These samples were analysed in accordance with the method given (MDHS 77) at a laboratory holding accreditation to ISO 17025. The subsequent reports provided a clear statement of whether asbestos was found and the type of asbestos identified.</p>
South Eastern Education and Library Board	<p><b>(iii) remove asbestos from schools</b></p> <p>Asbestos removal contractors must be licensed and be on the list approved by the Health and Safety Executive.</p>
	<p><b>(i) investigate asbestos in schools</b></p> <p>Suitably qualified and experienced surveyors, drawn from Constructionline, were appointed by SEELB to carry out Type 2 asbestos surveys of all its premises in accordance with MDHS 100 “Surveying, sampling and assessment of asbestos containing materials”</p>
	<p><b>(ii) detect asbestos in schools</b></p> <p>Samples of suspected asbestos containing materials were taken as part of the surveying process. These samples were analysed in accordance with the method given (MDHS 77) at a laboratory holding accreditation to ISO 17025. The subsequent reports provided a clear statement of whether asbestos was found and the type of asbestos identified.</p>
	<p><b>(iii) remove asbestos from schools</b></p> <p>After a publicly advertised tendering process where the Health and Safety Executive licensed asbestos removal contractors were invited to tender, eight suitably experienced contractors were appointed to carry out all asbestos removal in SEELB premises in accordance with HSG 2007 (Health and Safety Guidance) 247 “Asbestos removal”.</p>

Southern Education and Library Board	<b>(i) investigate asbestos in schools</b> After a publicly advertised tendering process which included a technical assessment and interview, suitably qualified and experienced surveyors were appointed by SELB to carry out Type 2 asbestos surveys of all its premises in accordance with MDHS 100 "Surveying, sampling and assessment of asbestos containing materials".
	<b>(ii) detect asbestos in schools</b> Samples of suspected asbestos containing materials were taken as part of the surveying process. These samples were analysed in accordance with the method given (MDHS 77) at a laboratory holding accreditation to ISO 17025. The subsequent reports provided a clear statement of whether asbestos was found and the type of asbestos identified.
	<b>(iii) remove asbestos from schools</b> After a publicly advertised tendering process where the Health and Safety Executive licensed asbestos removal contractors were invited to tender, two suitably experienced contractors were appointed to carry out all asbestos removal in SELB premises in accordance with HSG 2007 (Health and Safety Guidance) 247 "Asbestos removal".

### Teaching Vacancies in East Belfast

**Mr Newton** asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the number of teaching vacancies in each school in east Belfast; and (ii) the number of temporary appointments that have been made to fill the vacancies.

(AQW 7067/09)

**Minister of Education:** Bíonn an Roinn ar lorg eolais maidir le folúntais múinteora ó gach scoil dheontas-chúnta ar bhonn bhliantúil. Tugann an t-eolas léiriú ar na folúntais ar dháta ar leith gach bliain. Sonraítear sa tábla thíos eolas a bhaineann leis an toghcheantar parlaiminteach Bhéal Feirste Thoir don bhliain acadúil 2008/2009

The Department seeks information on teacher vacancies from all grant-aided schools on an annual basis. The information provides a "snapshot" of vacancies at a specific date each year. Details relating to the academic year 2008/2009 for the Belfast East parliamentary constituency are set out in the table below.

- (1) The total number of vacancies is given in the first column. It includes all vacancies for permanent and temporary teaching posts for the 08/09 academic year reported by the school. The remaining columns detail whether or not those vacancies were filled, or still to be filled, as at 3 November 2008.
- (2) Although the Department does collect information on the number of permanent and temporary posts that were filled, it does not collect details of how schools filled these posts (i.e. whether a permanent post was filled by a permanent or temporary appointment).

Number of vacancies filled by 3rd November 2008 and number of vacancies still to be filled at 3rd November 2008 in schools in the Belfast East parliamentary constituency					
School Name	Total vacancies reported for 08/09	Permanent posts		Temporary posts	
		Number of unfilled vacancies	Number of filled vacancies	Number of unfilled vacancies	Number of filled vacancies
Ashfield Boys' High School	1	0	0	1	0
Ashfield Girls' High School	2	0	0	0	2
Avoniel Ps	0	0	0	0	0
Beechfield Ps	2	0	0	0	2
Belmont Ps	0	0	0	0	0
Bloomfield Collegiate	3	0	3	0	0
Bloomfield Collegiate Prep. Dept.	0	0	0	0	0

Number of vacancies filled by 3rd November 2008 and number of vacancies still to be filled at 3rd November 2008 in schools in the Belfast East parliamentary constituency					
School Name	Total vacancies reported for 08/09	Permanent posts		Temporary posts	
		Number of unfilled vacancies	Number of filled vacancies	Number of unfilled vacancies	Number of filled vacancies
Braniel Ps	6	0	2	0	4
Cabin Hill School	0	0	0	0	0
Campbell College	9	0	5	0	4
Castlereagh Nursery School	0	0	0	0	0
Clarawood Special School	0	0	0	0	0
Cregagh Ps	0	0	0	0	0
Dundela Infants School	1	0	1	0	0
Elmgrove Ps	1	0	0	0	1
Euston Street Ps	1	1	0	0	0
Gilnahirk Ps	1	0	1	0	0
Glendhu Nursery School	0	0	0	0	0
Greenwood House Assessment Centre	1	1	0	0	0
Greenwood Ps	1	1	0	0	0
Grosvenor Gs	12	1	9	0	2
King's Road Nursery School	0	0	0	0	0
Knockbreeda Nursery School	0	0	0	0	0
Knockbreda High School	3	0	0	1	2
Knockbreda Ps	0	0	0	0	0
Knocknagoney Ps	0	0	0	0	0
Lead Hill Ps	0	0	0	0	0
Lisnasharragh Ps	0	0	0	0	0
Loughview Integrated Ps	5	0	2	0	3
Mcarthur Nursery School	0	0	0	0	0
Mitchell House Special School	1	0	1	0	0
Orangefield High School	4	0	4	0	0
Orangefield Ps	0	0	0	0	0
Our Lady And St Patrick's College	0	0	0	0	0
Ravenscroft Nursery School	0	0	0	0	0
Sandbrook Nursery School	0	0	0	0	0
St Bernard's Ps	1	0	0	0	1
St Joseph's Ps	1	0	0	0	1
St Matthew's Ps	0	0	0	0	0
Strandtown Ps	1	0	1	0	0
Strathearn School	0	0	0	0	0
Strathearn School Prep. Dept.	0	0	0	0	0

Number of vacancies filled by 3rd November 2008 and number of vacancies still to be filled at 3rd November 2008 in schools in the Belfast East parliamentary constituency					
School Name	Total vacancies reported for 08/09	Permanent posts		Temporary posts	
		Number of unfilled vacancies	Number of filled vacancies	Number of unfilled vacancies	Number of filled vacancies
Tullycarnet Ps	0	0	0	0	0

1 Includes both full-time and part-time teaching posts.

## Teaching Posts

**Mr I McCrea** asked the Minister of Education how many teaching posts there are in primary schools in the Mid Ulster constituency. (AQW 7124/09)

**Minister of Education:** Ní bhailíonn an Roinn eolas ar líon na bpost do mhúinteoirí i dTuaisceart na hÉireann, ach bailíonn sí eolas maidir le líon na múinteoirí.

The Department does not collect data on the number of teaching posts, but does collect the numbers of teachers. The number of teachers in each school in the Mid Ulster parliamentary constituency in the academic year 2007-2008 is given in the table below.

### TEACHERS<sup>1</sup> IN SCHOOLS IN MID ULSTER PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY, 2007-2008

School Name	Town	Teachers filling or temporarily filling posts in 2007-2008
<b>Primary Schools</b>		
Altayeskey Ps	Draperstown	2
Ampertaine Ps	Upperlands	5
Anahorish Ps	Toomebridge	11
Aughamullan Ps	Dungannon	4
Ballylifford Ps	Cookstown	4
Ballynease Ps	Portglenone	4
Ballytree Ps	Stewartstown	6
Bellaghy Ps	Bellaghy	3
Bush Ps	Dungannon	9
Castledawson Ps	Castledawson	7
Churchtown Ps	Cookstown	4
Coagh Ps	Cookstown	4
Cookstown Ps	Cookstown	25
Crievagh Ps	Cookstown	3
Crossroads Ps	Kilrea	6
Culnady Ps	Upperlands	3
Derrychrin Ps	Coagh	6
Desertmartin Ps	Desertmartin	3
Donaghey Ps	Dungannon	7
Donaghmore Ps	Donaghmore	4
Drumard Ps	Upperlands	4

School Name	Town	Teachers filling or temporarily filling posts in 2007-2008
Edendork Ps	Dungannon	11
Gaelscoil Na Spéiríní	Draperstown	2
Gaelscoil Ui Neill	Coalisland	8
Greenlough Ps (St Mary's)	Clady	7
Holy Family Ps	Magherafelt	23
Holy Trinity Ps	Cookstown	31
Kilross Ps	Tobermore	5
Knockloughrim Ps	Knockloughrim	4
Knocknagin Ps	Desertmartin	5
Lissan Ps	Cookstown	6
Maghera Ps	Maghera	6
Magherafelt Controlled Ps	Magherafelt	14
Moneymore Ps	Moneymore	8
New Row Ps	Castledawson	8
Newmills Ps	Dungannon	4
Orritor Ps	Cookstown	10
Phoenix Integrated Primary School	Cookstown	5
Primate Dixon Ps	Coalisland	25
Queen Elizabeth Ii Ps	Pomeroy	3
Sacred Heart Ps, Rock	Dungannon	5
Spires Integrated Ps	Magherafelt	9
St Brigid's Ps	Knockloughrim	10
St Brigid's Ps	Coalisland	7
St Brigid's Ps Tirkane	Maghera	10
St Columba's Ps	Draperstown	6
St Columb's Ps (Cullion)	Desertmartin	4
St Eoghan's Ps	Draperstown	4
St John's Ps	Swatragh	8
St John's Ps	Coalisland	3
St Joseph's Ps	Galbally	11
St Joseph's Ps	Cookstown	4
St Malachy's Ps	Magherafelt	2
St Mary's Ps	Draperstown	10
St Mary's Ps	Bellaghy	10
St Mary's Ps	Dungannon	5
St Mary's Ps	Stewartstown	7
St Mary's Ps	Cookstown	7
St Mary's Ps	Pomeroy	9
St Mary's Ps (Glenview)	Maghera	16



School Name	Town	Teachers filling or temporarily filling posts in 2007-2008
St Patrick's P.S. Loup	Magherafelt	6
St Patrick's Ps	Dungannon	7
St Patrick's Ps	Dungannon	8
St Patrick's Ps	Coalisland	10
St Patrick's Ps	Moneymore	4
St Patrick's Ps (Glen)	Maghera	8
St Peter's Ps	Moortown	9
St Trea's Ps	Ballyronan	4
Stewartstown Ps	Stewartstown	2
Tobermore Ps	Tobermore	5
Woods Ps	Magherafelt	7
<b>Mid Ulster Primary Total</b>		<b>526</b>
<b>Secondary And Grammar Schools</b>		
Cookstown High School	Cookstown	64
Holy Trinity College	Coalisland	51
Maghera High School	Maghera	18
Magherafelt High School	Magherafelt	35
Rainey Endowed School	Magherafelt	52
Sperrin Integrated College	Magherafelt	32
St Colm's High School	Draperstown	27
St Joseph's Convent Gs	Donaghmore	35
St Joseph's High School	Dungannon	38
St Mary's College	Portglenone	24
St Mary's Gs	Magherafelt	68
St Patrick's Co-Ed Comp College	Maghera	89
St Pius X College	Magherafelt	63
<b>Mid Ulster Secondary And Grammar Total</b>		<b>596</b>

- 1 This table contains the total number of teachers in full-time or part-time permanent positions, teachers employed on a daily (1/365th) basis, and teachers temporarily covering vacancies (either full- or part-time). It does not include information on unfilled vacancies, or information on posts shared by teachers.

## Teaching Posts

**Mr I McCrea** asked the Minister of Education how many teaching posts there are in secondary schools in the Mid Ulster constituency. (AQW 7125/09)

**Minister of Education:** Ní bhailíonn an Roinn eolas ar líon na bpost do mhúinteoirí i dTuaisceart na hÉireann, ach bailíonn sí eolas maidir le líon na múinteoirí.

The Department does not collect data on the number of teaching posts, but does collect the numbers of teachers. The number of teachers in each school in the Mid Ulster parliamentary constituency in the academic year 2007-2008 is given in the table below.

**TEACHERS IN SCHOOLS IN MID ULSTER PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY, 2007-2008**

School Name	Town	Teachers filling or temporarily filling posts in 2007-2008
<b>Primary Schools</b>		
Altayeskey Ps	Draperstown	2
Ampertaine Ps	Upperlands	5
Anahorish Ps	Toomebridge	11
Aughamullan Ps	Dungannon	4
Ballylifford Ps	Cookstown	4
Ballynease Ps	Portglenone	4
Ballytrea Ps	Stewartstown	6
Bellaghy Ps	Bellaghy	3
Bush Ps	Dungannon	9
Castledawson Ps	Castledawson	7
Churchtown Ps	Cookstown	4
Coagh Ps	Cookstown	4
Cookstown Ps	Cookstown	25
Crievagh Ps	Cookstown	3
Crossroads Ps	Kilrea	6
Culnady Ps	Upperlands	3
Derrychrin Ps	Coagh	6
Desertmartin Ps	Desertmartin	3
Donaghey Ps	Dungannon	7
Donaghmore Ps	Donaghmore	4
Drumard Ps	Upperlands	4
Edendork Ps	Dungannon	11
Gaelscoil Na Spéiríní	Draperstown	2
Gaelscoil Ui Neill	Coalisland	8
Greenlough Ps (St Mary's)	Clady	7
Holy Family Ps	Magherafelt	23
Holy Trinity Ps	Cookstown	31
Kilross Ps	Tobermore	5
Knockloughrim Ps	Knockloughrim	4
Knocknagin Ps	Desertmartin	5
Lissan Ps	Cookstown	6
Maghera Ps	Maghera	6
Magherafelt Controlled Ps	Magherafelt	14
Moneymore Ps	Moneymore	8
New Row Ps	Castledawson	8
Newmills Ps	Dungannon	4
Orritor Ps	Cookstown	10

School Name	Town	Teachers filling or temporarily filling posts in 2007-2008
Phoenix Integrated Primary School	Cookstown	5
Primate Dixon Ps	Coalisland	25
Queen Elizabeth Ii Ps	Pomeroy	3
Sacred Heart Ps, Rock	Dungannon	5
Spires Integrated Ps	Magherafelt	9
St Brigid's Ps	Knockloughrim	10
St Brigid's Ps	Coalisland	7
St Brigid's Ps Tirkane	Maghera	10
St Columba's Ps	Draperstown	6
St Columb's Ps (Cullion)	Desertmartin	4
St Eoghan's Ps	Draperstown	4
St John's Ps	Swatragh	8
St John's Ps	Coalisland	3
St Joseph's Ps	Galbally	11
St Joseph's Ps	Cookstown	4
St Malachy's Ps	Magherafelt	2
St Mary's Ps	Draperstown	10
St Mary's Ps	Bellaghy	10
St Mary's Ps	Dungannon	5
St Mary's Ps	Stewartstown	7
St Mary's Ps	Cookstown	7
St Mary's Ps	Pomeroy	9
St Mary's Ps (Glenview)	Maghera	16
St Patrick's P.S. Loup	Magherafelt	6
St Patrick's Ps	Dungannon	7
St Patrick's Ps	Dungannon	8
St Patrick's Ps	Coalisland	10
St Patrick's Ps	Moneymore	4
St Patrick's Ps (Glen)	Maghera	8
St Peter's Ps	Moortown	9
St Trea's Ps	Ballyronan	4
Stewartstown Ps	Stewartstown	2
Tobermore Ps	Tobermore	5
Woods Ps	Magherafelt	7
<b>Mid Ulster Primary Total</b>		<b>526</b>
<b>Secondary And Grammar Schools</b>		
Cookstown High School	Cookstown	64
Holy Trinity College	Coalisland	51
Maghera High School	Maghera	18

School Name	Town	Teachers filling or temporarily filling posts in 2007-2008
Magherafelt High School	Magherafelt	35
Rainey Endowed School	Magherafelt	52
Sperrin Integrated College	Magherafelt	32
St Colm's High School	Draperstown	27
St Joseph's Convent Gs	Donaghmore	35
St Joseph's High School	Dungannon	38
St Mary's College	Portglenone	24
St Mary's Gs	Magherafelt	68
St Patrick's Co-Ed Comp College	Maghera	89
St Pius X College	Magherafelt	63
<b>Mid Ulster Secondary And Grammar Total</b>		<b>596</b>

- 1 This table contains the total number of teachers in full-time or part-time permanent positions, teachers employed on a daily (1/365th) basis, and teachers temporarily covering vacancies (either full- or part-time). It does not include information on unfilled vacancies, or information on posts shared by teachers.

## Departmental Land

**Mr Gardiner** asked the Minister of Education to detail all the land that is owned by her Department, its agencies, and the Education and Library Boards. (AQW 7209/09)

**Minister of Education:** Tá sé socraithe agam go gcuirfear an t-eolas a iarradh i leabharlann an Tionóil.

I have arranged for the information requested to be placed in the Assembly Library.

## Voluntary Fees

**Mr O'Dowd** asked the Minister of Education what legislation governs the practice of schools placing 'Voluntary Fees' on pupils. (AQW 7247/09)

**Minister of Education:** Tá an reachtaíocht a chuimsíonn ranníocaíochtaí saorálacha a iarrtar ó dhaltaí cuimsithe in Airteagal 137 den Education Reform Order 1989.

The legislation covering the request for voluntary contributions on pupils is covered by Article 137 of the Education Reform Order 1989.

Department of Education Circular No 1991/21 "Education Reform Order 1989 – Charges in Grant-Aided Schools from 1 April 1992" provides further guidance regarding charges levied on parents of registered pupils in grant-aided schools.

## Educational Psychology Service

**Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister of Education to outline how Educational Psychology Service time is allocated to schools; and what is the time-per-pupil ratio, in each Education and Library Board area. (AQW 7369/09)

**Minister of Education:** Chuir Príomhfheidhmeannaigh na mBord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne (ELBanna) an t-eolas seo a leanas in iúl dom:-

I have been advised by the Chief Executives of the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) as follows:-

### 1. Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB)

The BELB Educational Psychology Service allocates time to schools in a manner which:-

- (i) facilitates early intervention - more time is given to primary schools than to post-primary schools and sufficient time is allocated to allow all children under compulsory school age to be assessed in a timely manner;
- (ii) takes account of school size - schools with more pupils get more time;
- (iii) takes account of the level of attainment in each school - schools where fewer pupils get Transfer grades A to C2 get more time.

Whenever possible flexibility is exercised and schools may get more time than the minimum allocated.

## 2. North – Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB)

The NEELB Educational Psychology Service provides a service based on a minimum time allocation of one visit per 100 pupils per year.

Whenever possible flexibility is exercised and schools may get more time than the minimum allocated.

## 3. South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB)

The SEELB does not operate a time allocation model of service delivery. Referrals will normally be seen in the order in which they are referred although provision is made for exceptional circumstances.

## 4. Southern and Western Education and Library Boards (SELB and WELB)

The SELB and WELB allocate time to each school based on the school's enrolment plus additional time related to its free school meals (FSM) entitlement. The minimum time allocation is 2% of the school population multiplied by 4 hours of educational psychologist (EP) time plus the additional FSM element. This formula is flexible in accordance with EP staffing levels.

There is no set time-per-pupil ratio in each ELB. Time spent with individual pupils varies greatly depending on the complexity of the pupil's special educational needs. EPs ensure that they spend sufficient time with every pupil to ensure that her/his needs are comprehensively assessed and that all those involved with the pupil are fully informed of their findings.

## Youth Workers

**Mr Ross** asked the Minister of Education how many youth workers are planned for the East Antrim constituency, in each of the next three years. (AQW 7391/09)

**Minister of Education:** The Department of Education currently provides funding to the North Eastern Education and Library Board and the Bytes Project which employ youth workers in the East Antrim Constituency.

The Chief Executive of the NEELB has provided the following information on the number of youth workers currently employed by the Board in the East Antrim Constituency:

Full Time Youth Workers	Part Time Youth Workers
8	85

In addition, the NEELB contributes 70% salary costs for 5 youth tutors employed by schools in the constituency. It also provides funding to voluntary youth clubs in the constituency which employ a further 23 part-time youth workers.

The Director of Bytes Project has advised that the Rathcoole Bytes Centre is allocated 2 youth worker posts which are currently vacant but temporarily covered by other youth workers.

Is féidir go bhfuil oibrithe ógra eile ag obair sa toghcheantar atá fostaithe ag eagraíochtaí nach bhfaigheann cistiú ón Bhord ná ón Roinn Oideachais.

There may be other youth workers who operate in the constituency area who are employed by organisations which are not in receipt of Board or DE funding.

The Chief Executive of the NEELB has also advised that he has no plans to change the current level of youth workers in the area over the next three years. The Director of the Bytes Project has also advised that it is not possible at this time to forecast the number of youth workers who may be employed at its Bytes Centre in the



constituency over the next three years. However, it will be the responsibility of the new Education and Skills Authority to determine how it deploys resources for the Youth Service from January 2010.

### Rental Money

**Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of Education (i) how much rental money is owed by her Department to Gaelscoil Eanna; and (ii) when this money will be paid. (AQW 7408/09)

**Minister of Education:** The position of rental payments has been under discussion with InaG and is being considered positively as part of the wider examination with the sector on how best to address the accommodation deficiencies in existing schools.

The schools in question have submitted a number of claims for rental charges. These claims are in respect of accommodation purchased by InaG and two other Irish-medium support groups for the schools. Under the common funding formula arrangements approved rents and other costs associated with the provision of approved accommodation will be met from board's centre funds. There have been some rental agreements in place for sites in the Irish-medium sector but there has not to date been a similar arrangement for accommodation.

Tá mo roinn ag déanamh dul chun cinn, i gcomhairle le InaG, le díriú ar an cheist seo. Tá critéir á bhforbairt faoi láthair le haghaidh íocaíochtaí dá leithéid a bhreithniú agus táthar ag dréim leis go gcuirfear an chéim seo i gcrích ar ball.

My department is now moving forward, in consultation with InaG, to address this issue. Criteria for the consideration of such payments are currently being developed and is expected to be completed shortly.

### Rental Money

**Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of Education (i) how much rental money is owed by her Department to Gaelscoil Ghleann Darach; and (ii) when this money will be paid. (AQW 7409/09)

**Minister of Education:** The position of rental payments has been under discussion with InaG and is being considered positively as part of the wider examination with the sector on how best to address the accommodation deficiencies in existing schools.

The schools in question have submitted a number of claims for rental charges. These claims are in respect of accommodation purchased by InaG and two other Irish-medium support groups for the schools. Under the common funding formula arrangements approved rents and other costs associated with the provision of approved accommodation will be met from board's centre funds. There have been some rental agreements in place for sites in the Irish-medium sector but there has not to date been a similar arrangement for accommodation.

Tá mo roinn ag déanamh dul chun cinn, i gcomhairle le InaG, le díriú ar an cheist seo. Tá critéir á bhforbairt faoi láthair le haghaidh íocaíochtaí dá leithéid a bhreithniú agus táthar ag dréim leis go gcuirfear an chéim seo i gcrích ar ball.

My department is now moving forward, in consultation with InaG, to address this issue. Criteria for the consideration of such payments are currently being developed and is expected to be completed shortly.

### Rental Money

**Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of Education (i) how much rental money is owed by her Department to An Drochead Ltd in respect of Scoil an Drochid; and (ii) when this money will be paid. (AQW 7410/09)

**Minister of Education:** The position of rental payments has been under discussion with InaG and is being considered positively as part of the wider examination with the sector on how best to address the accommodation deficiencies in existing schools.

The schools in question have submitted a number of claims for rental charges. These claims are in respect of accommodation purchased by InaG and two other Irish-medium support groups for the schools. Under the common funding formula arrangements approved rents and other costs associated with the provision of approved accommodation will be met from board's centre funds. There have been some rental agreements in place for sites in the Irish-medium sector but there has not to date been a similar arrangement for accommodation.

Tá mo roinn ag déanamh dul chun cinn, i gcomhairle le InaG, le díriú ar an cheist seo. Tá critéir á bhforbairt faoi láthair le haghaidh íocaíochtaí dá leithéid a bhreithniú agus táthar ag dréim leis go gcuirfear an chéim seo i gcrích ar ball.

My department is now moving forward, in consultation with InaG, to address this issue. Criteria for the consideration of such payments are currently being developed and is expected to be completed shortly.

### Rental Money

**Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of Education (i) how much rental money is owed by her Department to Pobal an Chaistil in respect of Gaelscoil an Chaistil; and (ii) when this money will be paid. (AQW 7411/09)

**Minister of Education:** The position of rental payments has been under discussion with InaG and is being considered positively as part of the wider examination with the sector on how best to address the accommodation deficiencies in existing schools.

The schools in question have submitted a number of claims for rental charges. These claims are in respect of accommodation purchased by InaG and two other Irish-medium support groups for the schools. Under the common funding formula arrangements approved rents and other costs associated with the provision of approved accommodation will be met from board's centre funds. There have been some rental agreements in place for sites in the Irish-medium sector but there has not to date been a similar arrangement for accommodation.

Tá mo roinn ag déanamh dul chun cinn, i gcomhairle le InaG, le díriú ar an cheist seo. Tá critéir á bhforbairt faoi láthair le haghaidh íocaíochtaí dá leithéid a bhreithniú agus táthar ag dréim leis go gcuirfear an chéim seo i gcrích ar ball.

My department is now moving forward, in consultation with InaG, to address this issue. Criteria for the consideration of such payments are currently being developed and is expected to be completed shortly.

### Rental Money

**Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of Education (i) how much rent in total is owed to other Irish-medium schools; and (ii) to list the Irish-medium schools owed rent; and the amount owed to each school. (AQW 7412/09)

**Minister of Education:** The position of rental payments has been under discussion with InaG and is being considered positively as part of the wider examination with the sector on how best to address the accommodation deficiencies in existing schools.

The schools in question have submitted a number of claims for rental charges. These claims are in respect of accommodation purchased by InaG and two other Irish-medium support groups for the schools. Under the common funding formula arrangements approved rents and other costs associated with the provision of approved accommodation will be met from board's centre funds. There have been some rental agreements in place for sites in the Irish-medium sector but there has not to date been a similar arrangement for accommodation.

Tá mo roinn ag déanamh dul chun cinn, i gcomhairle le InaG, le díriú ar an cheist seo. Tá critéir á bhforbairt faoi láthair le haghaidh íocaíochtaí dá leithéid a bhreithniú agus táthar ag dréim leis go gcuirfear an chéim seo i gcrích ar ball.

My department is now moving forward, in consultation with InaG, to address this issue. Criteria for the consideration of such payments are currently being developed and is expected to be completed shortly.

### Public Procurement Contracts

**Ms J McCann** asked the Minister of Education (i) which companies; and (ii) what percentage of companies from the SME or the Social Economy Sector were successful in securing public procurement contracts in works, services, and goods through her Department, in the last two years. (AQW 7416/09)

**Minister of Education:** Ní fhaigheann an Roinn Oideachais obair, seirbhísí ná earraí go díreach ó chuideachtaí.

The Department of Education does not directly procure works, services and goods from companies. These are procured from Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) and Properties Division in the Department of Finance and Personnel.

### Youth Workers

**Mr Ross** asked the Minister of Education how many youth workers are employed in the East Antrim constituency. (AQW 7419/09)

**Minister of Education:** The Department of Education currently provides funding to the North Eastern Education and Library Board and the Bytes Project which employ youth workers in the East Antrim Constituency.

The Chief Executive of the NEELB has provided the following information on the number of youth workers currently employed by the Board in the East Antrim Constituency:

Full Time Youth Workers	Part Time Youth Workers
8	85

In addition, the NEELB contributes 70% salary costs for 5 youth tutors employed by schools in the constituency. It also provides funding to voluntary youth clubs in the constituency which employ a further 23 part-time youth workers.

The Director of Bytes Project has advised that the Rathcoole Bytes Centre is allocated 2 youth worker posts which are currently vacant but temporarily covered by other youth workers.

Is féidir go bhfuil oibrithe ógra eile ag obair sa toghcheantar atá fostaithe ag eagraíochtaí nach bhfaigheann cistiú ón Bhord ná ón Roinn Oideachais.

There may be other youth workers who operate in the constituency area who are employed by organisations which are not in receipt of Board or DE funding.

The Chief Executive of the NEELB has also advised that he has no plans to change the current level of youth workers in the area over the next three years. The Director of the Bytes Project has also advised that it is not possible at this time to forecast the number of youth workers who may be employed at its Bytes Centre in the constituency over the next three years. However, it will be the responsibility of the new Education and Skills Authority to determine how it deploys resources for the Youth Service from January 2010.

### Special Educational Needs

**Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister of Education to outline (i) the criteria for carrying out a stage three statutory assessment of special educational needs; (ii) how assessment slots are allocated to various schools; and (iii) what is the assessment per pupil ratio in each of the Education Board areas. (AQW 7448/09)

**Minister of Education:** At the outset I should explain that assessments of children's special educational needs (SEN) at Stage 3 of the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs (COP) are not statutory. At Stage 3, which is a school-based stage, teachers and the SEN co-ordinator are supported by specialists from outside the school, but it is at Stage 4 of the COP when the Education and Library Board (ELB) considers the need for a statutory assessment.

The Chief Executives of the ELBs have advised me that the criteria for carrying out a Stage 3 non-statutory assessment are that following detailed discussion of a pupil's needs a completed referral form, signed by the school and the pupil's parents, is sent to the appropriate ELB. Two education plans, which should clearly indicate that the school has implemented all appropriate strategies to deal with the pupil's needs and confirm the need for referral to an educational psychologist, should be attached to the referral form.

Assessment slots are allocated to schools using the time allocation model in all ELBs except the South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) as outlined in my response to your recently asked AQW 7369/09. In the SEELB referrals will normally be seen in the order in which they are referred although provision is made for exceptional circumstances.

Níl cóimheas ar leith leagtha síos maidir le measúnachtaí in aghaidh an dalta. Freagraíonn gach ELB na hiarrtais a dhéanann scoileanna sna ceantair ábhartha dóibh.

There is no set ratio of assessments per pupil. Each ELB responds to the requests made by schools in their area.

### Special Educational Needs

**Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister of Education to detail the number and percentage of children who have received a statutory assessment of special educational needs in each of the Board areas, in each of the last 5 years, broken down by the key stage at which the statutory assessment was carried out. (AQW 7449/09)

**Minister of Education:** Seo a leanas líon agus céatadán na bpáistí a fuair measúnú reachtúil ar riachtanais speisialta oideachais i ngach ceann de limistéir na mBord, i ngach bliain acadúil le 5 bliana acadúla anuas, miondealaithe de réir na heochairchéime ag a ndearnadh an measúnú reachtúil orthu:-

The number and percentage of children who have received a statutory assessment of special educational needs in each of the Board areas, in each of the last 5 academic years, broken down by the key stage at which the statutory assessment was carried out is as follows:-

#### BELFAST EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD

	KS1	%	KS2	%	KS3	%	KS4	%
2003/04	41	0.55	54	0.46	39	0.25	3	0.01
2004/05	72	0.95	43	0.38	53	0.35	6	0.06
2005/06	96	1.34	89	0.79	65	0.44	8	0.08
2006/07	80	1.16	61	0.55	60	0.42	13	0.13
2007/08	116	1.75	74	0.67	53	0.38	20	0.20

#### NORTH - EASTERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD

	KS1	%	KS2	%	KS3	%	KS4	%
2003/04	145	1.35	87	0.54	47	0.27	14	0.12
2004/05	134	1.24	81	0.50	54	0.32	6	0.05
2005/06	160	1.51	53	0.32	34	0.20	9	0.08
2006/07	111	1.06	51	0.32	30	0.18	0	0
2007/08	113	1.11	54	0.33	38	0.23	7	0.06

#### SOUTH - EASTERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD

	KS1	%	KS2	%	KS3	%	KS4	%
2003/04	4*	0.04	6*	0.04	8*	0.06	0*	0
2004/05	65*	0.63	37*	0.24	20*	0.20	0*	0
2005/06	246	2.43	136	0.89	4	0.32	2	0.02
2006/07	165	1.68	89	0.58	23	0.18	3	0.03
2007/08	128	1.37	69	0.45	23	0.18	3	0.03

\* Figures may be lower than actual in these years due to discrepancy in Board's IT records.

#### SOUTHERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD

	KS1	%	KS2	%	KS3	%	KS4	%
2003/04	*		*		*		*	

	KS1	%	KS2	%	KS3	%	KS4	%
2004/05	138	1.28	56	0.35	23	0.14	1	0.01
2005/06	241	2.26	83	0.51	41	0.24	4	0.03
2006/07	364	3.47	99	0.61	47	0.28	6	0.05
2007/08	236	2.31	71	0.43	40	0.25	7	0.06

\* Not available in Key Stages – total children who received a statutory assessment in 2003/04 is 383 which is 0.69% of the total school population.

#### WESTERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD

	KS1 & KS2**	%	KS3 & KS4**	%
2004*	175	0.79	72	0.30
2005*	150	0.68	46	0.20
2006*	166	0.77	55	0.24
2007*	135	0.64	55	0.25
2008*	125	0.60	57	0.26

\* calendar years

\*\* differentiation of Key Stages not recorded on IT database.

KS1 = Key Stage 1

KS2 = Key Stage 2

KS3 = Key Stage 3

KS4 = Key Stage 4

% = above numbers as a percentage of total school population in that key stage in that Board area.

### Rental Money

**Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of Education (i) how much rental money is owed by her Department in relation to Gaelscoil Eadain Mhoir; and (ii) when this money will be paid. (AQW 7481/09)

**Minister of Education:** The position of rental payments has been under discussion with InaG and is being considered positively as part of the wider examination with the sector on how best to address the accommodation deficiencies in existing schools.

The schools in question have submitted a number of claims for rental charges. These claims are in respect of accommodation purchased by InaG and two other Irish-medium support groups for the schools. Under the common funding formula arrangements approved rents and other costs associated with the provision of approved accommodation will be met from board's centre funds. There have been some rental agreements in place for sites in the Irish-medium sector but there has not to date been a similar arrangement for accommodation.

Tá mo roinn ag déanamh dul chun cinn, i gcomhairle le InaG, le díriú ar an cheist seo. Tá critéir á bhforbairt faoi láthair le haghaidh íocaíochtaí dá leithéid a bhreithniú agus táthar ag dréim leis go gcuirfear an chéim seo i gcrích ar ball.

My department is now moving forward, in consultation with InaG, to address this issue. Criteria for the consideration of such payments are currently being developed and is expected to be completed shortly.

### Rental Money

**Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of Education (i) how much rental money is owed by her Department in relation to Gaelscoil na Mona; and (ii) when this money will be paid. (AQW 7483/09)

**Minister of Education:** The position of rental payments has been under discussion with InaG and is being considered positively as part of the wider examination with the sector on how best to address the accommodation deficiencies in existing schools.



The schools in question have submitted a number of claims for rental charges. These claims are in respect of accommodation purchased by InaG and two other Irish-medium support groups for the schools. Under the common funding formula arrangements approved rents and other costs associated with the provision of approved accommodation will be met from board's centre funds. There have been some rental agreements in place for sites in the Irish-medium sector but there has not to date been a similar arrangement for accommodation.

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My department is now moving forward, in consultation with InaG, to address this issue. Criteria for the consideration of such payments are currently being developed and is expected to be completed shortly.

### Rental Money

**Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of Education (i) how much rental money is owed by her Department in relation to Bunscoil an Traonaigh; and (ii) when this money will be paid. (AQW 7486/09)

**Minister of Education:** The position of rental payments has been under discussion with InaG and is being considered positively as part of the wider examination with the sector on how best to address the accommodation deficiencies in existing schools.

The schools in question have submitted a number of claims for rental charges. These claims are in respect of accommodation purchased by InaG and two other Irish medium support groups for the schools. Under the common funding formula arrangements approved rents and other costs associated with the provision of approved accommodation will be met from board's centre funds. There have been some rental agreements in place for sites in the Irish-medium sector but there has not to date been a similar arrangement for accommodation.

Tá mo roinn ag déanamh dul chun cinn, i gcomhairle le InaG, le díriú ar an cheist seo. Tá critéir á bhforbairt faoi láthair le haghaidh íocaíochtaí dá leithéid a bhreithniú agus táthar ag dréim leis go gcuirfear an chéim seo i gcrích ar ball.

My department is now moving forward, in consultation with InaG, to address this issue. Criteria for the consideration of such payments are currently being developed and is expected to be completed shortly.

### Rental Money

**Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of Education (i) how much rental money is owed by her Department in relation to Gaelscoil na gCrann; and (ii) when this money will be paid. (AQW 7487/09)

**Minister of Education:** The position of rental payments has been under discussion with InaG and is being considered positively as part of the wider examination with the sector on how best to address the accommodation deficiencies in existing schools.

The schools in question have submitted a number of claims for rental charges. These claims are in respect of accommodation purchased by InaG and two other Irish-medium support groups for the schools. Under the common funding formula arrangements approved rents and other costs associated with the provision of approved accommodation will be met from board's centre funds. There have been some rental agreements in place for sites in the Irish-medium sector but there has not to date been a similar arrangement for accommodation.

Tá mo roinn ag déanamh dul chun cinn, i gcomhairle le InaG, le díriú ar an cheist seo. Tá critéir á bhforbairt faoi láthair le haghaidh íocaíochtaí dá leithéid a bhreithniú agus táthar ag dréim leis go gcuirfear an chéim seo i gcrích ar ball.

My department is now moving forward, in consultation with InaG, to address this issue. Criteria for the consideration of such payments are currently being developed and is expected to be completed shortly.

### Rental Money

**Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of Education (ii) how much rental money is owed by her Department in relation to Gaelscoil an Damba; and (ii) when this money will be paid. (AQW 7488/09)

**Minister of Education:** The position of rental payments has been under discussion with InaG and is being considered positively as part of the wider examination with the sector on how best to address the accommodation deficiencies in existing schools.

The schools in question have submitted a number of claims for rental charges. These claims are in respect of accommodation purchased by InaG and two other Irish-medium support groups for the schools. Under the common funding formula arrangements approved rents and other costs associated with the provision of approved accommodation will be met from board's centre funds. There have been some rental agreements in place for sites in the Irish-medium sector but there has not to date been a similar arrangement for accommodation.

Tá mo roinn ag déanamh dul chun cinn, i gcomhairle le InaG, le díriú ar an cheist seo. Tá critéir á bhforbairt faoi láthair le haghaidh íocaíochtaí dá leithéid a bhreithniú agus táthar ag dréim leis go gcuirfear an chéim seo i gcrích ar ball.

My department is now moving forward, in consultation with InaG, to address this issue. Criteria for the consideration of such payments are currently being developed and is expected to be completed shortly.

### Economic Appraisal

**Ms Ní Chuilín** asked the Minister of Education what is the average time between an economic appraisal being submitted to her Department and a decision being made on it. (AQW 7529/09)

**Minister of Education:** All Economic Appraisals (EA) for major capital schemes submitted to the Department progress through a number of stages of scrutiny, comment and approval by the Department's Building and Economic Advisers. If total costs for the scheme exceed £5m, there is a further stage of approval by the Department of Finance and Personnel.

Bíonn dul chun cinn ar aon Bhreithmheas Eacnamaíochta ag brath ar roinnt mhaith athróg mar shampla, méid na leasuithe a bhíonn de dhíth lena chinntiú go gcloítear leis an treoir a fhoilsíonn an Roinn Airgeadais agus Pearsanra.

Progress of an EA is dependent on a significant number of variables for example, the volume of revisions required to ensure compliance with guidance produced by the Department of Finance and Personnel. It is not possible, therefore, to give an average timescale between submission of an Economic Appraisal and a decision being made on it.

### Free School Meals

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) how many pupils receive free school meals and; (ii) what percentage of the school age population does this represent, in the North Down constituency. (AQW 7542/09)

**Minister of Education:** The number of children taking school meals varies from week to week. However, information collected annually from the School Meals Census provides a snapshot of the numbers taking meals on the day on which census information is gathered.

Ar an lá a rinneadh an t-áireamh is deireanaí maidir le béilí scoile, 10ú Deireadh Fómhair 2008, fuair 751 dalta béile scoile saor in aisce i dtoghcheantar parlaiminte Dhún Thuaidh. B'ionann é seo agus 6% de dhaonra aoise scoile Dhún Thuaidh.

On the date of the most recent School Meals Census, 10th October 2008, 751 pupils in the North Down parliamentary constituency received free school meals. This represented 6% of the school age population in North Down.

### Enrolment to Preschool

**Mr Hilditch** asked the Minister of Education if she has any plans to review the admission criteria used for enrolment to preschool. (AQW 7548/09)

**Minister of Education:** Níl aon phleananna faoi láthair athruithe a dhéanamh ar Rialacháin um Oideachas Réamhscoile sna Scoileanna (Critéir Iontrála) 1999.

There are currently no plans for changes to be made to the Pre-School Education in Schools (Admissions Criteria) Regulations 1999.

### School Buildings Design Guide

**Mrs Long** asked the Minister of Education in relation to the review of the school buildings design guide, (i) when she anticipates the review will be completed and new guidance issued; and (ii) if the review included the different spacial needs of the extended schools programme in its remit. (AQW 7553/09)

**Minister of Education:** I can confirm that on 23 April 2009 my Department published an updated handbook which sets out the specification and design standards for new primary schools. This document has been circulated to the Education and Library Boards and Project Managers involved in the design of schools. It is also available to download from the Department's website.

Cuirtear san áireamh leis na Sceidil Athbhreithnithe um Chóiríocht seomraí ilchuspóireacha sa bhreis a bhfuil freastail ar réimse leathan feidhmíochta, ina n-áirítear seirbhísí agus gníomhachtaí a bhaineann le Clár na Scoileanna Seirbhísí Breise, mar aidhm acu.

The revised Schedules of Accommodation include additional multi-purpose rooms which are intended to serve a wide range of functions including the services and activities of the Extended Schools programme.

### Nursery Places in East Belfast

**Mr Newton** asked the Minister of Education what action she intends taking to address the shortfall in nursery places within the East Belfast constituency. (AQW 7564/09)

**Minister of Education:** Ní raibh eolas maidir le spriocasnamh áiteanna réamhscoile i dtoghcheantar Oirthear Bhéal Feirste curtha in iúl chuig mo Roinn ag na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne, a fheidhmíonn an próiseas iontrála.

The Education and Library Boards, who operate the admissions process, have not indicated to my Department a shortfall in preschool places within the East Belfast constituency.

The Early Years Branch in the Department liaises closely with Education and Library Board officers to ensure that any shortfall is identified and appropriate action taken as soon as possible.

### Statements of Educational Needs

**Mr Boylan** asked the Minister of Education for a breakdown of the number of children and young people in receipt of statements of educational needs across the Belfast Education and Library Board area. (AQW 7580/09)

**Minister of Education:** Tá an t-eolas a iarradh mionsonraithe sa tábla seo thíos.

The information requested is detailed in the table below.

NUMBER OF PUPILS IN RECEIPT OF A STATEMENT OF SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN THE BELFAST EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD – 2008/09

School type	BELB
Voluntary and private preschool centres and nursery schools	5
Primary	473
Post primary	496
Special	1,120
Total	2,094

**Source:** School census.

**Note:**

- Figure for primary schools includes children in nursery, reception and year 1 – 7 classes.
- Figures for voluntary and private preschool centres relate to children in funded places.

### South Eastern Education and Library Board

**Mrs I Robinson** asked the Minister of Education whether the South Eastern Education and Library Board is adhering to RPA guidelines in relation to secondments within RPA affected agencies and bodies. (AQW 7593/09)

**Minister of Education:** The SEELB follows the recommendations outlined in the Guiding Principles established by the Public Service Commission, including all necessary steps to safeguard the interests of staff and to ensure their smooth transfer to the Education and Skills Authority.

The provision for the interchange of staff with the RPA affected bodies, including secondment and the free flow of staff between and within public services is supported by the Board where it does not significantly compromise its business continuity and delivery of service.

Bhí an Bord ábalta deiseanna iasachta a éascú le haghaidh 24 foireann le 5 bliana anuas, le formhór na deiseanna siúd laistigh den earnáil Oideachais.

The Board has been able to facilitate secondment opportunities to 24 staff over the last 5 years, the majority of which have been within the Education sector.

### Departmental Land

**Dr McDonnell** asked the Minister of Education if in light of the current economic crisis, and with rising fuel and food prices, she has any plans to release departmental land for the use of local communities to grow affordable food and make local food more sustainable. (AQW 7619/09)

**Minister of Education:** Níl talamh ar bith faoi úinéireacht mo Roinne. Bíonn talamh a úsáidtear faoi choinne cúrsaí oideachais faoi úinéireacht na mBord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne nó faoi úinéireacht Iontaobhaithe scoileanna aonair. I gcás talaimh ar bith nach bhfuil de dhíth faoi choinne cúrsaí oideachais níos mó, caithfear é a dhiúscairt de réir threoir an Land and Property Service (LPS).

My Department does not own any land. Land used for educational purposes is owned by Education and Library Boards or by individual school Trustees. Any land no longer required for educational purposes is subject to disposal in accordance with Land and Property Service (LPS) guidance.

## DEPARTMENT FOR EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING

### Visteon Workers

**Mr Butler** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline what his Department has done to date to investigate the claims made by trade unions representing Visteon workers in relation to the redundancy and pensions rights of the workers. (AQW 7269/09)

**Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey):**

#### Redundancy

While I am very encouraged to learn that Visteon workers have since voted to accept a deal to end the dispute over the closure of the west Belfast factory, I offer the following in answer to your original question.

Employment Rights legislation allowed redundant workers of Visteon and their representatives the right to seek redress whenever they believed that there had been any breach of their redundancy payments and pension entitlements. This could ultimately have had to be resolved at an Industrial Tribunal when all other avenues had failed.

Clearly it is a matter of regret that the Visteon workers found themselves in a situation where they believed they have been working under contracts which would have entitled them to more redundancy pay than would be payable under the statutory scheme, which is the only one that the Administrator could apply once the companies was legally insolvent. In these circumstances my Department had to agree with the Administrator what those redundancy entitlements should be and make the payments to the redundant workers. I have no powers to investigate the contractual issues with previous employers or Visteon. Indeed, if we did so it could be seen to

prejudice subsequent legal options which the workers may have felt obliged to take. On that basis, it would be improper for me to investigate the contractual claims of workers in such circumstances.

As at 27th April 2009, one application from a former Visteon employee had been received by my Department for statutory redundancy and insolvency payments under the Employment Rights (Northern Ireland) Order 1996. With the ongoing dispute, other employees had been reluctant to complete a claim form for payment from the statutory scheme therefore my Department was not in a position to consider such claims until they had been received. Payments of eligible claims, once received, would have been made within the normal timescales.

### Pensions

With regard to pensions, as a result of allegations put to me by representatives of the Visteon workforce I instructed officers of my Department to pass on those concerns to colleagues in the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and this has been done. I have also raised these concerns with my Ministerial counterpart in DWP. In relation to statutory payments, my Department may have a limited liability under the Pension Schemes (N. Ireland) Act 1993 for meeting a portion of pension contributions which remain unpaid at the date the company in question became legally insolvent.

In the case of Visteon, it is the responsibility of the Administrator, in consultation with the pension fund trustees, to establish the company's liability to the pension fund. In turn, the Administrator may apply to my Department for any portion of contributions remaining unpaid.

## Student Enrolment Figures

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for a breakdown of (i) Protestant; and (ii) Roman Catholic student enrolment figures for universities, in each of the last three years. (AQW 7297/09)

**Minister for Employment and Learning:** Information on religion is only collected for Northern Ireland (NI) domiciled students studying at NI Higher Education Institutions.

The number of NI domiciled students enrolled in courses at NI Higher Education Institutions, broken down by religious background (where this data is available), in each of the last three years is detailed in the table below:

	Protestant	Catholic
2005/06	16,305	21,475
2006/07	14,590	20,055
2007/08	14,200	19,820

**Source:** Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

### Notes:

- (1) Figures have been rounded to the nearest 5 and due to rounding the sum of figures in each row may not match the total.
- (2) The latest available data are for 2007/08.
- (3) Religious affiliation is not a mandatory question and has a high non-response rate.

## St Mary's College

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what contact has he or his Department had, officially or unofficially, with St Mary's College about the college's future. (AQW 7302/09)

**Minister for Employment and Learning:** There have been no unofficial meetings with St. Mary's College about its future. Over the past year, I have had a number of meetings with senior management and Governing Body representatives of the College in relation to a range of issues, including funding and the development of strategic options. Departmental officials have also been involved in a range of meetings on similar issues.



## University of Ulster

**Mr Ross** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many confirmed redundancies have been made in the University of Ulster, Jordanstown campus. (AQW 7316/09)

**Minister for Employment and Learning:** The University of Ulster is carrying out restructuring exercises in two areas of its Jordanstown campus – Residential Services and the Faculty of Computing and Engineering. Fourteen support staff roles within Residential Services will be discontinued. Thirteen of the support staff have asked for and have been granted voluntary redundancy effective from 5 June 2009. The remaining member of staff has asked to be considered for redeployment.

Within the Faculty of Computing and Engineering, there have been ten voluntary redundancies. Three of these have been academic staff, two are academic related and five are support staff.

The restructuring process is likely to be completed by 30 June 2009 by which time further voluntary redundancies or early retirements will have been explored with support staff as well as the opportunity to consider redeployment. At present the number to be made redundant or granted early retirement cannot be known until the process nears completion.

In total there have been twenty-three redundancies to date at Jordanstown.

One further support post at Jordanstown will be discontinued in the Faculty of Life and Health Sciences in September 2009. The post holder is currently being interviewed for another post under redeployment procedures.

The university is handling these matters in line with its normal processes and procedures to minimise the potential for redundancies.

## Public Procurement Contracts

**Ms J McCann** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the companies that were successful in securing public procurement contracts in works, services and goods through his Department, in the last two years and the percentage of these that were from the SME or the Social Economy sectors. (AQW 7482/09)

**Minister for Employment and Learning:** The following companies were successful in securing public procurement contracts with this Department for works, services and goods through Central Procurement Directorate in DFP in the past two years. A total of 102 organisations were awarded contracts in the last two years. Based on local knowledge only, it is considered that 74% of these organisations are from the SME or Social Economy sectors; Departmental records contain insufficient information to be able to make a definitive judgement on this classification.

- A4e
- Austins Quality Training Services
- Actors Ireland
- Antrim Electrical
- ASM Howarth
- BCW Training Ltd
- Belfast Central Training Ltd
- Belfast College of Training & Education Ltd
- Belfast Metropolitan
- Blackwater House
- Bolton Community College
- CAFRE (DARD)
- Carter & Carter Group plc
- Coalisland Training Services Ltd
- Conservation Volunteers
- Cookstown Training
- Craft Recruitment & Training

- Creative Events
- Customized Training Services
- Dairy Farm Training (People 1st)
- Dairy Farm Training & Premier Care Homes (NI) Ltd
- Deloitte
- Derry Youth & Community Workshop Ltd
- Dowling Contracts
- EG Information Consulting
- Electrical Training Trust
- Engineering Training Council
- Farrens
- FGS/McClure Watters
- Food & Drink Training Council
- FPM Chartered Accountants
- Fujitsu Services
- Geronimo / Kindred PR
- Graham Training
- Graham Training & Premier Care Homes
- Grant Thornton
- Happening
- H & J Martin Ltd
- Hugh J O'Boyle Training Ltd
- Impact Training (NI) Limited
- Institute for Conflict Research
- Ipsos MORI
- Jennymount Training Services (The Hair Academy)
- Kennedy Fitzgerald Associates
- Knox & Clayton
- KPMG
- Larne Skills Development Ltd
- Loughview Training Services
- Mascott Construction
- Millar & Matchet
- Millward Brown Ulster Ltd
- Morrow Communications
- Napier University Edinburgh
- Network Personnel
- New Deal West
- NFRC (National Federation of Roofing Contractors)
- NIE
- North City Training
- North Down Training
- North Down Training & Datalink Reprographics Ltd
- North West Centre for Learning & Development (NI) Ltd
- North West Regional College
- Northern Regional College

- Opportunity Youth
- O'Hare & McGovern
- Oriel Training Services
- Oxford Economics
- Paragon Training (NI) Ltd
- Plumbing & Mechanical Services Training (NI) Ltd
- PMST
- Portview Fit Out
- Proteus NI Ltd
- Protocol
- QCG
- RT Resources
- Rutledge Joblink
- Seven Towers Training Ltd
- Shorts Bombardier
- SMR
- South Eastern Regional College
- South West College
- Southern Regional College
- Springvale Learning Ltd
- STEP
- Stothers
- Strabane Community Work Programme
- Strabane Training Services Ltd
- Swann Training Services Ltd
- The Link Works
- Tracey Brothers
- Transport Training Services
- TWL
- Ulster Supported Employment Ltd
- VT Training
- Wade Training Ltd
- Western Health & Social Care Trust
- Williamson Consulting
- Workforce Training Services
- Youth Action NI

### North West Regional College

**Mrs McGill** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 7081/09, in relation to enrolment of students from the Strabane catchment area in the North West Regional College, Derry Campus, how many students are (i) full time; (ii) part time; and (iii) evening, broken down by courses. (AQW 7512/09)

**Minister for Employment and Learning:** Course title level information is very detailed and therefore the information is presented in the context of subject area. On that basis, the table below shows the number of enrolments at the Derry campus of North West Regional College from the Strabane catchment area by Subject Area and Mode of Attendance in 2007/08 (latest available data).

Subject Area	Full time	Part time	Evening	Total
Health, Public Services & Care	88	111	74	273
Science & Mathematics	9	38	3	50
Agriculture, Horticulture & Animal Care	0	2	1	3
Engineering & Manufacturing Technologies	15	53	4	72
Construction, Planning & the Built Environment	29	61	2	92
Information & Communication Technology	19	139	22	180
Retail & Commercial Enterprise	25	167	43	235
Leisure, Travel & Tourism	34	6	162	202
Arts, Media & Publishing	29	10	182	221
Social Sciences	2	0	18	20
Languages, Literature & Culture	0	63	28	91
Education & Training	3	157	3	163
Business, Administration & Law	20	91	2	113
<b>Total</b>	<b>273</b>	<b>898</b>	<b>544</b>	<b>1,715</b>

Source: Further Education Statistical Record.

### Senior Civil Servant Bonuses

**Mr McGlone** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how much was paid in bonuses to senior Civil Servants in his Department in (i) 2003/04; (ii) 2004/05; (iii) 2005/06; (iv) 2006/07; and (v) 2007/08.

(AQW 7519/09)

**Minister for Employment and Learning:** The total amount paid in non-consolidated bonus payments to Senior Civil Servants in the Department for Employment and Learning in respect of performance years 2003/2004 through to 2007/2008 is as shown in the table below. The table also includes the number of payments made.

Department for Employment and Learning					
Performance Year	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Total number of Bonuses	5	6	8	7	8
Total Value of Bonuses	£21,500	£26,500	£42,000	£47,500	£63,500

### Welders

**Mr Ross** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many companies are currently seeking welders.

(AQW 7578/09)

**Minister for Employment and Learning:** On Friday 8th May, 4 employers were seeking to recruit welders through the Department's Employment Service.

It is important to note that this number only reflects those employers that have placed a vacancy with the Department. This does not represent the total number of employers in Northern Ireland that are currently seeking to recruit welders.

## Welders

**Mr Ross** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning where unemployed welders can attain their 'coding' if they have been out of work for six months or more. (AQW 7579/09)

**Minister for Employment and Learning:** I have asked Senta (the Sector Skills Council for Engineering and Manufacturing), and the Engineering Training Council (ETC) to advise me on this matter. They intend to engage with local employers and recruitment agencies to establish the demand for and supply of coded welders, and the training provision in this discipline available in Northern Ireland. Once their findings are available, I should be content to let you know what action I propose.

## DEPARTMENT OF ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

### Enterprise Finance Guarantee

**Ms Purvis** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in relation to the switch from Small Firms Loan Guarantee to the Enterprise Finance Guarantee has there been (i) any change in the number of applications and uptake; or (ii) any indications that complications with the new programme are inhibiting potential applicants. (AQW 7348/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs A Foster):** The Enterprise Finance Guarantee (EFG) is designed to be accessible to more businesses as it provides loans up to £1 million compared to an upper limit of £250,000 for the now dormant Small Firms Loan Guarantee (SFLG); supports businesses with a turnover of up to £25 million compared to £5.6 million under SFLG; and EFG loans can be used to convert an overdraft into a loan. Northern Ireland had the lowest uptake of SFLG of any UK region and early indications show a similar pattern for EFG. However it is too early to make direct comparisons between SFLG and EFG.

I am not aware of any complications that applicants are having with the administrative process for EFG. However, as with SFLG, there is a perceived reluctance among lenders in Northern Ireland to promote the scheme to customers. Together with other Ministers I have been encouraging senior management in the Northern Ireland banks to utilise the EFG when discussing lending opportunities with business customers. I will pursue this further with the banks.

### Energy from Waste Grant Funding

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much of the £18million Energy from Waste grant funding remains unspent; and how it will be distributed. (AQW 7433/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** Offers totalling £14.771 million have been made to five projects, one of which is a public sector project. No funding has yet been distributed but as all the promoters are confident that the projects will proceed, the budget remains allocated and committed to the five successful projects.

Of the remaining £3.229 million, £0.43 million was returned to the Northern Ireland Block in the 07/08 financial year and £2.8 million was redirected to the Reconnect programme to increase its budget to £10.8 million during the 08/09 financial year.

### Ulster American Folk Park, Omagh

**Mr Buchanan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what work the Northern Ireland Tourist Board has done and is currently doing to promote the Ulster American Folk Park, Omagh. (AQW 7500/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** NITB works to promote Northern Ireland as a short break destination to residents of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and as such recently launched a major marketing campaign in both markets. The campaign featured attractions right across Northern Ireland, including



the Ulster American Folk Park. NITB also includes the Ulster American Folk Park within other promotional materials including brochures and the consumer website [www.discovernorthernireland.com](http://www.discovernorthernireland.com).

The Ulster American Folk Park received funding of up to £75,000 under the Tourism Development Scheme 2006-08 towards the construction of an American log cabin that was the home of Richard McCallister, an emigrant from Co. Antrim to West Virginia.

NITB is currently appraising another application from the Ulster American Folk Park under the Tourism Development Scheme 2008-11 seeking assistance of £150,000 to support the development of a new exhibit comprising the re-building and furnishing of a Tennessee Plantation House originally built on the American frontier in the early 1800s by a Tyrone emigrant.

NITB will continue to work to develop, promote and market Ulster American Folk Park as a key part of the Northern Ireland tourism offering.

### Unemployment Figures

**Mr McClarty** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many people in (i) Coleraine and; (ii) Limavady Council areas were registered as unemployed in April, in each of the last five years. (AQW 7555/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** The number of claimant count unemployed persons, together with the associated unemployment rate<sup>#</sup>, for Coleraine and Limavady District Council areas, for April in each of the last five years are given in the table below:

Date	Coleraine		Limavady		Northern Ireland	
	Number	Rate	Number	Rate	Number	Rate
April 2005	1,233	3.6	642	2.9	28,609	2.7
April 2006	1,049	3.1	625	2.9	28,204	2.6
April 2007	813	2.4	592	2.7	25,183	2.3
April 2008	846	2.5	631	2.9	24,768	2.3
April 2009	1,540	4.5	1,341	6.1	46,857	4.3

<sup>#</sup> The number of claimants expressed as a percentage of the resident working age population.

### Project Kelvin

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in relation to Project Kelvin, what information her Department has on specific applications for planning approval by Hibernia Atlantic.

(AQW 7563/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** Hibernia Atlantic has informed the Department that it has submitted an application for planning approval in relation to the cable landing station. The application relates to a site at Dundooan Road in Coleraine. The siting of the cable landing station is a commercial decision taken by Hibernia Atlantic.

### Welders

**Mr Ross** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many welders are currently unemployed in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 7577/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** It is not possible to give an exact figure of the number of welders currently unemployed in Northern Ireland. However, there were 480 unemployed claimants in April 2009 whose usual occupation was in the metal welding trades, corresponding to the Standard Occupational Classification 2000 code 5215.

## Government Investment

**Dr McDonnell** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the amount of Government investment received over the last ten years by (i) Vesteon; (ii) Nortel; (iii) FG Wilson; and (iv) Shorts and its parent company Bombardier. (AQW 7620/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** The following information has been provided on the basis of financial assistance offered by Invest NI and its legacy agencies to the various Client Companies referenced.

During the period in question, Invest NI and its legacy agencies offered almost £24 million of grant support for FG Wilson in support of a number of significant investments in additional plant, machinery and manufacturing facilities, research and development and high calibre training. As a result, F G Wilson employment grew from approximately 2,000 in 1999, to a peak of 3,500 in 2008, falling recently to approximately 2,400 as a result of global economic conditions.

Support for FG Wilson also enabled Invest NI to develop a strong relationship with Caterpillar (its parent company) across a number of business areas. By leveraging this relationship, Invest NI has been able to attract and establish a number of Caterpillar shared service centres to Northern Ireland and has offered £0.56 million in support of these investments.

In the same period, Invest NI and its legacy agencies offered approximately £45 million of assistance (excluding assistance agreed for the new C Series Programme) towards investments by Bombardier in new mobile projects, which were integral to major aircraft programmes undertaken by the company. These projects generated new investment in Northern Ireland, jobs and extensive wider economic benefits through knowledge transfer and supply chain business. In addition to the projects supported by Invest NI, Bombardier has undertaken significantly more total investment than that which received direct Invest NI assistance. The company continues to perform strongly, allowing for the effect of the international economic recession. Earlier this year, Bombardier undertook a review of all current aircraft programmes and is now implementing programme rate changes in line with international market demand. This will result in a reduction in employment at the company's Northern Ireland sites of 1,275, leaving a core workforce of circa 5,000.

Between 1999 and 2009, a total of £138,172 of assistance was offered to Visteon in support of training, market development and research and development projects. £88,606.78 of the £109,305 of R& D support is now subject to clawback due to non-compliance with the offer.

Approximately £24 million of grant support was offered to Nortel Networks UK Ltd in support of a number of significant investments at its Monkstown site. Following the dotcom downturn of 2001-03, Nortel commenced a number of rationalisation initiatives to increase its competitiveness, including the outsourcing / sale of parts of its operations. As a result, in 2005, Invest NI commenced a review of its potential claw-back position in respect of funding provided to Nortel. A total liability on the part of Nortel of £17.4 million was subsequently agreed and, of this, the company had, by March 2009, repaid or earned-out a total of £15.07 million.

On foot of Nortel entering Administration in January 2009, Invest NI determined that Nortel had breached a June 2006 Financial Assistance Agreement. As a consequence, the earn-out facility was no longer made available and a further invoice for £7.4 million for restitution in cash in place of the earn-out provision was issued to the company in February 2009.

## Wind Turbines

**Mr Doherty** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what level of grant aid is available for (i) domestic wind turbines; and (ii) commercial wind turbines; and whether such funding is available only for newbuilds. (AQW 7626/09)

**Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:** The UK Low Carbon Buildings Programme offers grant aid for domestic wind turbines of £1000 per kW of installed capacity, subject to an overall maximum of £2,500 or 30% of relevant eligible costs, whichever is lower. The programme is set to remain open until 2010 and is available to individual home owners (both existing homes and newbuilds), including those in Northern Ireland.

No grants are currently available for commercial wind turbines however the Carbon Trust's interest free loan scheme can assist with the installation of wind turbines for the supply of electricity for a company's own use. The loan can be between £5,000 and £400,000 and is repayable over 4 years. The interest free loan is available for

retrofit on existing sites and commercial newbuilds are eligible to apply providing a company has been trading for a particular period of time.

In addition all generators of electricity from eligible renewable sources, including wind, can avail of the support provided by the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation (NIRO). In the case of micro-generators (installed capacity of 50kW or less), this support has been doubled since 1 April 2009 with the introduction of banding arrangements to the NIRO.

## DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT

### Ards and Down Area Plan

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of the Environment if there is flexibility within the Ards and Down Area Plan to provide housing and/or Council Development that at this stage is excluded from the plan. (AQW 7243/09)

**Minister of the Environment (Mr S Wilson):** The Ards and Down Area Plan was adopted on 30 March 2009, following a lengthy Public Inquiry into the objections to the draft Plan. The Department accepted the majority of the recommendations made by the Planning Appeals Commission in their report produced following the Public Inquiry. As a result additional land was allocated to many towns and villages throughout the Plan area.

If a planning application were to be submitted, it would be considered on its own merits and within the context of prevailing plans, regional policy including planning policy statements, and other relevant material considerations. This would of course include the recently adopted Plan.

### Road Safety Council

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of the Environment what is the timescale for the removal of funding for the Road Safety Council. (AQW 7294/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** Following a critical review of its performance, I wrote to the Road Safety Council (RSC) on 9 December 2008 to inform it of my decision to channel funding, not into central administration but direct to local committees from 1 April 2009. However, some elements of core funding will continue until 30 June 2009 with a view to allowing the Council to complete the required end-year financial reporting.

### Cycling Proficiency Initiatives

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of the Environment how many schools have participated in cycling proficiency initiatives, in each of the last five years, (AQW 7296/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** Each year, my Department's cycling proficiency scheme is offered to all primary schools in Northern Ireland. The number of schools participating in each of the last five years is as follows:

2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
510	559	544	569	568

### Cycling Proficiency Initiatives

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of the Environment how many pupils have received training in road safety cycling proficiency initiatives, in the last five years. (AQW 7301/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** Each year, my Department's cycling proficiency scheme is offered to all primary schools in Northern Ireland. It targets children mainly in primary 7, and in the last five years 44,293 children have been trained. This is broken down as follows:

2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
8,849	8,563	8,663	8,735	9,483

### Road Safety

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of the Environment what level of additional funding can be made available to local groups for road safety following the proposed removal of funding from the Road Safety Council.

(AQW 7303/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** Last year local road safety committees spent approximately £25,000 on local activities or events. However, the Department currently has a budget of £160,000 for grants to the voluntary sector, and this amount is now available to local road safety committees, subject to completion of the normal bidding and evaluation procedures.

### Vehicle Testing Centres

**Miss McIlveen** asked the Minister of the Environment to (i) detail the percentage of unsuccessful vehicle tests carried out on motor vehicles and heavy goods vehicles at the Newtownards Testing Centre; and (ii) compare this to other Vehicle Testing Centres in Northern Ireland, in the last five years.

(AQW 7315/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** The tables below detail the percentage of vehicles that failed the full test and the re-test for all vehicle categories, private cars and heavy good vehicles in Newtownards test centre in the years 2004/05, 2005/06, 2006/07, 2007/08, 2008/09 and includes the figures for the same periods for the other 14 test centres.

#### VEHICLE FULL TESTS 1 APRIL 2004 TO 31 MARCH 2005

Centre	All vehicle categories % fail rate	Private cars % fail rate	Heavy goods vehicles % fail rate
Newtownards	27	22	43
Armagh	26	23	44
Ballymena	22	22	30
Belfast	22	22	29
Coleraine	21	20	37
Cookstown	29	27	47
Craigavon	30	31	35
Downpatrick	23	22	33
Enniskillen	20	20	34
Larne	15	15	20
Lisburn	24	22	37
Londonderry	24	23	41
Mallusk	23	23	25
Newry	23	21	36
Omagh	26	24	43

**VEHICLE RE-TESTS 1 APRIL 2004 TO 31 MARCH 2005**

<b>Centre</b>	<b>All vehicle categories % fail rate</b>	<b>Private cars % fail rate</b>	<b>Heavy goods vehicles % fail rate</b>
Newtownards	7	6	13
Armagh	9	7	11
Ballymena	7	6	13
Belfast	8	7	11
Coleraine	9	8	14
Cookstown	10	9	17
Craigavon	9	8	14
Downpatrick	7	6	12
Enniskillen	9	9	18
Larne	6	5	7
Lisburn	7	6	10
Londonderry	7	6	14
Mallusk	8	7	13
Newry	7	6	10
Omagh	10	9	16

**VEHICLE FULL TESTS 1 APRIL 2005 TO 31 MARCH 2006**

<b>Centre</b>	<b>All vehicle categories % fail rate</b>	<b>Private cars % fail rate</b>	<b>Heavy goods vehicles % fail rate</b>
Newtownards	25	24	46
Armagh	27	24	42
Ballymena	22	22	33
Belfast	26	25	32
Coleraine	24	23	45
Cookstown	33	31	55
Craigavon	31	30	45
Downpatrick	25	24	28
Enniskillen	23	23	33
Larne	17	17	21
Lisburn	26	25	35
Londonderry	26	25	42
Mallusk	28	28	31
Newry	25	23	42
Omagh	31	29	45



**VEHICLE RE-TESTS 1 APRIL 2005 TO 31 MARCH 2006**

<b>Centre</b>	<b>All vehicle categories % fail rate</b>	<b>Private cars % fail rate</b>	<b>Heavy goods vehicles % fail rate</b>
Newtownards	7	6	14
Armagh	8	7	12
Ballymena	6	6	11
Belfast	7	7	10
Coleraine	8	8	13
Cookstown	10	9	17
Craigavon	8	8	12
Downpatrick	6	5	12
Enniskillen	8	7	13
Larne	5	5	8
Lisburn	7	6	13
Londonderry	7	7	11
Mallusk	9	8	12
Newry	7	6	13
Omagh	9	8	18

**VEHICLE FULL TESTS 1 APRIL 2006 TO 31 MARCH 2007**

<b>Centre</b>	<b>All vehicle categories % fail rate</b>	<b>Private cars % fail rate</b>	<b>Heavy goods vehicles % fail rate</b>
Newtownards	26	25	45
Armagh	26	23	40
Ballymena	23	22	37
Belfast	21	20	26
Coleraine	22	21	35
Cookstown	30	28	50
Craigavon	28	27	38
Downpatrick	23	22	30
Enniskillen	22	22	32
Larne	17	18	20
Lisburn	21	20	36
Londonderry	25	25	41
Mallusk	27	25	29
Newry	23	21	39
Omagh	25	23	42

**VEHICLE RE-TESTS 1 APRIL 2006 TO 31 MARCH 2007**

<b>Centre</b>	<b>All vehicle categories % fail rate</b>	<b>Private cars % fail rate</b>	<b>Heavy goods vehicles % fail rate</b>
Newtownards	7	6	17
Armagh	8	7	11
Ballymena	7	6	11
Belfast	6	5	12
Coleraine	8	7	14
Cookstown	9	8	15
Craigavon	8	8	13
Downpatrick	5	5	9
Enniskillen	9	8	17
Larne	6	5	12
Lisburn	6	5	12
Londonderry	7	7	15
Mallusk	8	7	11
Newry	7	5	12
Omagh	9	8	13

**VEHICLE FULL TESTS 1 APRIL 2007 TO 31 MARCH 2008**

<b>Centre</b>	<b>All vehicle categories % fail rate</b>	<b>Private cars % fail rate</b>	<b>Heavy goods vehicles % fail rate</b>
Newtownards	26	25	47
Armagh	24	22	37
Ballymena	22	21	37
Belfast	20	19	26
Coleraine	22	21	38
Cookstown	28	26	49
Craigavon	29	29	41
Downpatrick	22	20	36
Enniskillen	23	23	41
Larne	21	21	28
Lisburn	19	18	32
Londonderry	25	24	39
Mallusk	23	23	27
Newry	21	19	33
Omagh	24	23	42

**VEHICLE RE-TESTS 1 APRIL 2007 TO 31 MARCH 2008**

<b>Centre</b>	<b>All vehicle categories % fail rate</b>	<b>Private cars % fail rate</b>	<b>Heavy goods vehicles % fail rate</b>
Newtownards	7	6	15
Armagh	7	6	11
Ballymena	7	6	8
Belfast	6	6	12
Coleraine	7	6	11
Cookstown	9	8	15
Craigavon	9	9	12
Downpatrick	6	5	9
Enniskillen	8	7	13
Larne	7	6	13
Lisburn	5	4	10
Londonderry	6	5	13
Mallusk	7	6	8
Newry	6	5	11
Omagh	8	7	14

**VEHICLE FULL TESTS 1 APRIL 2008 TO 31 MARCH 2009**

<b>Centre</b>	<b>All vehicle categories % fail rate</b>	<b>Private cars % fail rate</b>	<b>Heavy goods vehicles % fail rate</b>
Newtownards	25	25	47
Armagh	23	21	34
Ballymena	21	20	35
Belfast	18	17	22
Coleraine	21	20	35
Cookstown	24	23	41
Craigavon	25	25	33
Downpatrick	19	18	28
Enniskillen	22	21	40
Larne	21	21	28
Lisburn	18	18	28
Londonderry	24	23	39
Mallusk	22	22	26
Newry	20	19	30
Omagh	23	22	38

## VEHICLE RE-TESTS 1 APRIL 2008 TO 31 MARCH 2009

Centre	All vehicle categories % fail rate	Private cars % fail rate	Heavy goods vehicles % fail rate
Newtownards	7	6	18
Armagh	7	7	8
Ballymena	6	6	9
Belfast	6	6	10
Coleraine	7	7	10
Cookstown	8	7	12
Craigavon	8	8	12
Downpatrick	5	4	10
Enniskillen	8	8	11
Larne	7	6	10
Lisburn	5	4	10
Londonderry	5	5	10
Mallusk	7	7	7
Newry	6	5	9
Omagh	8	8	12

## Draft Planning Policy Statement 21

**Mr McGlone** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of planning applications in each Divisional Planning Office that are determined under the Draft Planning Policy Statement 21 in the categories of (i) farm dwellings; (ii) replacement dwellings; and (iii) farm or other conversions to a dwelling; and to include whether Planning Service refused or approved these applications. (AQW 7317/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** Following the publication of draft PPS21 on 25 November 2008, my Department determined 10 planning applications for single rural dwellings in the rural area between this date and 31 December 2008. These are broken down as follows (i) 7 new rural dwellings; and (ii) 3 replacement dwellings.

These figures are extracted from my Department's published Development Management Statistics for 2008/09 Third Quarterly Statistical Bulletin which provides data up to 31 December 2008.

Due to the new statistical code of practice it is not possible to provide information on any applications which have not been through the quality assurance process prior to the publication of official statistics

The next Development Management quarterly statistics are due for publication in June 2009. These figures will include considerably more applications reassessed under draft PPS21 as my Department has given a commitment to complete reassessment of all 2277 deferred applications by June 2009.

## Driver and Vehicle Agency

**Mr T Clarke** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the reasons for the delay in the recruitment of Driver and Vehicle Agency inspectors, in each of the last two years. (AQW 7361/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** Two recruitment competitions for vehicle examiners were held in the last two years. In the 2008/09 year there was no delay with the recruitment of vehicle examiners, with the recruitment process being completed in 20 weeks from the date the process commenced to the date the first new recruits took up post. In the 2007/08 year the recruitment process took approximately 36 weeks from commencement to the date the first new recruits took up post. The timing of this competition coincided with the introduction of a NICS wide revised recruitment policy which suffered some inevitable delays in the early days. My Department

took measures to address certain aspects of the recruitment process which resulted in a quicker and acceptable turnaround for the recruitment competition held in the 2008/09 year.

### Driver and Vehicle Agency

**Mr T Clarke** asked the Minister of the Environment how much money was allocated for the recruitment of additional inspectors for the Driver and Vehicle Agency, in each of the last two years. (AQW 7362/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** The amount of money allocated by the Driver and Vehicle Agency for the recruitment of additional inspectors for each of the last two years for vehicle and driving tests was:

2007/08	2008/09
216,000	355,000

### Driver and Vehicle Agency

**Mr T Clarke** asked the Minister of the Environment what percentage of monies allocated for the recruitment of new inspectors for the Driver and Vehicle Agency has not been spent, in each of the last two years. (AQW 7363/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** The percentage of allocated budget not spent by the Driver and Vehicle Agency (previously the Driver and Vehicle Testing Agency) for the recruitment of new inspectors was NIL for both years. In order to ensure that waiting times for both vehicle and driving tests were achieved, the Agency used the available resource to conduct both driver and vehicle tests by means of overtime. In 2008/09 the Agency actually recruited more staff than it had originally planned in order to meet additional growth in demand.

### Driver and Vehicle Agency

**Mr T Clarke** asked the Minister of the Environment how many inspectors have been recruited for the Driver and Vehicle Agency in each of the last two years. (AQW 7364/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** The Driver and Vehicle Agency has recruited 65 vehicle examiners in the last two years, 18 in the 2007/08 year and 47 in the 2008/09 year.

### Driver and Vehicle Agency

**Mr T Clarke** asked the Minister of the Environment how many vehicle and taxi inspectors are employed by the Driver and Vehicle Agency. (AQW 7365/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** Vehicle testing staff are trained to inspect all categories of vehicles including taxis. DVA currently employs 290 vehicle examiners.

### Death Threats to Belfast City Council Staff

**Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister of the Environment what guidance and direction is given by his Department to Councils about dealing with threats, such as the recent death threats to Council workers in Belfast City Council, to protect workers and staff. (AQW 7392/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** My Department has not issued any guidance and direction to councils about dealing with threats and the protection of council workers and staff. My Department does not have the power to issue such guidance and direction.



### Death Threats to Belfast City Council Staff

**Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of (i) Belfast City Council's actions to protect its staff over and above the police investigation of death threats; and (ii) the disparity between this and the case of a death threat received by the chief executive of Craigavon Borough Council in 2006, where that Council took no action. (AQW 7393/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** Dealing with threats to council workers and staff is a human resources matter for each individual council. I have no power to intervene in human resources issues within district councils and it would not be appropriate for me to provide an assessment of the actions of any council in respect of the protection of staff following death threats.

### Audit Functions for Local Government

**Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister of the Environment (i) for his assessment of the internal audit and external audit functions for local government being fit for purpose; (ii) what proposals is his Department making to the DFP and/or the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General, for a review of functions that will meet the increased requirement when the review of public administration is implemented; and (iii) if he will consider this a priority, given the number of instances of fraud being uncovered in the public sector. (AQW 7394/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** I have no authority to assess or challenge the role that local government auditors undertake in relation to the external audit of local government as they are independent of my Department. The internal audit of a council's business is a matter for individual councils to determine.

In the context of the decisions on the future shape of local government, one of the policy development panels established last year is tasked with bringing forward proposals in relation to service delivery improvement.

These proposals that will include the identification and specification of an enhanced role for local government auditors will inform the preparation of legislative proposals to be brought before the Assembly in early 2010.

### Houses in Multiple Occupation

**Dr McDonnell** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail, in respect of Houses in Multiple Occupation in each electoral ward, (i) the total number; (ii) the percentage; (iii) the cap implemented; and (iii) how his Department arrived at the individual percentage limits. (AQW 7400/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** The Department does not maintain information on Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) on the basis of electoral wards. However, provisional data has been assembled on this basis in Table A below.

The information requested, is also provided by HMO Policy Areas. See Table B below. Policy Areas are more meaningful than wards in this instance as the number HMOs are capped on the basis of the former rather than latter.

Approximately 8% of the dwelling stock in Belfast is in the form of HMOs. The HMO Subject Plan, which was adopted in December 2008, identified and designated 22 HMO Policy Areas. These are areas where HMOs are concentrated and are outlined on the relevant maps in the HMO Subject Plan.

The Subject Plan capped HMO development at 30% in HMO Policy Areas and 10% in all other streets.

The number of HMOs exceeds 30% of all the dwelling units in 20 of the 22 HMO Policy Areas. Consequently, no further HMO development will be permitted within these areas until such times as the proportion of HMOs falls below 30%. This restriction will help protect area amenity and maintain community balance.

During the public consultation process, many local residents voiced concern at the concentration of HMOs in certain locations and the impact that such properties were having on these areas. However, many also acknowledged the positive impact HMOs could bring to an area in terms of regeneration, not only for the physical housing stock but also in consolidating the viability of local businesses and services such as shopping.

All agreed there was a need to achieve a balance between HMOs and traditional residential accommodation. The general consensus was that the upper limit for conversion to multiple occupation should be 30%. This level

of multiple occupation could potentially assist regeneration but at the same time would not necessarily result in the local community becoming imbalanced.

Planning Appeals Commission undertook an Independent Examination of representations made in respect of the HMO Draft Subject Plan in October 2007. Their subsequent report endorsed the 30% cap as reasonable and acceptable.

TABLE A: HMOS BY WARD

Ward	Dwelling Units	HMOs	% HMO
Andersonstown	1,896	18	1
Ardoyne	2,575	69	3
Ballyhackamore	2,716	95	3
Ballymacarret	2,306	54	2
Ballynafeigh	2,752	719	26
Ballysillan	2,449	0	0
Beechmount	2,510	77	3
Bellevue	1,994	11	1
Belmont	2,496	5	0
Blackstaff	2,592	165	6
Bloomfield	2,668	79	3
Botanic	4,138	2,922	71
Castleview	2,221	25	1
Cavehill	1,825	11	1
Cherryvalley	2,398	50	2
Chichester Park	2,135	271	13
Cliftonville	1,970	38	2
Clonard	1,848	45	2
Crumlin	2,306	21	1
Duncairn	2,134	35	2
Falls	2,099	41	2
Falls Park	2,285	3	0
Finaghy	1,920	17	1
Fortwilliam	1,978	58	3
Glen Road	2,086	4	0
Glencairn	1,607	1	0
Glencolin	2,463	2	0
Highfield	2,180	6	0
Island	2,326	24	1
Knock	2,098	30	1
Ladybrook	2,337	3	0
Legoniel	2,253	2	0
Malone	2,299	239	10
Musgrave	1,888	6	0

Ward	Dwelling Units	HMOs	% HMO
New Lodge	2,301	55	2
Orangefield	2,415	6	0
Ravenhill	2,655	98	4
Rosetta	2,394	288	12
Shaftesbury	3,523	232	7
Shankill	2,082	0	0
Stormont	2,268	25	1
Stranmillis	2,582	473	18
Sydenham	2,208	92	4
The Mount	2,444	193	8
Upper Malone	2,103	5	0
Upper Springfiel	1,871	1	0
Water Works	2,896	702	24
Whiterock	1,729	12	1
Windsor	3,576	1,966	55
Woodstock	2,723	72	3
Woodvale	2,382	8	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>119,900</b>	<b>9,374</b>	<b>8</b>

Source: OSNI Pointer Address Data and NIHE HMO database

#### ANNEX B HMOS BY POLICY AREA

Designation	HMO Policy Area	Dwelling Units	HMOs	% HMO
HMO 2/01	Adelaide	378	145	38
HMO 2/02	Atlantic	145	68	47
HMO 2/03	Ballynafeigh	1,655	521	31
HMO 2/04	Castleton	118	50	42
HMO 2/05	Cavehill	277	101	36
HMO 2/06	Cliftonville	441	222	50
HMO 2/07	Donegall Road	410	157	38
HMO 2/08	Edinburgh Street	690	391	57
HMO 2/09	Eglantine	1,343	779	58
HMO 2/10	Fitzwilliam	627	259	41
HMO 2/11	Harleston	126	49	39
HMO 2/12	Jameson	136	40	29
HMO 2/13	Lower Ormeau	389	120	31
HMO 2/14	Malone	331	139	42
HMO 2/15	Meadowbank	722	283	39
HMO 2/16	Mount Charles	222	63	28
HMO 2/17	Sandymount	202	127	63
HMO 2/18	South Parade	265	102	38

Designation	HMO Policy Area	Dwelling Units	HMOs	% HMO
HMO 2/19	Stranmillis	790	480	61
HMO 2/20	Thorndale	108	48	44
HMO 2/21	Ulsterville	1,089	553	51
HMO 2/22	Botanic, Holylands, Rugby	2,491	1,586	64
<b>Total</b>		<b>12,955</b>	<b>6,530</b>	

Source: OSNI Pointer Address Data and NIHE HMO database

### Planning Service

**Mrs Long** asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the protocol to be followed by Planning Service when it is presented with photographic and/or actuarial evidence of repeated out-of-sewer or other flooding by objectors and public representatives in relation to the site of a planning application, which has not been raised in the statutory consultation process by NI Water. (AQW 7406/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** If my Department is presented with evidence of repeated out of sewer or other flooding in relation to a planning application, this information will be taken into account in the assessment of that application. Depending on the scale and nature of the planning application and evidence presented, my Department may decide to consult Rivers Agency and/or Northern Ireland Water for expert advice. However, each application will be dealt with on its own individual merits.

### Planning Service

**Mrs Long** asked the Minister of the Environment if Planning Service has the power to consider the impact upon residential amenity of issues, such as parking or flooding, where the technical expertise for assessing policy compliance and technical issues such as safety lies with a statutory consultee; and where that consultee has not raised a technical objection, but where amenity may be affected. (AQW 7407/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** There are many material considerations that may be relevant in the determination of a planning application and these will vary depending on the specific circumstances of each case. Residential amenity is a material planning consideration and impact on residential amenity is a matter for my Department to consider as part of the assessment and determination of a planning application. The comments of consultees such as Roads Service and Rivers Agency are also a key part of the development management process as they provide expert advice on road and flood risk matters where the circumstances are appropriate. As part of the determination of a planning application my Department will consider all factors and make a balanced planning judgement based on the individual material considerations of the case.

### Programme for Government: Environment Targets

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the targets for the environment in the Programme for Government. (AQW 7413/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** The targets for the environment set out in the Programme for Government reflect the Executive's priority to protect and enhance our environment and natural resources. They are part of a cross-cutting framework of agreed objectives and are a valuable resource in steering the work of government over the coming two years as the Executive seeks to improve the quality of life of people in Northern Ireland. My Department is working with other departments to achieve all those targets for which it has responsibility and is liaising closely with officials in DFP who are undertaking ongoing monitoring arrangements.

### Northern Ireland Environment Agency

**Mr Bresland** asked the Minister of the Environment what plans the Northern Ireland Environment Agency has to implement ASSIs in the West Tyrone constituency in 2009. (AQW 7425/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** The Northern Ireland Environment Agency intends to designate a further 25 sites across Northern Ireland during the 2009/10 financial year in line with its commitments under the current Programme for Government (2008 to 2011). Due to the sensitive nature of ASSI designations, and the courtesy which must be afforded to individual landowners, the Agency is unable to provide a detailed list of proposed sites prior to the official notification of each designation at the consultation stage of the process.

The Agency is however proposing to declare possibly 2 sites within the West Tyrone constituency during 2009/10.

### Areas of Special Scientific Interest

**Mr Bresland** asked the Minister of the Environment how much funding has been paid to landowners in Areas of Special Scientific Interest, in each constituency, in each of the last three years. (AQW 7427/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** The Northern Ireland Environment Agency is unable to provide funding details for payments to landowners within ASSIs along constituency boundaries.

Detailed below however is the total funding paid to landowners in respect of management agreements within ASSIs across Northern Ireland in each of the last three years.

Year	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
Amount Paid	489,338.35	282,275.57	529,623.74

### Areas of Special Scientific Interest

**Mr Bresland** asked the Minister of the Environment what support is available to landowners who, as the result of being an Area of Special Scientific Interest, have had their property damaged. (AQW 7429/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** Article 28 of the Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002 requires the Department to designate Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs) to ensure that identified features are specially protected. Whilst support is available to secure the appropriate management of these ASSI features, this does not extend to activities which may be considered damaging by the landowner but which are not having an adverse impact upon the aforementioned features.

### Planning Service

**Mrs Long** asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the impact that Planning Circular PC 0307 has had on the outcome of the determination of applications by Planning Service. (AQW 7454/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** In recognition of public concern on this issue, Planning Service staff were reminded of the need to consider fully the impact on the established residential character when processing applications for new residential development. To this end, Planning Circular (PC 03/07), 'Assessing Planning Applications for Residential Development in Urban Areas, Villages and Other Small Settlements' issued in August 2007 has positively assisted Planning Service staff in processing planning applications for residential development.

It reiterates the key policy objections of PPS 7: 'Quality Residential Environments' and the need to fully consider the existing character of the surrounding area when assessing individual proposals. It also provides a full list of all other relevant policies.

### Mass Launching of Balloons

**Dr Farry** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail his Department's powers and responsibilities in relation to the mass launching of balloons, under litter or other legislation, in light of the potential impact on wildlife. (AQW 7458/09)



**Minister of the Environment:** My Department does not have any specific powers in legislation in relation to the mass launching of balloons and has not issued any guidance on this matter. It is accepted that a proportion of the balloons released at mass launches of helium filled balloons fall back down to earth and, for example, become a source of litter and may also pose a risk to wildlife. However, my Department does not have any scientific evidence that the release of balloons has any detrimental affect on wildlife or that balloon-related litter is a significant problem for Councils or one that is causing particular difficulties for them.

### Protection of Mature Trees

**Mrs Long** asked the Minister of the Environment if mature trees are protected from felling, and removal during nesting season, and for his assessment of the adequacy of the protection. (AQW 7463/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** Under the terms of the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 it is an offence to 'take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while that nest is in use or being built or to 'take or destroy an egg of any wild bird'.

DoE and DARD both advise that tree cutting and hedge trimming should not be undertaken during the period March to 31 August in order to minimise the potential effects of disturbance to nesting birds.

As such, there may be incidental protection of mature trees during the nesting season if they harbour nesting birds, but this protection would not extend beyond the rearing and fledgling period of the chicks. Planning Service may however decide to issue a permanent Tree Protection Order on a particular tree (or trees) on the basis of their amenity value.

The Department of the Environment recently undertook a consultation exercise on the ongoing review of the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 and received only one response urging that the level of legislative protection for trees in Northern Ireland be increased.

The Department considers that the present system is effective for protecting birds using trees during the nesting season.

### River Pollution

**Mr Dallat** asked the Minister of the Environment (i) to detail the number of successful prosecutions against polluters of rivers in the last five years; (ii) the level of the fines and; (iii) have these fines been collected from the polluters. (AQW 7492/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) is responsible for investigating reports of pollution and for instigating enforcement action where appropriate.

In the last 5 years, January 2004 to December 2008, NIEA has successfully prosecuted 179 offenders, in relation to offences under the Water (NI) Order 1999, in Courts throughout Northern Ireland.

Table A below details the number of successful prosecutions in each of the last 5 years together with the level and range of fines imposed.

Table A

Year	No of Prosecutions	Level of Fines	Range of Fines
2004	63	£88,575	£75 - £10,000
2005	39	£42,700	£100 - £6,000
2006	29	£74,100	£200 - £15,000
2007	35	£48,700	£100 - £5,000
2008	13	£17,050	£200 - £5,000
Totals	179	£271,125	£75 - £15,000

The fines imposed totalled £271,125, representing an average fine of £1515, ranging from the highest at £15,000 to the lowest at £75.

The collection of fines imposed by the Courts is a matter for the Northern Ireland Office through the Northern Ireland Court Service.

### Tree Preservation Orders

**Mrs Long** asked the Minister of the Environment to outline in what circumstances it would be preferable to protect trees on a site subject to a development proposal by way of a planning condition attached to an outline application rather than by either a temporary or permanent Tree Preservation Order. (AQW 7550/09)

**Minister of the Environment:** In August 2005 my Department published a consultation document and questionnaire seeking information on the scale and geographical spread of problems with nuisance high hedges in Northern Ireland. The consultation document was issued to a wide range of individuals and organisations including other Departments and public bodies.

The consultation exercise confirmed that the high hedge problem in Northern Ireland is at least on a par with that in England and Wales and it was accepted that legislation was necessary to deal with the problem. This assessment of the nuisance high hedges problem has not changed.

Any new scheme to deal with the issue of high hedges will be operated by local government and I would not underestimate the amount of additional work the introduction of such a scheme would have on district councils, particularly during the early stages of the scheme's operation when the existing problems affecting many householders would need to be dealt with. It is with this in mind together with the competing priorities and resource constraints I am facing that I have decided not to progress the development of policy and legislation related to this matter until after the eleven new Councils have been elected in May 2011. This also allows staff resources in the Department's Planning and Environment Policy Group to focus on higher priority environmental issues over the coming years.

## DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

### Senior Civil Servant Bonuses

**Mr McGlone** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to his answer to AQW 6505/09, to detail the grades of senior Civil Servants receiving bonuses, in each Department in (i) 2003/04; (ii) 2004/05; (iii) 2005/06; (iv) 2006/07; (v) 2007/08; and 2008/09. (AQW 7049/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr N Dodds):** Senior Civil Servants at Grade 3, Grade 5 and Permanent Secretary level in NICS Departments received non-consolidated bonuses in respect of performance years 2003/04 through to 2007/08. Information is not yet available with regard to the 2008/09 performance year.

### Civil Service

**Mr McNarry** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what arrangements exist to allow the direct transfer of staff from the Northern Ireland Civil Service to the Home Service Departments. (AQW 7288/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel:** The Northern Ireland Civil Service and the Home Civil Service are separate legal employers. In order to move from the NICS to the Home Civil Service, a person is required to resign from the NICS in order to take up a position in a Home Civil Service Department. Should a NICS employee wish to move to the HCS, the onus is on the individual to identify a suitable position and initiate contact with that department.

### Civil Service

**Mr McNarry** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what arrangements exist to allow the direct transfer of staff from the Home Service Departments to the Northern Ireland Civil Service. (AQW 7289/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel:** As the NICS and the HCS are two legally separate employers, staff cannot normally move directly between the two. However, in exceptional circumstances, my department may allow requests from HCS staff to move to the NICS to be considered by NI Departments in the context of the business needs of the NICS. Such transfers occur only in very exceptional cases and where it is not reasonably practical to make the appointment in accordance with the merit principle.

### Recorded Births

**Mr Burns** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of recorded births where the father is listed as ‘unknown,’ in each of the last 10 years. (AQW 7340/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel:** Over the last decade no birth registrations took place where the father’s details were recorded as ‘Unknown’. However, in cases where the parents are not married to each other, both parents are currently required to attend the registrar in order for the father’s details to be recorded on the birth record. The table below gives the number of births registered where father’s details were not recorded at the time of first registration.

Registration Year	Number of Births Registered Without Father’s Details Recorded
1999	2,470
2000	2,265
2001	2,199
2002	2,196
2003	2,071
2004	2,106
2005	1,982
2006	2,128
2007	2,019
2008 <sup>P</sup>	2,087

P Provisional data

Around 700 births are re-registered each year with the most common reason for re-registration being to add the father’s name to the birth record. Proposals in the Civil Registration Bill currently being progressed through the Assembly will make it easier to add an unmarried father’s details to a birth record by allowing the father to register separately without the mother present, albeit with safeguards to ensure the mother is in agreement.

### Lower Carbon Emission Vehicles

**Mr McGlone** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what measures are being taken to use lower carbon emission vehicles as part of the government/ministerial fleet. (AQW 7352/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel:** When last tendering for the Ministerial fleet the Department set an emissions limit of 170 g(CO<sub>2</sub>)/km to ensure that emissions were restricted whilst meeting the necessary performance requirements.

Additionally, two Toyota Prius hybrid vehicles are included in the Central Car Pool.

It is expected that the policy of purchasing vehicles that meet specific emissions targets will be continued in future procurements.

## Civil Service

**Mr Kennedy** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) what is the situation with the Civil Service claim for equal back pay ; (ii) when he expects this matter to be resolved; and (iii) if the recent budget has had any impact on this situation. (AQW 7424/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel:** My officials are currently in discussions with NIPSA about the equal pay issue facing the Northern Ireland Civil Service in order to establish whether a framework can be agreed within which a negotiated settlement could be reached.

As the discussions with NIPSA are on-going and the equal pay claims lodged with the Industrial Tribunal are now the subject of legal processes, I am unable to provide any further specific details at present. The equal pay issues in the Civil Service are of a very significant scale and complexity and therefore it may yet take some time before I can confirm how they will be finally resolved.

The recent Budget has no impact on this situation.

## Public Sector Investment

**Mr McNarry** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the possible implications for Northern Ireland's Block Grant following the Budget projection that public sector investment will fall from 3.1 per cent of GDP this year to 1.3 per cent by 2013-14. (AQW 7562/09)

**Minister of Finance and Personnel:** The Northern Ireland Executive Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) for the period 2011-12 to 2013-14 will only be confirmed by HM Treasury at the conclusion of the next UK-wide Spending Review.

## DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

### Doctor Training

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what level of cooperation his Department has with universities on doctor training. (AQW 7237/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr M McGimpsey):** Queen's University Belfast is the sole provider of undergraduate medical training in Northern Ireland. The Department provides significant investment in the training of medical students and has a range of formal mechanisms in place for both undergraduate and postgraduate training. These include strategic, accountability and management meetings. In relation to Higher Education Institutes throughout the UK, my Department meets the cost of student fees for 5th year students.

### Downe Hospital New Coronary Care Unit

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when the Downe Hospital will open the new coronary care unit. (AQW 7239/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The new Downe Hospital which is due to open on 28 June 2009 will include a 9-bed coronary care facility.

### Paralateral Cyst Surgery

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people in the Strangford constituency are waiting for paralateral cyst surgery. (AQW 7240/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** It is assumed that this question relates to the number of people in the Strangford constituency that are waiting for paralabral cyst surgery.

The number of people in the Strangford constituency that are waiting for paralabral cyst surgery is not available.

### Paralateral Cyst Surgery

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people are waiting for paralateral cyst with paralateral tear surgery. (AQW 7242/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** It is assumed that this question relates to the number of people waiting for paralabral cyst with paralabral tear surgery.

Information on the number of people waiting for paralabral cyst with paralabral tear surgery is not available.

### Renal Unit at Causeway Hospital

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to confirm the timescale for the confirmation and construction of the renal unit at Causeway Hospital. (AQW 7244/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** Funding for this scheme has been identified within the 10-year investment strategy for Northern Ireland (ISNI) period. My Department are working closely with the Northern Health and Social Care Trust to agree the timescale for delivery and production of the business case for the renal unit at Causeway Hospital. Only following approval of the business case can the timescale for construction be confirmed.

### Child Protection

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many social workers in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust are trained in child protection. (AQW 7260/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has advised that there are 576 (493.67 Whole-Time Equivalent) Social Workers employed in their Trust area. All of these Social Workers (and all Social Work students undertaking practice learning within the Trust) receive the Childcare Protection Awareness Programme as part of the Corporate Induction Programme. Additionally all Social workers will have received Child Protection training as part of their Social Work course. In addition to this basic Child Protection training, 444 Social Workers have received further Child Protection training relevant to their role as set out in the Safeguarding Training Framework.

### Health Centre

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the obligations on a GP based in a health centre to respond to an emergency road traffic accident and to a patient who has been seriously injured. (AQW 7263/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The Health and Personal Social Services (General Medical Services (GMS) Contracts) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2004, directs that, as part of essential services, a GP (GMS contractor) must provide primary medical services required during core hours for the immediately necessary treatment of any person to whom the contractor has been requested to provide treatment, owing to an accident or emergency at any place in his practice area. Outside core hours the Out of Hours Services provides essential services.

The definition of an emergency includes any medical emergency whether or not related to services provided under the contract.

Core Hours are 8.00 am-6.30pm, Monday to Friday with the exception of a public holiday and a local holiday agreed with the Health and Social Care Board.



### Swine Flu

**Mr Ross** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what measures his Department has in place following the swine flu outbreak in Mexico and the US. (AQW 7278/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** I refer the Member to the information that has been published on my Department's website: [www.dhsspsni.gov.uk](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk). This information is updated frequently.

### Family Support Workers

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to his answer to AQW 6458/09, (i) why are only two of the ten family support workers in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust, on contract, considering the other eight have been requesting contracts for over three years; and (ii) why all family support workers do not get contracts at the start of their employment. (AQW 7284/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** As per the subsequent amendment to my answer to AQW 6458/09, there are in fact three family support workers in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust on contract.

The issues regarding contracts relate to the legacy Trust of Armagh and Dungannon and the process and management systems which were in place at the time. This is an issue which the Southern Trust fully acknowledges as an anomaly and is focused on addressing by ensuring all staff employed by the trust are issued with contracts. As a consequence of the review of public administration, it was not possible to progress this until the senior management structures were resolved and clarity obtained regarding the role and remit of each team and the various grades of staff. The trust has been involved in this process with the family support workers in the Armagh and Dungannon locality over the past two months. The ongoing consultation and engagement with the staff concerned and their union representatives is aimed at ensuring there is an equitable service spread across the Trust, and that staff are provided with formal contracts.

### Adoption Applications

**Miss McIlveen** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many adoption applications are currently being processed (AQW 7290/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The information is not collected centrally, and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

### Termination

**Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if it is legal for a mother to terminate a pregnancy on the basis that her in vitro fertilised foetus has been diagnosed with Down's Syndrome. (AQW 7304/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** Fetal abnormality is not, in itself, grounds for termination of pregnancy. In Northern Ireland, the only grounds for a lawful termination of pregnancy are where the continuance of the pregnancy threatens the life of the mother, or would adversely affect her physical or mental health.

A pregnancy established through in vitro fertilisation would be treated in the same way as a natural pregnancy.

### Termination

**Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the legal position for General Practitioners with regards to referring mothers to abortion facilities in Great Britain for terminations because they could not be carried out legally in Northern Ireland. (AQW 7305/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** Any health professional, including General Practitioners, may only refer women to abortion facilities in Great Britain for a termination of pregnancy where the woman meets the legal framework and there is a lack of capacity in Northern Ireland.

Under Article 4 of the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1972 the Department has the duty to provide an integrated health service for Northern Ireland. However, that duty does not extend to referring people to places outside Northern Ireland to have procedures that would not be legal in Northern Ireland.

### Abattoirs

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) what the hygiene practices and requirements are in abattoirs; and (ii) how often inspections are carried out. (AQW 7326/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:**

- (i) Hygiene practices and requirements for abattoirs are laid down in EU Regulations and National Legislation. The legislation clearly places primary responsibility for food safety with the abattoir operator and a system of official controls is in place to ensure compliance with EU and National Legislation. Abattoir operators must have in place procedures based on hazard analysis and critical control points (HACCP) to ensure hygienic production and safety of their products.
- (ii) In abattoirs, official controls in the form of ante-mortem and post mortem inspection of carcasses and carcase parts are carried out on a daily basis. In addition, official verification of abattoir procedures is subject to audit at a risk based frequency.

### E. coli Cases

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many cases of E. coli have occurred in hospitals, in the last three years, broken down by hospital. (AQW 7327/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** Information on the number of cases of E. coli that have occurred in hospitals, in the last three years, broken down by hospital is not available.

### Health and Social Care Trust Properties

**Mr Craig** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many times pest control experts have been called out to Health and Social Care Trust properties in (i) Lisburn; and (ii) Dromore, in each of the last three years. (AQW 7334/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** This information is not held centrally.

### Adoption Law

**Miss McIlveen** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail what consideration he has given to introducing legislation in light of the decision in P and others (2008) UKHL 38. (AQW 7336/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** My Department is engaged in an ongoing programme of reform in adoption, which includes plans to introduce new legislation to improve processes, services and the structures for service delivery. The implications of the decision in 'Re P and Others' will be considered in relation to any relevant provisions. As there are aspects of adoption law which impact on the responsibilities of other Departments, I intend to approach the Executive in the coming months on the proposed way ahead.

## Health Service Bank

**Mr Burns** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) if any hospitals have borrowed money from the Health Service bank (ii) how much money was borrowed; and (iii) what interest rate was charged by the Health Service bank, in each of the last 3 years. (AQW 7342/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The NHS Bank was an arm's-length body of the Department of Health, Whitehall, which only operated in England. It no longer functions and did not lend funds to any hospital or Health and Social Care Trust in Northern Ireland.

## Tuberculosis Vaccinations Programme

**Mr P Maskey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the tuberculosis vaccinations programme. (AQW 7346/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) reviewed all available scientific and epidemiological data and recommended in 2005 that the national schools-based programme should be stopped. Instead, those at high risk are identified in a selective programme. Those now recommended to be offered BCG vaccination are:

- infants living in areas where the incidence of TB is 40 per 100,000 population or greater;
- infants and previously unvaccinated children whose parents or grandparents were born in a country with a TB incidence of 40 per 100,000 or higher;
- previously unvaccinated new immigrants under 16 years of age from high prevalence countries for TB, and
- people in jobs where there is high risk of contact with infected patients, animals or clinical materials e.g. health care workers, care home staff.

## Respite Care Facilities

**Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what respite care facilities are available for adults with autism, in each of the Health and Social Care Board Areas. (AQW 7386/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** Health and Social Care services are provided on the basis of individually assessed need and not on the basis of a particular disability. Whilst all Trusts may not have dedicated services specifically for people affected by autism spectrum disorder, they can and do accommodate many service users who are affected by autism. Health and Social Care Trusts also contract with voluntary organisations to provide respite to those affected by autism spectrum disorder.

Following the work of Lord Maginnis with the Independent Review of Autism Services and public consultation on the ASD Strategic Action Plan, the newly established Regional ASD Group, chaired by Dr Stephen Bergin, will oversee the implementation of the ASD Strategic Action Plan. This has been developed to identify, quantify and address any deficiencies in services to individuals of all ages affected by ASD.

## Fragility Fractures

**Ms S Ramsey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, following the findings of the National Audit of the Organisation of Services for Falls and Bone Health of Older People, which were published by the Royal College of Physicians on 25th March, what steps he is taking to ensure that recurring fragility fractures are prevented. (AQW 7395/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** A report on 'The Prevention and Management of Fragility Fractures in Northern Ireland' will be finalised in the coming weeks. In developing the Report account has been taken of the findings of the National Audit of the Organisation of Services for Falls and Bone Health of Older People. The Report will make recommendations for further improving falls prevention and fracture services in Northern Ireland.

### Diabetes Service Framework

**Mrs Hanna** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to the increase in diabetes, (i) what plans he has to ensure early diagnosis, considering that 50% of people with a positive diagnosis have complications that could have been prevented; and (ii) if he would consider introducing a Diabetes Service Framework, to address this problem and bring Northern Ireland in line with England, Scotland and Wales.

(AQW 7417/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** My Department has various strategies in place to address the key elements in preventing diabetes and in slowing down the onset of some of the complications which may arise from diabetes – good nutrition, exercise and smoking cessation.

A service framework for cardiovascular health and well-being will be launched within the next few weeks. The framework contains 3 standards relating to diabetes which will have a positive impact on the prompt diagnosis of the condition and on the treatment and management of people with diabetes to prevent the onset of complications. It is anticipated that further areas for service framework development will be taken forward next year. These will be selected from the remaining priority areas identified and evaluated by the Department. Diabetes is one of the priority areas for consideration.

### Family Support Workers

**Mr Ross** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many children in East Antrim are receiving assistance from family support workers.

(AQW 7420/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** As at 6 May 2009, 44 children in East Antrim (includes the Council Districts of Larne, Carrickfergus and Newtownabbey) were receiving assistance from a family support worker.

### National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence

**Mr Ross** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how often he meets with representatives of NICE in relation to new medication.

(AQW 7421/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** My Department established links with NICE (the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence) from 1 July 2006. All guidance published by the Institute is reviewed locally for its applicability to Northern Ireland and, as appropriate, is endorsed by my Department for implementation in Northern Ireland.

Senior officials in my Department liaise with NICE on a continuous basis as part of this arrangement.

### Facial Vascular Malformation

**Mr Buchanan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what consideration his Department has given to the business case for the funding of treatment for Facial Vascular Malformation.

(AQW 7497/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** It is assumed that this question refers to Facial Vascular Malformation. Vascular malformations are usually congenital and affect the vascular system including arteries, veins, capillaries and lymphatic channels.

A regional multi-disciplinary vascular anomalies clinic is held at least four or five times a year at the Royal Victoria Hospital (RVH) and is attended by health professionals from a range of medical disciplines, principally plastics and dermatology, with an interest in vascular cases. The clinic sees patients with all types of vascular anomalies including facial vascular malformation. Patients are referred to the RVH for radiology treatment and surgery and the Ulster Hospital for laser treatment and surgery.

The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust submitted a service development proposal in November 2008 for a sclerotherapy service at the RVH Imaging Centre. Sclerotherapy is an interventional radiology procedure less

invasive than surgery which is used in the treatment of facial vascular malformation. The proposal is currently being considered by the Health and Social Care Board.

### Medical Professionals

**Mr Buchanan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many medical professionals are employed by Health and Social Care Trusts on (i) national contracts; and (ii) Health and Social Care Trust only contracts. (AQW 7501/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The Northern Ireland Health and Social Care Trusts have all advised that all of their Medical staff are employed on National Contracts. As at 31st March, there was a total of 3,607 (3,381.3 Whole-Time Equivalent) Medics employed by Health and Social Care Trusts in Northern Ireland.

### Grades of Doctors

**Mr Buchanan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the different grades of doctors currently employed, broken down by Health and Social Care Trusts. (AQW 7547/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The information requested is given in the table below.

TABLE 1: MEDICAL STAFF EMPLOYED BY GRADE & HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE TRUST AS AT MARCH 2009 (HEADCOUNT).

Grade	Belfast	Northern	South Eastern	Southern	Western	Total
Consultant	568	183	177	173	184	1,285
Associate Specialist	30	23	-	15	16	89
Staff Grade	106	36	46	69	47	304
Specialty / Specialist Registrar	618	160	166	151	141	1,236
Foundation/ Senior House Officer	202	89	73	66	65	495
General / Hospital Practitioner	42	14	38	60	27	181
Medical Officer / Other	-	8	-	-	-	17
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,567</b>	<b>513</b>	<b>506</b>	<b>536</b>	<b>485</b>	<b>3,607</b>

Source: Human Resource Management System

**Notes:**

1. Figures include all grades of Medical Staff and exclude Dental Staff.
2. Figures include Medical Staff employed within Trusts and exclude Medical Staff employed within Board Headquarters / Regional Services
3. “-“ represents a headcount between 1 and 5 inclusive in order to avoid issues of personal disclosure.

TABLE 2: MEDICAL STAFF EMPLOYED BY GRADE & HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE TRUST AS AT MARCH 2009 (WHOLE-TIME EQUIVALENT).

Grade	Belfast	Northern	South Eastern	Southern	Western	Total
Consultant	540.8	170.0	168.0	166.0	178.5	1,223.3
Associate Specialist	24.6	21.0	-	13.9	13.3	76.6



Grade	Belfast	Northern	South Eastern	Southern	Western	Total
Staff Grade	79.6	33.3	41.2	61.1	42.4	257.5
Specialty / Specialist Registrar	610.5	159.5	164.0	149.7	139.7	1,223.4
Foundation/ Senior House Officer	200.9	88.8	73.0	65.5	65.0	493.2
General / Hospital Practitioner	27.3	4.8	9.9	48.4	8.0	98.3
Medical Officer / Other	-	3.2	-	-	-	9.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,483.8</b>	<b>480.7</b>	<b>460.8</b>	<b>506.0</b>	<b>450.0</b>	<b>3,381.3</b>

**Source:** Human Resource Management System

**Notes:**

1. Figures include all grades of Medical Staff and exclude Dental Staff.
2. Figures include Medical Staff employed within Trusts and exclude Medical Staff employed within Board Headquarters / Regional Services
3. “-“ represents a headcount between 1 and 5 inclusive in order to avoid issues of personal disclosure.

## Swine Flu

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if there is a policy that GPs do not see patients who have been tested for Swine Flu for a month and, if so, why this is the case. (AQW 7632/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** There is no policy to preclude a GP from seeing or treating within a month a patient who has been tested for swine flu. All GPs have a duty of care to their patients irrespective of what illness they have. When attending patients with any infectious disease, all healthcare staff should follow relevant infection control guidance.

At this stage, any patients who think they may have swine influenza are encouraged to telephone their GP in the first instance to prevent spread of the virus. An assessment will then be carried out if required.

## Air Ambulance Service: Omagh

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to clarify his Department's position on the location of air ambulance provision in Omagh. (AQO 2657/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** I have been advised that there has been no formal request from any voluntary or private sector organisation to make use of any healthcare facility in Omagh as a permanent base for an air ambulance service.

Our priority must be to invest in modernising ground ambulance services to enable the Ambulance Service to improve its response to emergency calls. That is why I am investing nearly £100 million over the next ten years to enable the Ambulance Service to modernise its fleet and equipment on a regular basis. This includes £17.4 million over the current CSR period which will purchase 150 new vehicles. The first of these vehicles have already arrived; 26 A&E ambulances, 25 Patient Care Service vehicles and 13 rapid response vehicles. This investment will make a difference to patients where it matters on the ground.

## Smoking

**Mr Ford** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what further action he will take to reduce smoking levels. (AQO 2658/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** Further action I intend to take to reduce smoking levels includes banning the display of tobacco products at point of sale and introducing controls on the sale of

tobacco from vending machines. I also intend to bring forward proposals which will impose sanctions on retailers who continue to flout the law on underage tobacco sales. The continued use of public information campaigns and the further development of smoking cessation services will also be key in helping to reduce the appeal and uptake of smoking.

### Resettlement Programme

**Mrs Hanna** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the budget for the Resettlement Programme. (AQO 2659/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The additional resources of £54m (£27 recurrent) for mental health services and £33m (£17m recurrent) for learning disability services which I secured under the Comprehensive Spending Review for the period 2008-2011 are being used to provide a range of additional services for people with a mental health and a learning disability.

A proportion of those additional resources have been directed towards the resettlement of long stay patients from mental health and learning disability hospitals during the CSR period 2008-2011.

### Fire and Rescue Service: Attacks

**Mr Armstrong** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of attacks on Fire Service personnel and property. (AQO 2660/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The number of attacks on Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service personnel and its appliances has shown a marked reduction over recent years – from 86 in 2003 to 35 reported in 2008. However, any attack on our front line emergency services is one too many. Injuries to fire and rescue personnel are usually incidental to attacks on their vehicles responding to a callout. Such attacks are inexcusable, putting at unnecessary risk both the lives of highly skilled personnel and essential fire fighting equipment with a potentially devastating impact on fire fighting and rescue capabilities. In the worst case, that could mean the death of a member of the public if an appliance is held back by a mindless attack on fire fighters or their vehicles.

### Enniskillen Hospital

**Mr Gallagher** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the funding crisis for the new hospital in Enniskillen. (AQO 2661/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** I am assuming the funding crisis you refer to is the withdrawal of HSBC from the PFI market. The procurement process for the new South West Acute Hospital in Enniskillen is nearing financial close. The successful tenderer, the Northern Ireland Health Group, has put in place the necessary funding arrangements and all of the stakeholders in this project are completing final checks. Due to the complexities associated with the PFI process and scale of the project, it is crucial that this is completed thoroughly and accurately.

### Cardiac Screening

**Ms S Ramsey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has to implement the cardiac screening objectives proposed by Cardiac Risk in the Young. (AQO 2662/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** In 2008 the UK National Screening Committee reviewed the research evidence on screening for Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy, the main cause of sudden cardiac death. In December 2008 they advised the four UK Health Departments that screening should not be offered, and that pre-participation screening of athletes for Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy or other causes of sudden cardiac death should not be instituted at present.

In view of the advice provided by the UK National Screening Committee, my Department has no plans to implement screening in Northern Ireland.

### Royal Victoria Hospital: Fertility Services

**Mr Attwood** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps are being taken to address the staff shortage at the Fertility Services Department in the Royal Victoria Hospital. (AQO 2663/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The recent staff shortage has related specifically to embryologists and has been part of a general national shortage in this area. Steps have been taken to address the situation and two embryologists are due to take up post soon, filling all current vacancies. The Centre has also advertised a further post which will increase its capacity. The shortage, while temporarily restricting capacity at the Centre, has had no impact on publicly funded fertility work.

### Hospitals: Cleanliness

**Ms J McCann** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if any staff have been reprimanded over the level of cleanliness in hospitals. (AQO 2664/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** Information on the number of staff reprimanded is not recorded by Health and Social Care organisations. However, in answer to AQW 6872/2009 I reported that one member of staff has been disciplined for failing to follow hygiene procedures since the new HSC Trusts were established in April 2007.

### Prescription and Over-the-Counter Drugs

**Mrs M Bradley** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if an assessment has been made by his Department on the level of misuse of prescription and over-the-counter drugs. (AQO 2665/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The Department is aware of the growing concern about the misuse of “prescription drugs”, and there is a range of survey work undertaken by the Department to uncover the level of use and misuse of prescription medication in Northern Ireland.

Prevalence rates on the use of (though not misuse of or addiction to) sedatives and tranquilisers and anti-depressants in Northern Ireland were published in Bulletin 6 of the 2006/2007 Drug Prevalence Survey. The relevant figures are set out in the table below:

	Anti-Depressants	Sedatives and Tranquillisers	Other Opiates
Lifetime use	21%	20%	20%
Last year use	9%	9%	8%
Last Month use	8%	7%	5%

Further details from the Survey can be found at:

[http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/drug\\_prevalence\\_survey\\_2006-07\\_\\_bulletin\\_6.pdf](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/drug_prevalence_survey_2006-07__bulletin_6.pdf)

In addition, the Drug Misuse Database holds information on people presenting to treatment services with problem drug misuse. The annual statistical bulletin provides an analysis of the main drug of misuse of people presenting for treatment. Some of these drugs such as benzodiazepines, codeine and paracetamol, are prescribed medication. According to the most recent information (published in October 2008) benzodiazepines were the second most commonly reported main drug of misuse (reported by 31% of individuals), codeine and paracetamol were reported as the main drug of misuse by just 2%. Further information can be found at:

[http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/dmd\\_bulletin\\_2007-08.pdf](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/dmd_bulletin_2007-08.pdf)

With both sets of data it is not possible to establish if the drugs have been obtained on prescription by an individual or through another source.

The Department is beginning the process to review the ongoing implementation of the New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs (NSD). As part of this work the Department will consider all relevant information, seek further research where necessary, to inform the ongoing development process, and decide if further action is required on specific issues, such as the misuse of prescription drugs.

## Childcare

**Mrs Long** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action has been taken by his Department to clarify departmental responsibility for school age childcare. (AQO 2666/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** Policy responsibility for Early Years including all childcare and its associated staff resources transferred from my Department to the Department of Education in November 2006, with DHSSPS remaining responsible for regulation and inspection of childcare.

Childcare is an issue which cuts across the remit of a number of departments. My Department is a member of the cross-departmental sub group on Poverty, led by OFMDFM, which has been asked to examine childcare provision along with getting an agreed cross-departmental policy in relation to childcare.

My Department is also working with the Department of Education through a joint sub committee on Childcare Provision and Early Years to clarify and establish clear lines of policy responsibility and financial accountability in relation to childcare provision and Early Years between DE and DHSSPS.

## Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

**Mr T Clarke** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many representations he has made to his Department in his capacity as an MLA, since taking up office. (AQO 2667/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** This information is not held centrally.

## Lagan Valley Hospital

**Mr Craig** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, further to his decision on the midwifery led unit in the Lagan Valley Hospital, what assurances he can give that all other existing services will be maintained, including the numbers and provision of ambulance vehicles at the Lagan Valley ambulance station. (AQO 2668/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The provision of services at Lagan Valley Hospital and Lisburn Ambulance Station are matters for the South Eastern HSC Trust and Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Trust respectively. The South Eastern Trust and Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Trust have recently concluded public consultations on their proposals for CSR efficiency savings. I am currently considering the Trusts' final proposals and I will be announcing my decisions with respect to the Trusts' recommendations in due course.

I can assure you of my commitment to developing Lagan Valley Hospital as a local hospital and a specialist centre for elective surgery. Last year I announced significant capital investment in Lagan Valley Hospital, including £3.2 million for two new operating theatres. In the longer term there will be a major capital project on the site to provide a new local hospital/elective centre and a co-located new health and care centre for Lisburn, at an estimated cost of £62 million.

## Generic Medicines

**Mr Burns** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the generic medicines tendering process. (AQO 2669/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** The pharmaceutical clinical effectiveness programme (PCEP) has promoted a rationalised and transparent approach to the selection of pharmaceutical products from those suppliers who can provide the highest standard of evidence for the quality, safety and cost-effectiveness of their products.

Regional contracts have been established with selected suppliers identified through EU tendering mechanisms for influenza vaccinations, wound care products and hospital generic medicines. These arrangements have delivered demonstrable improvements in quality and risk management of services in addition to delivering significant cash efficiencies for reinvestment in HSC.

You will also be aware that over the CSR 2008-11 period, I have set challenging targets to improve generic dispensing rates in order to achieve greater convergence with equivalent generic dispensing rates across the rest of the UK. With these objectives in mind, I have been presented with an opportunity to purchase generic medicines at a NI level and therefore am interested that my Department pursues that approach.

Although policy in respect of a generic medicines tender has yet to be determined, I have noted the impact on efficiencies of implementing the tender in addition to the opportunities for community pharmacy. I am therefore undertaking discussions with the Pharmaceutical Contractors Committee before reaching a decision relative to the centralised purchase of generic medicines.

### **Budget 2009-2010**

**Mr O'Loan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the impact of the 22 April budget on his Department. (AQO 2670/09)

**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:** I cannot give any assessment of the impact of the 22 April Budget for my Department as the Executive has yet to consider its implications.

## **DEPARTMENT FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

### **Cullybackey Railway Halt.**

**Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister for Regional Development if there are any plans for the semi-derelict property at Cullybackey railway halt. (AQW 1854/09)

**Minister for Regional Development (Mr C Murphy):** Northern Ireland Holding Company sold the house and grounds and half the station building in 1973 and the remainder of the property in 1997. They have no plans at present to re-acquire it.

### **Northern Ireland Water**

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) to explain why Northern Ireland Water land at Conlig was sold; and (ii) if the jobs at this location will be retained. (AQW 1931/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that no land has yet been sold at Conlig but following the closure of the depot the property and associated lands will be disposed of in accordance with NIW's disposal policy and legislative and regulatory requirements. The introduction of new technology and working practices and the ability to work from other locations will deliver significant savings. This will impact on NIW's staffing levels and accommodation needs and a number of depots will be closed, including Conlig. Manpower reductions will be spread across the North. Following closure of the depot there will be no jobs retained at Conlig and staff will provide water and sewerage services to the Conlig area from other NIW offices and works to ensure standards of service are maintained.

### **Drainage Area Study**

**Mr Hamilton** asked the Minister for Regional Development when the Drainage Area Study covering Comber will be published. (AQW 1948/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that a Drainage Area Study is currently underway in the Comber and Newtownards areas which will assess the adequacy of the sewerage system and identify parts of the system which need to be upgraded. The Study is scheduled for completion by January 2009.

Any upgrading work identified by the report will be implemented subject to the availability of funding and priority within Northern Ireland Water's capital investment programme.



### Northern Ireland Water

**Mr Hamilton** asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline Northern Ireland Water's policy for informing people if their water supply is going to be temporarily switched off; and if the policy applies in all instances. (AQW 1974/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that its policy is to give at least 48 hours advance written notification for a planned interruption to supply lasting for more than four hours. This notification also includes a commitment from NIW to restore supplies by the time specified within the notice. For unplanned interruptions, NIW aims to restore supplies as soon as possible. If an interruption is anticipated to last for longer than 24 hours, NIW will provide an alternative water supply to customers. NIW aims to apply this policy in all instances where it is practicable.

NIW maintains a register of customers who have informed the company that they have specific medical conditions and operates a priority service for ensuring that an alternative water supply is available to these customers in the event of any interruption to the public water supply.

### Northern Ireland Water

**Mr Beggs** asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to his answers to AQWs 104/09 and 1048/09, to itemise the estimated costs of the current Northern Ireland Water proposals in terms of the supply and installation of (i) pipeline to carry flows from Whitehead to Ballycarry and then the coast; (ii) pumping equipment; (iii) modifications to treatment works at Ballycarry; and (iv) the sea outfall pipe at Cloughfin Bay. (AQW 2370/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that the total estimated cost associated with the current proposal for providing appropriate treatment of wastewater from Whitehead, Ballycarry and Ballystrudder is £10.08 million. A breakdown of the estimated cost into the categories requested is shown below.

No.	Supply And Installation Of	Estimated Cost (£Million)
(i)	Pipeline from Whitehead to Ballycarry then to the coast	3.83
(ii)	Pumping equipment (including screening requirements)	2.83
(iii)	Ballycarry Wastewater Treatment Works - no modifications required	NIL
(iv)	Sea outfall pipe at Cloughfin Bay	3.42

### Northern Ireland Water

**Mr Savage** asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail how much Northern Ireland Water pays Enterprise Ltd. to undertake survey and installation work. (AQW 2390/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that, following a full procurement process, it awarded Enterprise Ltd a contract in January 2007 to undertake water meter surveys and installation. Since then, around 40,000 surveys have been completed and 16,000 meters installed at a cost of £2.4 million.

### Speed of Buses

**Mr W Clarke** asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the potential to reduce the speed of buses around (i) Belfast City Hall; and (ii) Royal Avenue, Belfast. (AQW 2408/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** My Department's transport proposals for Belfast City Centre are set out in the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan 2015. The Plan proposes a reorganisation of the road network within the city centre, which in turn, will facilitate the reduction of traffic and encourage walking, cycling and increased use of public transport.

The design aspiration for the streets in the main retail and commercial areas of Belfast City Centre, such as Donegall Place and Royal Avenue, is for a high level of priority for pedestrians. However, these streets are used for a number of different purposes, including access for servicing and for public transport; therefore conflict can arise between the needs of transport and the urban environment.

I am advised by Translink, who currently operate the bus service through the city centre, that bus speed has not been an issue in the city centre. This is due to various factors, such as, traffic congestion, streetscape, vehicle parking, traffic calming measures, traffic lights and pedestrian crossings. In addition the current speed restrictions, both the statutory 30mph limit and those set out in Translink Company policy, for example, 15 mph through the subject area, ultimately contribute to reducing bus speeds.

Translink have also advised that through their ongoing monitoring process, they have a significant staff presence on the ground, with Bus Inspectors and mobile patrols monitoring their services.

My Department's Roads Service receives details of all road traffic collisions that involve personal injury from the PSNI. Officials use this information to identify locations where engineering measures might be used to reduce the likelihood of further incidents. I am aware that there have been a number of such incidents recently within Belfast City Centre, although full details of the circumstances surrounding them are not yet known. When these details become available, my officials will review them to see what, if any, further measures might be appropriate to improve safety for all road users in these areas.

### Ballynagross Wastewater Pumping Station

**Mr W Clarke** asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to his answer to AQW 1484/09, to investigate why Ballynagross Wastewater Pumping Station is producing malodours affecting the wellbeing of residents in the Ardmeen Green area of Downpatrick. (AQW 3086/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that the chemical dosing regime introduced in April 2008 at Ballynagross Wastewater Pumping Station has proven effective in reducing malodours in the Ardmeen Green area of Downpatrick. A recent process fault at the Pumping Station caused the dosing pumps to shut down and the malodours recurred, however, the fault has been rectified and Northern Ireland Water is satisfied that the problem is now resolved.

### Compensation Claims

**Mr Armstrong** asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) how many compensation claims have been received by his Department; and (ii) how much money has been paid out to the owners of vehicles damaged by potholes in the Mid-Ulster constituency, in each of the last five years. (AQW 7155/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** Unfortunately, my Department's Central Claims Unit (CCU) does not hold the information in the format requested. However, CCU does maintain a record of compensation claims details for each Roads Service Section Office. The area of the Mid-Ulster constituency includes all of the Cookstown and Magherafelt Section Offices plus some of the Dungannon Section Office area. The following figures show the number of compensation claims received and the amounts of compensation paid in respect to damage to motor vehicles caused by potholes in the Cookstown, Magherafelt and Dungannon Section Office areas by the Central Claims Unit for each of the last five financial years. Disaggregation of the Dungannon Section Office figures to show only those claims within the Mid-Ulster constituency could only be extracted at disproportionate cost.

	No. of Claims Received	Compensation Paid
<b>2008/2009</b>		
Cookstown Section Office	106	£10,633.06
Magherafelt Section Office	24	£1,027.00
Dungannon Section Office	106	£6,849.42
<b>Total</b>	<b>236</b>	<b>£18,509.48</b>

	No.of Claims Received	Compensation Paid
<b>2007/2008</b>		
Cookstown Section Office	55	£4,501.47
Magherafelt Section Office	14	£1,785.40
Dungannon Section Office	58	£3,771.05
<b>Total</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>£10,057.92</b>
<b>2006/2007</b>		
Cookstown Section Office	51	£2,095.19
Magherafelt Section Office	22	£563.63
Dungannon Section Office	64	£3,492.83
<b>Total</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>£6,151.65</b>
<b>2005/2006</b>		
Cookstown Section Office	13	£1,920.00
Magherafelt Section Office	8	£5,553.79
Dungannon Section Office	25	£1,618.89
<b>Total</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>£9,092.68</b>
<b>2004/2005</b>		
Cookstown Section Office	23	£1,112.32
Magherafelt Section Office	20	£1,421.62
Dungannon Section Office	30	£2,104.58
<b>Total</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>£4,638.52</b>

### Antisocial Behaviour on Trains

**Mr Ross** asked the Minister for Regional Development how many convictions for anti-social behaviour on trains have been made using evidence from CCTV camera footage. (AQW 7210/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** Translink has informed me that over the last four years, there have been three cases involving CCTV evidence where convictions were secured for offences on trains.

### Antisocial Behaviour on Trains

**Mr Ross** asked the Minister for Regional Development what action has Translink taken against persistent offenders such as those who are abusive and/or violent to other passengers or who write graffiti on trains. (AQW 7211/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** Translink have informed me that it seeks the conviction of persistent criminal offenders and will make its records available during the judicial process. All appropriate options are considered to address the issue. In some cases Translink will consider a court injunction against an individual. This action has been taken against two individuals who are now banned completely from NIR property and trains.

### CCTV Cameras on Trains

**Mr Ross** asked the Minister for Regional Development how many trains have CCTV cameras on board.

(AQW 7212/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** Translink have informed me that all Class 3000 trains are fitted with CCTV.

### CCTV Cameras on Trains

**Mr Ross** asked the Minister for Regional Development if CCTV cameras will be rolled out in every train.

(AQW 7213/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** Translink have informed me that the replacement of Class 450, Class 80 and Gatwick with Class 4000 (New Trains Two project) will lead to full CCTV coverage on these trains.

### CCTV Cameras at Train Stations

**Mr Ross** asked the Minister for Regional Development how many train stations on the network have operating CCTV cameras.

(AQW 7214/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** Translink have informed me that of NI Railways' 54 stations/halts, 18 have CCTV systems installed (see below). Out of these 18 locations, 9 are equipped with digital recording equipment whilst the remaining 9 locations have less modern VCR systems.

- Antrim
- Ballymena
- Ballymoney
- Bangor
- Botanic
- Carrickfergus
- Central
- Coleraine
- Greenisland
- Great Victoria Street
- Lisburn
- Lurgan
- Londonderry
- Moira
- Newry
- Portadown
- Whitehead
- Yorkgate

### Footpath and Resurfacing Projects

**Mr Gardiner** asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the footpath and resurfacing projects planned for the Upper Bann constituency in the next 12 months.

(AQW 7251/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that it does not draft work programmes on a constituency basis, instead, they are produced by Council area.

Roads Service's budget allocation for individual Council areas is currently being finalised, after which the proposed work programmes can be confirmed. Details of the work programmes are presented to the respective Councils in the spring of each year and are dependant on the amount of funding available.

I understand that the Upper Bann constituency covers regions from both Banbridge and Craigavon Council areas. When the Council Reports, containing the works programmes, for these areas are finalised, they can be accessed from the Roads Service internet site at the following web address:

[www.roadsni.gov.uk/index/publications/publications-council\\_reports.htm](http://www.roadsni.gov.uk/index/publications/publications-council_reports.htm)

If required a hard copy of these reports can be made available upon request from Roads Service. The relevant Roads Service official to contact in relation to this request is Mr Bertie Ellison, Acting Divisional Roads Manager, Southern Division, at Marlborough House, Central Way, Craigavon, BT64 1AD (Tel. 028 3832 0250).

### Train Service Disruption

**Mr Gardiner** asked the Minister for Regional Development in relation to train service disruption in the past year, caused by (i) civil disturbance; (ii) riotous assembly; and (iii) vandalism, in the Upper Bann constituency, to detail; (a) how many times; (b) dates and duration of rail closure; and (c) costs incurred by Translink.

(AQW 7253/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** Translink have provided the following information.

The following schedules list individual incidents of security alerts and vandalism/riotous assembly.

Security alerts; 16 events which resulted in 18 services cancelled and 59 services operated by bus substitution.

Vandalism/riotous assembly; 12 events which resulted in 3 service cancellations and 32 services operated by bus substitution.

It was not possible to determine the costs of incidents, direct and indirect, within the time available and these are still being compiled.

Security alerts				
Date	Area	Duration	Services operated by Bus Substitution	Services Cancelled
29/04/08	Lurgan	3hrs	0	0
21/07/08	Lurgan - Moira	3hrs 30min	8	5
22/07/08	Lurgan - Moira	2hrs	4	0
23/07/08	Lurgan - Moira	30min	5	5
03/08/08	Lisburn – Portadown	1hr	0	1
07/08/08	Lisburn – Portadown	1hr	0	1
22/08/08	Lurgan	2hrs	2	1
23/08/08	Lisburn - Portadown	5hrs	14	0
20/10/08	Lurgan	2hr 45min	6	2
09/11/08	Lurgan	3hrs	2	0
22/02/09	Lurgan	30min	0	0
08/03/09	Lurgan	45min	0	2
24/03/09	Lurgan	2hrs	3	0
25/03/09	Lurgan	1hr	1	0
27/03/09	Lurgan	4hrs	9	0
28/03/09	Lurgan	3hrs	5	1



Vandalism and Riotous Assembly Events				
Date	Location/Reason	Service delays	Services operated by Bus Substitution	Services Cancelled
15/04/08	Lurgan suspicious activity	1hr 05min	0	0
06/06/08	Lisburn bridge strike	15min	0	0
16/06/08	Knockmore line side fire	1hr 50min	0	0
28/10/08	Damhead Automatic Half Barrier debris on line	18min	0	0
02/11/08	Lurgan Lake Street Crossing fire	67min	0	0
11/11/08	Lurgan area trespass	1hr 43min	0	0
02/01/09	Lurgan unruly passenger	10min	0	0
06/02/09	Lurgan area trespass	1hr 28min	0	0
12/02/09	Lurgan Bells Row Crossing fire	32min	1	0
14/03/09	Lurgan Civil unrest	6hrs	26	1
15/03/09	Lurgan Civil unrest	3hrs	4	0
25/03/09	Lurgan Bells Row Crossing fire	2hrs	1	2

## Translink

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the impact of Translink's price increases on the Bangor to Belfast train and bus routes. (AQW 7256/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** The average fares increases are 2% for bus travel and 3% for rail.

Under Translink's proposals, cash fares would be increased, but most multi journey ticket prices would remain at present levels. This would provide positive benefits for regular public transport users on the Bangor route; it aims to encourage the use of pre-paid tickets, the use of which reduces boarding times and keeps buses running on schedule.

## Translink

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Regional Development if and when the Department approved the recently announced price rises by Translink. (AQW 7257/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** My role, and that of my officials, is to consider and approve the assumptions underpinning the cost and revenue changes included in the Translink Corporate Plan for each of Metro, Ulsterbus and Northern Ireland Railways.

Changes in fares is obviously an important element of this process and for 2009/10 my intention was to keep fares increases to a minimum. Against all the other changes in cost and revenue I was aware of plans for average bus fares to increase by 2% and average rail fares to increase by 3%.

As a result of my intervention the final package from Translink involved lower fare increases than previously proposed and at the same time kept job losses to a minimum. This was achieved by ensuring that Translink implement an efficiency programme which focused on the level of overheads in Translink and bus services which were poorly utilized and where alternatives were provided.

I approved the Translink Corporate Plan on the 18 March 2009 which included these assumptions on average fares increases.

It is then the role of Translink, as the bus and rail operator, to decide how individual fares will change within these average fares increase parameters. It is not my role to approve fare changes for individual services or ticket types, however, Translink do inform me and my Department of these changes before announcing them. I expect Translink to consult with the Consumer Council in drawing up these detailed fare measures.

### Translink

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Regional Development what consultation took place between his Department and Translink, before Translink announced price increases. (AQW 7259/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** The role of my Department was to consider and challenge the assumptions underpinning the cost and revenue changes included in the Translink Corporate Plan for each of Metro, Ulsterbus and Northern Ireland Railways for 2009/10.

As a result of my intervention the final package from Translink involved lower fare increases than previously proposed and at the same time kept job losses to a minimum. This was achieved by ensuring that Translink implement an efficiency programme which focused on the level of overheads in Translink and bus services which were poorly utilized and where alternatives were provided.

Changes in fares is obviously an important element of this process and the Translink plans shared with DRD envisaged average bus fares increase by 2% and average rail fares increase by 3%.

It is the role of Translink, as the bus and rail operator, to decide how individual fares would change within these average fares increase parameters. It is not my role to approve the fare change for individual services or ticket types; however, Translink do inform me and my Department of these changes before announcing them.

### Antisocial Behaviour on Trains

**Mr Ross** asked the Minister for Regional Development what steps have been taken to tackle anti-social behaviour on trains on the Larne line. (AQW 7277/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** Translink have informed me that they encountered problems relating to anti-social behaviour on Larne line services in October 2008. At that time Translink introduced the following measures:

- Code of Conduct leaflets and posters aimed at school children were developed and distributed on Larne line trains;
- PSNI officers (100+) were trained in railway bye-laws;
- Local MLAs, Councillors and community representatives were approached in relation to anti-social behaviour in both Whitehead and Greenisland;
- Three private security operations were put in place on the Larne line. Similarly, following a request from railway management, PSNI presence on the line was given a high profile, with 3 separate operations conducted. Local representatives participated in some of these special operations;
- Railway inspectors were on duty most weekends on Larne line trains;
- CAF trains with on-board CCTV were allocated to late night shifts;
- Counselling was offered to some members of staff who suffered verbal abuse whilst performing their duties; and
- Translink's Press Office released statements to local newspapers highlighting the problem and warning of the possibility of service cuts, should such attacks continue.

Since then there has been an ongoing number of incidents on the Larne line, however at a lower frequency than that experienced in 2008. Translink continue to mount special operations with PSNI as were conducted in 2008.

### Ballymena to Coleraine Track Relay

**Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) what is the progress on the Ballymena to Coleraine track relay; and (ii) if it is on schedule. (AQW 7281/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** The works on the track between Coleraine and Ballymena are progressing well. The line is currently closed and bus substitution is in operation. It is planned to re-open the line on Monday 29 June 2009, as scheduled, when full services will be resumed. The rest of the work required to finish the project is still on course to be completed by the middle of 2010.

### Translink

**Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister for Regional Development if Translink has indicated how many jobs will be lost through (i) voluntary redundancy; (ii) compulsory redundancy; and (iii) natural wastage in Northern Ireland Railways. (AQW 7282/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** Translink have indicated that they expect that 25 jobs will be lost from Northern Ireland Railways. Translink aim to achieve all these reductions through voluntary redundancy or natural wastage but this process is not complete as yet. At this stage the option of compulsory redundancies is not being considered.

### M1 Citybound Bus Lane

**Mr B McCrea** asked the Minister for Regional Development why the M1 citybound bus lane does not extend to junction 6 or 7; and if plans exist to extend it. (AQW 7321/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** My Department's Roads Service initially provided a bus lane on the M1, in August 2006, as a measure to facilitate construction of the M1/Westlink roadworks. The start of the bus lane, at Ballyskeagh Bridge, allows buses to bypass traffic queuing back from the Black's Road junction during peak times. Whilst, traffic can queue back beyond Ballyskeagh Bridge, the length of the existing bus way is considered to be appropriate.

There are no plans, at present, to extend the M1 bus lane.

### Traffic Calming Schemes

**Mr Moutray** asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to his answer to AQW 6886/09, to detail the (i) traffic calming schemes; and (ii) school travel and safety projects proposed for the Upper Bann area, in the next twelve months. (AQW 7323/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** As the Member is aware the Upper Bann Constituency covers areas from both Craigavon and Banbridge Councils.

In relation to the 2009/10 financial year, the tables below provide details of my Department's Roads Service programme for traffic calming schemes and school safety projects, in the Banbridge and Craigavon Council areas. However, scheme delivery is dependant on community support, the necessary resources being available and the successful completion of the required statutory procedures.

Traffic Calming Schemes - Banbridge Council Area	
Location	Possible Measures
Dromore Street, Banbridge	Traffic islands, sheltered parking
Huntly Road	Mini-roundabout, speed cushions

Traffic Calming Schemes - Banbridge Council Area	
Location	Possible Measures
Ballygowan Road	Traffic islands, gateway feature
Seapatrik Rd, Seapatrik	Speed cushions, gateway feature
Newry Street, Rathfriland	Speed cushions, gateway feature

Traffic Calming Schemes - Craigavon Council Area	
Location	Possible Measures
North Circular Road, Lurgan	Speed cushions
Ballymoney Road, Aghacommon	Speed cushions
Mill Hill, Waringstown	Speed cushions, gateway feature
Lower Toberhewny Lane, Lurgan	Speed ramps

School Safety Projects - Banbridge Council Area	
Location	Measures
Banbridge Academy	Flashing school warning signs and road markings
St Matthew's, Leitrim	Flashing school warning signs and road markings

School Safety Projects - Craigavon Council Area	
Location	Measures
Portadown Integrated Primary School	Flashing school warning signs and road markings
Eglish Primary School	Flashing school warning signs and road markings

## Opening of the M2

**Mr Burns** asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to his answer to AQW 5492/09, when the official opening ceremony of the M2 will take place. (AQW 7338/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that the official opening ceremony for the M2 Improvements Scheme is scheduled to take place on 9 June 2009.

However, as I announced on 7 May 2009, the works were sufficiently completed to allow traffic to use three lanes in each direction between Sandyknowes and Greencastle junctions, from Saturday 9 May 2009.

Some minor road works remain to be completed, which may require closures of the hard shoulder. The overall M2 Improvements scheme is currently on target to be completed later this month, some 3 months ahead of the original programme.

## Roads Service and Northern Ireland Water

**Mr Burns** asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the work that will be carried out by Roads Service and NI Water, in the South Antrim constituency, in May 2009. (AQW 7339/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** As I announced on 7 May 2009, the M2 Improvement Scheme works were sufficiently completed to allow traffic to use three lanes in each direction between Sandyknowes and Greencastle junctions, from Saturday 9 May 2009.

Some minor road works remain to be completed, which may require closures of the hard shoulder. The overall M2 Improvements scheme is currently on target to be completed later this month, some 3 months ahead of the original programme.

In addition to the ongoing M2 Improvements Scheme, the following work will be undertaken in the South Antrim Constituency during May 2009:

- environmental improvement scheme at The Square, Ballyclare;
- carriageway resurfacing on the A57 Templepatrick Road, Ballyclare;
- storm sewer and new footway construction at Park Road, Mallusk;
- provision of central hatching and right turning pockets on the Antrim Road, near Chimney Corner Hotel;
- extension of footway at Whelans Park, Randalstown;
- improvement work on footway at Ardmore Road / Diamond Road junction; and
- surface dressing works at some 25 locations covering approximately 112,000 square metres in Antrim Borough Council area.

Roads Service will also carry out routine maintenance work on roads in the South Antrim constituency during May 2009.

Northern Ireland Water has advised of the following work to be carried out in the South Antrim Constituency during May 2009:

- replacement watermain - Birchill Road, Antrim;
- reservoir Rehabilitation Programme 3 – various locations within South Antrim Constituency;
- service reservoir, enhanced security and telemetry work at divisional sites - Newtownabbey and Antrim;
- replacement of joints - Hyde Park Service Reservoir;
- new and replacement Watermains - Enkalon Industrial Estate, Antrim;
- foul sewer upgrade - Aldergrove Sewerage Scheme, Antrim Road;
- installation of Storm Tank - Roughfort Wastewater Treatment Works;
- upgrading of existing works - Milltown Waste Water Treatment Works, Antrim;
- construction of Pumping Stations at Masserene, Antrim and Randalstown;
- laying of sewers - Main Street and New Street Randalstown; and
- ongoing investigation work, consisting of bore holes, trial pits and slit trenches – no road closures are planned - Whitehead, Ballystrudder and Ballycarry.

This work is in addition to the day-to-day maintenance and repair required to the water and sewerage network.

### Out-of-Sewer Flooding

**Mrs Long** asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) what investigations have been undertaken; and (ii) what has been the outcome of those investigations, into the underlying causes of repeated out-of-sewer flooding at Eastleigh Dale, BT4. (AQW 7376/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the flooding that affected Eastleigh Dale in June 2007 and August 2008 was caused by extreme levels of rainfall which overwhelmed the drainage system in parts of the North. The flooding was compounded by rainfall causing surcharging of rivers and watercourses to which the drainage would normally discharge. It was widely acknowledged that no sewerage system could have coped with the intensity of the rainfall.

The ongoing Drainage Area Study of the East Belfast sewer network will assess the adequacy of the sewerage system in the area and identify any parts that need to be upgraded. The Study is expected to be completed in late 2009 after which a Drainage Area Plan (DAP) incorporating any improvements recommended by the Study, will be developed. Completion will take a further 6-9 months and the planned improvement works will subsequently be included in NIW's capital works programme. Implementation of proposals within the plan will be dependent on available funding.

Pending the outcome of the DAP, NIW will continue to monitor and maintain the public sewer network and take all practicable steps to reduce the risk of future flooding. Regrettably, whatever measures are implemented, it will not be possible to guarantee that flooding caused by exceptional weather conditions such as occurred in June 2007 and August 2008 will not recur.



### Out-of-Sewer Flooding

**Mrs Long** asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) if any improvement schemes are currently being developed; and (ii) to detail the prospective time-table for the implementation of any such schemes, to address the causes of repeated out-of-sewer flooding at Eastleigh Dale, BT4. (AQW 7377/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the flooding that affected Eastleigh Dale in June 2007 and August 2008 was caused by extreme levels of rainfall which overwhelmed the drainage system in parts of the North. The flooding was compounded by rainfall causing surcharging of rivers and watercourses to which the drainage would normally discharge. It was widely acknowledged that no sewerage system could have coped with the intensity of the rainfall.

The ongoing Drainage Area Study of the East Belfast sewer network will assess the adequacy of the sewerage system in the area and identify any parts that need to be upgraded. The Study is expected to be completed in late 2009 after which a Drainage Area Plan (DAP) incorporating any improvements recommended by the Study, will be developed. Completion will take a further 6-9 months and the planned improvement works will subsequently be included in NIW's capital works programme. Implementation of proposals within the plan will be dependent on available funding.

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### Out-of-Sewer Flooding

**Mrs Long** asked the Minister for Regional Development, in relation to any planning applications in the vicinity of Eastleigh Dale, BT4, and specifically application Z/2009/0235/F, if the history of repeated out-of-sewer flooding is being, or has been considered as part of the statutory consultation response to Planning Service that is being prepared by NI Water. (AQW 7378/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that, as part of the planning consultation process, it is currently considering a response for a proposed development in the Eastleigh area of East Belfast. The response will take into account the capacity in the sewer network in the area and will propose that the developer enters into early discussions with NIW to assess the options for serving the development in line with current procedures.

### East Belfast Drainage Area Study

**Mrs Long** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the progress of the East Belfast Drainage Area Study and Plan; and when he anticipates that the Drainage Area Plan will be finalised. (AQW 7379/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that the flooding that affected Eastleigh Dale in June 2007 and August 2008 was caused by extreme levels of rainfall which overwhelmed the drainage system in parts of the North. The flooding was compounded by rainfall causing surcharging of rivers and watercourses to which the drainage would normally discharge. It was widely acknowledged that no sewerage system could have coped with the intensity of the rainfall.

The ongoing Drainage Area Study of the East Belfast sewer network will assess the adequacy of the sewerage system in the area and identify any parts that need to be upgraded. The Study is expected to be completed in late 2009 after which a Drainage Area Plan (DAP) incorporating any improvements recommended by the Study, will be developed. Completion will take a further 6-9 months and the planned improvement works will subsequently be included in Northern Ireland Water's capital works programme. Implementation of proposals within the plan will be dependent on available funding.

Pending the outcome of the DAP, Northern Ireland Water will continue to monitor and maintain the public sewer network and take all practicable steps to reduce the risk of future flooding. Regrettably, whatever measures are implemented, it will not be possible to guarantee that flooding caused by exceptional weather conditions such as occurred in June 2007 and August 2008 will not recur.

### Planning Service

**Mrs Long** asked the Minister for Regional Development if advice has been issued to Roads Service or NI Water to complement advice circulated to the Planning Service regarding the cumulative effects of development (PC 0307). (AQW 7380/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) and my Department's Roads Service that they have not received advice to complement the Department of the Environment's internal Planning Service guidance note, PC 0307.

A Transport Assessment will normally be required to identify the cumulative effects of development. Advice for Roads Service staff is provided in the joint Department for Regional Development and Department of the Environment document 'Transport Assessment Guidelines for Development Proposals in Northern Ireland'.

NIW and Roads Service are acutely aware of the impact that cumulative development can have on existing infrastructure, and they work closely with Planning Service on such matters, in accordance with current procedures, and legislative and regulatory requirements.

### Rapid Transit

**Mrs Long** asked the Minister for Regional Development what public consultation is planned in respect of the rapid transit (E-Way) proposals for the Comber Greenway. (AQW 7403/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** Following the Executive's endorsement of the findings of the Strategic Outline Case (SOC), a dedicated Rapid Transit Division has been established to take the project forward. At present they are drawing up a project programme and, as part of the preliminary design, are considering a range of route options to best meet the objectives within the SOC. The preliminary design will form the basis for public consultation at the appropriate time, which will probably be in the latter part of this year.

### Rapid Transit

**Mrs Long** asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) when the detailed plans for the Rapid Transit (E-WAY) will be completed; and (ii) if any formal decisions have been taken regarding the route on the city-centre side of the Holywood Arches junction. (AQW 7404/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** Following the Executive's endorsement of the findings of the Strategic Outline Case (SOC), a dedicated Rapid Transit Division has been established to take the project forward. As part of the preliminary design, the division is considering a range of route options to best meet the objectives within the SOC, and at present is carrying out the necessary on-site surveys. Therefore, no formal decisions have been made at this time about any of the routes, including the city-centre side of the Holywood Arches junction. As this work will take some time to complete, it is likely to be towards the latter part of this year before detailed plans would be available.

### Rapid Transit

**Mrs Long** asked the Minister for Regional Development what communications there have been between his Department and landowners, both public and private sector, whose property may be affected by or are adjacent to the proposed route of the Rapid Transit (E-WAY) system between Dundonald and Belfast. (AQW 7405/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** To date, the Rapid Transit Division in my department has not had direct communication with landowners, public or private, whose property may be affected by or is adjacent to the proposed route of the EWAY. However they have started to engage with key public sector stakeholders and are a member of the Connswater Greenway Project multi-agency team and the steering group overseeing the East Belfast Development Strategy.

### Door Sensors on Trains

**Mr Ross** asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) if costs have been estimated to establish the viability of fitting door sensors on trains that do not have fully automated door systems; and (ii) to detail what these costings are. (AQW 7423/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** Currently three out of 38 trains fleet operating on the railways network do not have door sensors fitted. These are all Class 80 trains. For these trains the door mechanisms are safe if operated according to proper procedures. The mechanism has been approved for use by HM Railway Inspectorate.

In March of this year I announced that 20 new trains would be purchased and introduced to passenger service on the railways network from 2011 thus allowing 13 old trains still in service to be replaced, including the three Class 80 trains.

Given that the three Class 80 trains will be taken out of service in two to three years and that the mechanisms on them are safe to operate, Translink have advised that they have not costed installing door sensors at this stage. Translink have indicated that in light of the fact that the anticipated remaining life of the trains is two to three years, it is unlikely that the investment would meet value for money tests particularly as the specification procurement and installation of a new system would take time and would involve costs from taking the three trains out of service.

### Railway Stations in East Antrim

**Mr Ross** asked the Minister for Regional Development if there are any plans to install CCTV cameras at all railway stations in East Antrim. (AQW 7443/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** Translink have informed me that Northern Ireland Railways (NIR) currently have CCTV cameras at 4 stations on the Larne Line (Yorkgate, Greenisland, Carrickfergus and Whitehead).

CCTV cameras are also installed at the automatic road/rail barriers at Jordanstown and Trooperslane.

Translink bus and rail own and maintain over 400 buildings at 180 locations, a large proportion of which are accessible to the public. Capital expenditure on CCTV equipment and maintenance is costly and Translink use the criteria of high passenger throughput and reportable incidents in deciding where to install such equipment.

At present it would not be Translink's intention to install CCTV equipment at all stations and halts on the Larne line, but each location is considered on its own merits. However, all trains operating on the Larne line will have CCTV fitted as standard by 2013.

### Translink

**Mr Ross** asked the Minister for Regional Development if Translink is legally able to lease trains from other companies within, and outside, the UK. (AQW 7444/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** Legally Translink can lease trains from other companies within, and outside, Britain.

Practically Northern Ireland Rail (NIR) can only lease from Irish Rail. This is because the NIR track is broad gauge (1600mm) compared to standard gauge (1483mm) used in Britain. No other similar broad gauge fleet exists outside the island of Ireland. Accordingly trains from Britain and Europe would require substantial modification before use.

NIR is in regular contact with Irish Rail on rolling stock issues. Translink have informed me that, currently, Irish Rail have no suitable vehicles to lease.

## Translink

**Mr Ross** asked the Minister for Regional Development if Translink has examined the possibility of leasing trains from other companies for the Larne line, given that it will be a minimum of two years before new stock will arrive. (AQW 7445/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** Translink have informed me that there are no possibilities for leasing trains from outside Ireland for use by Northern Ireland Railways (NIR). This is because the NIR track is broad gauge (1600mm) compared to standard gauge (1483mm) used in Britain. No other similar broad gauge fleet exists outside the island of Ireland.

NIR is in regular contact with Irish Rail on rolling stock issues. However, Irish Rail currently have no suitable vehicles to lease. At some point in the future Irish Rail will have loco-hauled Mark 3 intercity coaches available but these are not suitable for suburban services.

In making any decisions on leasing trains NIR needs to consider its overall financial position and the value for money of leasing options.

## Door to Door Transport Scheme

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of members of the Door to Door Transport Scheme in the Bangor area. (AQW 7472/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** On 11 May 2009 there were 827 members in the Bangor operational area.

## Potholes

**Mr Dallat** asked the Minister for Regional Development what procedures are in place to (i) find; (ii) list; (iii) repair; and (iv) inspect potholes in the various classes of roads. (AQW 7495/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** Article 8 of the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993, places a duty on my Department to maintain all public roads in reasonable condition. To comply with this duty, my Department's Roads Service has a set of Maintenance Standards in place, which are based on best practice, research and consultation with the public, other professional bodies and industry representatives. These standards, which were last reviewed in 2006, and continue to provide a systematic approach to road maintenance management, are designed to ensure a consistent service level and safe carriageways, while also offering value for money.

The standards establish frequencies for road inspections, which are dependent on traffic volumes. They also specify response times for the repair of identified defects. Inspection frequencies vary between daily cycles for motorways, to four monthly cycles for carriageways carrying low volumes of traffic.

Response times specified for the repair of identified defects are dependent on the type of road (Urban or Rural), the traffic volume and the severity of the defect. They range from one calendar day, to inclusion in that particular route's next work programme. When a relevant response time cannot be met, Roads Service has the option of installing signs to warn road users of a possible danger.

## Translink

**Mr Burns** asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to, AQW 5017/09, in relation to Translink paying less for fuel under the renewed fuel hedging deals, to detail his reasons for approving public transport fare increases. (AQW 7508/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** The percentage changes to the net price per litre of fuel provided in AQW 5017/09 for the year 2009/10 are:

	ULSD	Gas Oil
6 Months January 2009 to June 2009	+24%	+25%
Months July 2009 to September 2009	-8%	-8%

	ULSD	Gas Oil
3 Months October 2009 to December 2009	-0.4%	-0.3%
3 Months January 2010 to March 2010	-6%	-5%

This information indicates that while there will be a percentage fall in the price Translink will pay for fuel for the last three quarters of this year this is greatly outweighed by the percentage increase Translink will pay for fuel in the first quarter. The net effect of this is that Translink's fuel bill for bus and rail for 2009/10 will be around 5% and 12% higher respectively than for 2008/09.

Fuel cost increases are only one area of cost pressure Translink will face in 2009/10. There are wider cost pressures which also have to be covered, for example, pay increases, increased pension contributions, additional running costs of new buses and bus stations etc. These cost pressures are countered by efficiencies and revenues and on balance I content for average bus fares to increase by 2% and average rail fares to increase by 3%.

### Cloughogue to Beechill Section of the A1

**Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister for Regional Development when the Cloughogue to Beechill section of the A1 will be completed and fully in use. (AQW 7541/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** The contractor's programmed completion date for this scheme is December 2010. The latest information from the contractor would indicate that works are currently some 2 months ahead of schedule. However, the completion date on this scheme will depend on the timely completion of the remaining engineering works.

### Cloughogue to Beechill Section of the A1

**Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister for Regional Development if he will give a timetable for the opening of the various completed sections of the Cloughogue to Beechill part of the A1. (AQW 7549/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that the contractor for the A1 Beech Hill to Cloughogue dual carriageway scheme has not indicated that any sections of the new road will be opened ahead of the opening of the complete scheme. However, the contractor has indicated that temporary traffic management measures, involving traffic using various sections of new carriageway, will continue to be put in place as the work proceeds.

The completion date of this scheme will depend on the timely completion of the remaining engineering works.

### Northern Ireland Water

**Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister for Regional Development what action his Department is taking to stop recurrent flooding at the intersection adjacent to 26, Bridge Street, Newry. (AQW 7602/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the flooding during periods of heavy rainfall at Bridge Street, Newry resulted from blockages in an undesignated drain, known as the Railway drain. Although this drain is not part of the public sewerage system and NIW has therefore no responsibility for its operation or maintenance, it cleared the blockages and desilted the drain to reduce the risk of further flooding.

NIW plans to liaise with other agencies to establish ownership of the drain and responsibility for its future maintenance.

### School Buses

**Mr P J Bradley** asked the Minister for Regional Development what discussions he has had with the Minister of Education to ensure that school bus runs are gritted during winter months. (AQO 2672/09)



**Minister for Regional Development:** I have had initial discussions with the Minister of Education regarding gritting of school bus runs during winter months and have had a meeting with the Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development regarding the general issue of gritting of rural roads.

I can also confirm that Roads Service's examination of the Winter Service operational response around rural schools regularly affected by adverse weather conditions is underway.

As part of this examination, Roads Service intends to contact all rural schools that are not on the gritted network to gather relevant information. In due course, Roads Service will report to me with the outcome of their examination and, at that stage, I will consult again with Minister Ruane and Minister Gildernew.

It is anticipated that any changes to operational practice will be in place for the commencement of the next winter season.

### Roads and Transport Budgets

**Mr Lunn** asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail his capital budget for (i) roads and (ii) public transport, in the 2009/10 financial year. (AQO 2678/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that the Capital budget for roads in 2009-10 is £185 million, as identified in the Executive's Budget 2008-2011 and the investment strategy 2008-2018.

I do not intend to give finite detail on what is an extensive capital programme within Roads Service but would draw your attention to the main highlights of what is planned for the year. These are:

- The completion of:
  - the M2 Widening from Sandyknowes to Greencastle;
  - the Newtownards Southern Distributor Road;
  - this year's Local Transport and Safety Measures programme; and
  - this year's Bridge Strengthening programme.
- There will be further work on:
  - the final section of the A1 to dual carriageway standard around Newry;
  - four junction improvements on the A1; and
  - a dual carriageway on the A4 between Dungannon and Ballygawley.
- Schemes that will commence work on the ground are:
  - the new dual carriageway on the A2 from Derry to the City of Derry Airport;
  - the A26/M2 Ballee Road East Link at Ballymena; and
  - the Carland Bridge Realignment scheme on the A29 between Dungannon and Cookstown – although this scheme is subject to the satisfactory completion of the procurement process.
- Plans are also progressing well to:
  - dual the A6 between Derry and Dungiven;
  - dual the A5 between Derry and Aughnacloy; and
  - dual the remaining single carriageway section of the A8 between Belfast and Larne.
- Turning to Public Transport the Capital budget in 2009/10 is around £54 million.
- The £36 million Railways allocation will assist Northern Ireland Railways in taking forward several major projects. These include:
  - the procurement of 20 new trains;
  - the construction of a new railway station at Newry; and
  - most of the track life extension works on the railway line between Ballymena and Coleraine.
- The £15 million bus allocation will allow Translink:
  - to purchase at least 69 buses; and
  - to carry out work at a number of Bus Stations, Workshops and Garages.

- Lastly, the £3 million Rapid Transit allocation will go towards my Department's PSA target 13 which is to commence work on the first Rapid Transit line in Greater Belfast by 2011.

## Translink

**Mr K Robinson** asked the Minister for Regional Development what representations Translink has made to him for extra resources in the past 12 months. (AQO 2679/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** Translink make representations through the normal Public Expenditure process, specifically the in-year monitoring rounds or other budgetary exercises commissioned by the Department of Finance and Personnel.

In September 2008, Translink bid for additional resources for the next two financial years as part of the DFP review of the existing budget settlement. Bids of £5.25 million and £6.1 million additional revenue funding lodged for the railways for 2009/10 and 2010/11 respectively. In the same exercise DRD bid for £6.4 million and £6.6 million additional revenue funding for bus travel for 2009/10 and 2010/11. An additional capital bid for £3.4 million for signage and lighting for school buses was withdrawn until the legislation was enacted.

None of these bids were met and the existing budget settlement remains in place.

Translink also bid for additional funding for 2008/09, through the in-year monitoring round process. This included bids in the June, October and December monitoring rounds. The size of the bids varied over the course of the year as additional funding became available and circumstances changed. In the initial June Monitoring Round, Translink bid for £3.3 million additional revenue funding for railways and £6million for the bus side. By the time of the December Monitoring Round, this had reduced to £2.2 million and £3.6 million for rail and bus respectively.

During the year DRD allocated additional resources of £1.9 million for rail and £1.6 million for the bus side including budget to cover additional concessionary fare travel and additional funding for an increase in Fuel Duty Rebate.

## Memorials and Symbols

**Mr Simpson** asked the Minister for Regional Development what estimate his Department has made of the number of symbols displayed or memorials erected, on Departmental land or property, which glorify criminal behaviour. (AQO 2680/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** My Department's Roads Service does not have any specific criteria for classifying different types of roadside symbols or memorials. However, when last counted in November 2007, there were 106 unauthorised monuments on public roads, of which 72 related to road traffic fatalities, 31 related to the troubles and 3 had been erected to mark deaths due to other causes.

## Public Transport Reform

**Mr Boylan** asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline his proposals and timescale for taking forward the recently announced reform of public transport. (AQO 2681/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** The proposed reform of public transport is designed to help improve the arrangements for the provision of a modern, efficient and well managed public transport system. It would also ensure compliance with EU requirements involving new contractual arrangements for the delivery of public transport.

An Outline Business Case is being completed which examines the options for organisational arrangements that will best support the reform. The OBC findings and the proposals for reform are scheduled to be discussed with the Regional Development Committee on 17 June 2009.

Subject to the views of the Regional Development Committee, I intend to undertake a public consultation exercise on the reform in the autumn, after which policy proposals for any required legislative changes would be introduced to the Assembly in spring 2010.

### Disabled Parking Enforcement

**Mrs Hanna** asked the Minister for Regional Development when he plans to extend legislation to cover disabled parking enforcement to car parks for shopping centres. (AQO 2682/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that it has no plans to control the use of car parks on private property. The current legislation that governs the operation of the Blue Badge Scheme and the enforcement of parking restrictions, only applies to on-street car parking and off street car parks on the publicly adopted road network.

### Translink: Price Increases

**Mr Beggs** asked the Minister for Regional Development how the recent price increases announced by Translink fit in with his Department's long-term strategy for public transport. (AQO 2683/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** My Department's long-term strategy for public transport is contained within the Regional Transportation Strategy (RTS), and the three under pinning Transport Plans.

An important theme within the RTS is to encourage people away from private car use onto public transport. The relative cost of modes of transport is an important factor in this regard. I believe that proposed average fares increases of 2% for bus and 3% for rail maintain bus and rail services as attractive alternatives to the car, taking account of budget and other constraints.

Quality of service is also important in terms of increasing the numbers of passengers moving onto public transport. There has been investment of £127 million on 938 new buses from 2003/04 to 2008/09 and £157 million on new trains and railway infrastructure from 2004/05 to 2008/09. I think this demonstrates clearly my desire to improve public transport.

This investment has resulted in the establishment of a modern bus and rail fleet and has proved successful in seeing bus and rail passenger numbers increasing over the last few years as well as improved punctuality levels meeting the targets set in the Passenger's Charter.

The RTS is currently under review, and this review process will allow consideration of further ways of developing and promoting the use of public transport within the context of existing and future budgets.

### Rural Bus Services

**Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to ensure that the frequency of buses on vital rural routes is maintained, to ensure rural dwellers are not disadvantaged. (AQO 2684/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** I can confirm that there will be no reduction in the overall coverage of bus services in the North.

Translink has extremely limited plans to change rural transport services, involving a reduction in frequency on three routes and the withdrawal of one very low use sub route in County Derry.

### Minister for Regional Development

**Mr Clarke** asked the Minister for Regional Development how many representations he has made to his Department in his capacity as an MLA, since taking up office. (AQO 2685/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** Since taking up post as Minister for Regional Development, in my capacity as an MLA, I have made one formal written representation to Roads Service about traffic calming/speed control issues on the Portadown Road, Armagh.

### Public Procurement

**Mr Molloy** asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans his Department has to revise public procurement guidelines, or regulations, to provide greater opportunities for local contractors. (AQO 2686/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** My Department's Roads Service, like other Government clients, has to abide by the Public Contracts Regulations and must not show favouritism to local contractors. It has in place a procurement strategy that provides opportunities for small medium enterprises (SMEs) to tender for contracts. SMEs will, in most cases, be made up by local contractors.

For example, all Roads Service's Maintenance and Minor Works is carried out using a series of Term Contracts, with individual works orders within such contracts, up to £350,000. This accounts for an annual spend of £70-80 million per annum. Projects costing between £350,000 to £5 million are procured individually, which again gives tendering opportunities to local contractors in the SME range.

It is also a requirement to publicly advertise all construction procurement opportunities, which is completed by Roads Service through a dedicated Tenders webpage and, as required, the Official Journal of the European Union.

Roads Service has also been represented on the Procurement Task Group which was set up under the auspices of the Construction Industry Forum for Northern Ireland. The Group has representatives from the construction industry and government construction clients and aims to agree the broad principles governing government construction procurement going forward.

### A6 Road Scheme

**Mr Brolly** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the A6 road scheme. (AQO 2687/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** On 6 May 2009, I announced the preferred route for the proposed 30 kilometre Derry to Dungiven dual carriageway, including a dual carriageway bypass of Dungiven. This was a key milestone in the planning of this road, which will greatly improve access to the Northwest.

Public exhibitions took place on 6 and 7 May in Dungiven and are planned for 12 and 13 May in Drumahoe, to inform local representatives and the public about the preferred route. Roads Service staff and their advisers are available to answer questions.

The next stage of the project will be an examination of the preferred route in greater detail by Roads Service's Consultants and preparation of the necessary statutory procedures. I anticipate that these will be published in Autumn 2010, followed by a public enquiry in 2011.

Work on the scheme could possibly commence in 2012/13 subject to:-

- satisfactory progress through the statutory processes;
- economic appraisal;
- the availability of funding through the normal budgetary process; and
- satisfactory progression through the procurement process.

### Rathlin Island

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the Executive's policy for Rathlin Island. (AQO 2688/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** My Department has taken the lead in developing a central government policy for Rathlin Island. The work has been undertaken on a cross departmental basis but also incorporating the views of the islanders.

The policy has recently been endorsed by the Executive and it is my intention to make a statement to the Assembly. The policy is subject to the normal range of impact assessments and public consultation.

### Translink: Operating Costs

**Mr McCallister** asked the Minister for Regional Development if any of Translink's operating costs have risen disproportionately or unexpectedly, in the last 2 years. (AQO 2689/09)

**Minister for Regional Development:** Apart from an increase in fuel costs, I am aware that costs have increased in a number of areas. The cost to Translink of the Enterprise service increased due to unfavourable movements in the sterling euro exchange rate. Translink pension costs have increased disproportionately but this

is in line with costs arising for all employees in the NILGOSC pension scheme. Wage costs have risen in line with Department of Finance and Personnel Pay Guidelines.

## DEPARTMENT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

### Homeless Numbers in Lagan Valley

**Mr Craig** asked the Minister for Social Development how many people were registered as homeless in the Lagan Valley constituency in 2006/07, 2007/08 and 2008/09. (AQW 7287/09)

**Minister for Social Development (Ms M Ritchie):** I am not able to provide this information in the format requested as the Lagan Valley constituency covers parts of the Lisburn, Dairy Farm and Banbridge district offices of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. The table below instead details the requested information with regard to the number of people registered as homeless by each of these district offices.

Homeless presentations and acceptances from 2006/07 until 2008/09 in district offices within the Lagan Valley constituency						
	2006/2007		2007/2008		2008/2009 (provisional)	
	Presented	Accepted	Presented	Accepted	Presented	Accepted
Lisburn District	1433	631(44%)	1226	521(42%)	1190	587(49%)
Dairy Farm District	497	264 (53%)	434	224 (52%)	427	249 (58%)
Banbridge District	510	178 (35%)	457	164 (36%)	307	118 (38%)

### Grants Scheme

**Mr Cobain** asked the Minister for Social Development how much new money is in the grants scheme for (i) owner occupiers; and (ii) private landlords, in the financial year 2009/10. (AQW 7370/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The Private Sector grant budget for the 2009/10 financial year is £20.25m. I will continue to make bids for additional funding in future monitoring rounds.

Responsibility for the allocation of the Private Sector grant rests with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

### Warm Homes Scheme

**Mr Cobain** asked the Minister for Social Development how much new money is in the Warm Homes Scheme for the financial year, 2009/10. (AQW 7371/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The Warm Homes Scheme budget for 2009/10 is £20.5 million.

### Grants Scheme

**Mr Cobain** asked the Minister for Social Development how much has been awarded in grants to (i) owner occupiers; (ii) Housing Executive properties; and (iii) private landlords, in the financial year, 2008/09. (AQW 7372/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** A total of £40.5m for Private Sector grants was paid in the 2008/09 financial year. Owner occupiers received £34.7m and private landlords received £5.8m.

Housing Executive properties are not eligible for grant aid.



### Warm Homes Scheme

**Mr Cobain** asked the Minister for Social Development how much money has been awarded through the Warm Homes Scheme to (i) owner occupiers; (ii) Housing Executive properties; and (iii) private landlords in financial year 2008/09. (AQW 7373/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** To date, £16.76 million has been spent on owner occupiers and £1.86 million sent on private

landlords. Eaga are finalising their 2008/09 accounts, however I do not expect this figure to change considerably. Only households in the owner-occupied and private rented sector are eligible for assistance under the Warm Homes Scheme.

### Social Housing

**Mr Cobain** asked the Minister for Social Development how her Department arrived at the figure of £350,000 per unit, to redevelop social housing. (AQW 7374/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** During our debate on 21 April 2009 I referred to the estimated costs of putting back new houses in areas that are currently being considered for redevelopment.

Given the high number of privately owned homes that often have to be purchased at market value to make way for redevelopment, this sort of intervention is undoubtedly a more costly option when compared to traditional newbuild schemes.

Obviously costs will vary between different schemes depending on a range of issues. However the figure I quoted during the debate was lifted directly from one economic appraisal currently before me.

These figures include acquisition, compensation and demolition costs associated with existing housing in the redevelopment area. It also includes the construction costs including all fees in building the new put back housing alongside other costs associated with the total redevelopment plans.

### Mortgage Payment Assistance

**Mr F McCann** asked the Minister for Social Development, in relation to mortgage payment assistance, (i) how many people have received help; (ii) how much time elapsed before they became eligible for assistance; and (iii) if single parents were treated differently from other applicants, in each of the last seven years. (AQW 7381/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** Payments towards mortgage interest and home loans can be considered when eligible customers are in receipt of the income-based benefits of income support, jobseeker's allowance, employment and support allowance and state pension credit.

- (i) The data held by social welfare statistics and consultancy branch shows that the number of claimants to income related benefits (income support, jobseeker's allowance, state pension credit and employment and support allowance) that have benefited from mortgage interest payments or interest payments on home loans for each of the last seven years is set out in the table below.

Year	Number of claimants benefiting from Interest Payments
April 2002 - March 2003	21,884
April 2003 - March 2004	22,372
April 2004 - March 2005	22,372
April 2005 - March 2006	22,024
April 2006 - March 2007	20,885
April 2007 - March 2008	19,290
April 2008 - March 2009	20,899

**Source:** Unvalidated scans from the computer systems of income-related benefits.

### Social Security Benefits

**Mr F McCann** asked the Minister for Social Development how many Housing Executive houses were sold to people in receipt of Social Security benefits, in each of the last seven years. (AQW 7382/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** Information in the form requested is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

### Bonfire Programmes

**Mr Ross** asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the bonfire programmes that are being funded by the Housing Executive in the East Antrim constituency in 2009. (AQW 7387/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister funds Council bonfire programmes. However, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive provides financial support of £500 per Housing Executive District Office area for communities whose Councils have not yet put in place a bonfire initiative.

### Welfare Reform Bill

**Mr Cobain** asked the Minister for Social Development if her Department is monitoring amendments to the Welfare Reform Bill in Westminster, that may effect Northern Ireland. (AQW 7398/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** Yes. My Department is monitoring the Welfare Reform Bill as it progresses through its parliamentary stages at Westminster.

### Income Support Fresh Claims

**Ms Anderson** asked the Minister for Social Development how many income support fresh claims were received in the Foyle office in 2007/08 and in 2008/09. (AQW 7434/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The information requested is detailed in the table below.

Financial Year	No. of Income Support fresh claims received in Foyle Jobs & Benefits Office
2007/2008	1527
2008/2009	1280

This information is extracted from Social Security Agency internal monitoring systems.

### Environmental Improvement Scheme

**Mr Maskey** asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the Environmental Improvement Scheme phases three and four, for the Market area in South Belfast. (AQW 7441/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The Member will be aware that following our debate in the Assembly on 30 September 2008 my department rejected proposals for phase 3 of this Environmental Improvement Scheme as these included the unnecessary demolition of social houses in an area of such high housing need. The Housing Executive has agreed to reconsider how best to deliver the wider objectives of phase 3 without demolition and I am still awaiting these revised proposals.

Plans for Phase 4 are well developed and once the resources are identified to deliver them, work will begin. Unfortunately due to the collapse of the land and property market, the housing budget will suffer a shortfall in the region of £100m in each of the next two years. The result of this is that the Housing Executive has had to reprioritise many Environmental Improvement Schemes and programmes such as this one for the Markets. I will keep you appraised once new plans for Phase 3 are approved and resources identified to deliver phases 3 and 4.

### Environmental Improvement Scheme

**Mr A Maskey** asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the total cost of the Cromac Street Environmental Improvement Scheme. (AQW 7442/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The Environmental Improvement Scheme for the Markets has not yet been completed. The work will be delivered over four phases.

To date £550,061 has been spent completing phase one and phase two whilst the overall costs of completing all four phases is estimated to be £2,284,061.

### Household Fuel Payment Team

**Mr Savage** asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) how many letters; (ii) telephone calls; and (iii) e-mails have been received by the household fuel payment team since 01 April 2009 and the average timescale for the team to issue a reply. (AQW 7450/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** My officials have not formally recorded all calls, letters and e-mails relating to the household fuel payment as a significant number of these enquiries, in particular the telephone calls, were dealt with at the point of contact. However, it is estimated that approximately 4,000 letters and e-mails have been received seeking clarification of entitlement to a payment.

My officials handled calls from 6 April until 16 April. From 17 April, the Energy Savings Trust which is operated by Bryson Charitable Group, handled calls regarding the household fuel payment. To date, over 10,000 calls have been made to this helpline. However I am advised that approximately 60% of these are repeat callers.

We have begun the process of responding to those individuals who wrote to the Department but do not meet the qualifying criteria and an additional 16,000 payments accompanied by a notification letter will be issued to eligible householders by 22 May. Those who believe they qualify for the household fuel payment have until the 30 June to write to the Department setting out the reasons why they believe they are entitled to a payment. My officials will continue to respond to such letters promptly, either by making a payment or providing an explanation as to why there is no entitlement.

### Registered Carers in North Down

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Social Development how many registered carers in North Down are over 60 years of age. (AQW 7467/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The information requested is not available as my Department does not hold a list of registered carers.

### Public Procurement Contracts

**Ms J McCann** asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the companies that were successful in securing public procurement contracts in works, services and goods through her Department, in the last two years and the percentage of these that were from the SME or the Social Economy sectors. (AQW 7485/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The tables over provide details for contracts awarded by Central Procurement Directorate on behalf of the Department for Social Development for 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2009.

DSD - Supplies (Goods) and Services			
2008/09 Financial Year			
	Name of Company to which Contract was Awarded	Contract awarded to	
		SME	/SEE(Y/N) *
Supplies			
DSD	Gael Force Ventures	Not specified	
Works			
Services			
DSD	ASM Horwath	Not specified	
	Deloitte	Y	
	FGS McClure Watters	Y	
	KPMG	Y	
	Moore Stephens	Y	
	Oxford Economics/PWC	Y	
	PWC	Y	

\* Information based on information provided by each company when registering on eSourcingNI

DSD - Supplies (Goods) and Services			
2007/08 Financial Year			
	Name of Company to which Contract was Awarded	Contract awarded to	
		SME	/SEE(Y/N) *
Supplies			
Works			
Services			
DSD	Advice NI	Y	
	BDO Stoy Hayward	Y	
	Biznet	Y	
	CIPFA	Not specified	
	Citizens Advice	Y	
	Co-operation Ireland	Not specified	
	Deloitte	Y	
	Education and Development	Y	
	Goldblatt McGuigan	Y	
	Grant Thornton	Y	
	KPMG	Y	
	Locus	Y	
	McCann Consulting	Y	

<b>DSD - Supplies (Goods) and Services</b>			
<b>2007/08 Financial Year</b>			
	<b>Name of Company to which Contract was Awarded</b>	<b>Contract awarded to</b>	
		<b>SME</b>	<b>/SEE(Y/N) *</b>
	McClure Watters	Not specified	
	Octoberstone	Not specified	
	PA Consulting	Y	
	Penna Consulting	Y	
	Peter Quinn	Y	
	PWC	Y	
	Quay Marinas	Not specified	
	Roger Tym & Partners	Y	
	SQW	Y	
	Venturei	Y	
	Volunteer Development Agency	Not specified	
	William Consulting	Y	

\* Information based on information provided by each company when registering on eSourcingNI

<b>Department - DSD Construction Works and Services</b>			
<b>2008/09 Financial Year</b>			
	<b>Name of Company to which Contract was Awarded</b>	<b>Contract awarded to</b>	
		<b>SME</b>	<b>/SEE(Y/N)</b>
<b>Supplies</b>	See separate return - above		
<b>Works</b>	John Graham (Dromore) Ltd	No	
	John Graham (Dromore) Ltd	No	
	F P McCann Ltd	Yes	
<b>Services</b>	McAdam Design	Yes	
	McAdam Design	Yes	
	McAdam Design	Yes	
	McAdam Design	Yes	
	McAdam Design	Yes	
	McAdam Design	Yes	
	Tribal Consulting	No	
	Tribal Consulting	No	
	GVA Grimley	Not known	
	GVA Grimley	Not known	
	GVA Grimley	Not known	
	GVA Grimley	Not known	
	GVA Grimley	Not known	
	GVA Grimley	Not known	



Department - DSD Construction Works and Services			
2008/09 Financial Year			
	Name of Company to which Contract was Awarded	Contract awarded to	
		SME	/SEE(Y/N)
	Paul Hogarth Company	Yes	
	Paul Hogarth Company	Yes	
	Paul Hogarth Company	Yes	
	Paul Hogarth Company	Yes	
	Paul Hogarth Company	Yes	
	Paul Hogarth Company	Yes	
	Paul Hogarth Company	Yes	
	Byrne Looby Partners	Yes	
	Scott Wilson	No	
	RPS Consulting	Yes	
	RPS Planning & Environment	Yes	
	RPS Planning & Environment	Yes	
	RPS Consulting	Yes	
	White Young Green	No	
	White Young Green	No	
	White Young Green	No	
	White Young Green	No	
	Sammon Chartered Surveyors	Yes	
	Savills Commercial Ltd	Not known	

Department - DSD Construction Works and Services			
2007/08 Financial Year			
	Name of Company to which Contract was Awarded	Contract awarded to	
		SME	/SEE(Y/N)
Supplies	See separate return – above		
Works	Dan George	Single	
	F P McCann Ltd	Yes	
Services	Paul Hogarth Company	Yes	
	Paul Hogarth Company	Yes	
	McAdam Design	Yes	
	McAdam Design	Yes	
	McAdam Design	Yes	
	McAdam Design	Yes	
	McAdam Design	Yes	
	McAdam Design	Yes	

Department - DSD Construction Works and Services			
2007/08 Financial Year			
	Name of Company to which Contract was Awarded	Contract awarded to	
		SME	/SEE(Y/N)
	Colin Buchanan & Partners	Yes	

### Regeneration Schemes for Coleraine

**Mr Dallat** asked the Minister for Social Development (i) if the regeneration schemes for Coleraine town centre are on schedule; and (ii) to indicate what problems, if any, have been encountered. (AQW 7491/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** There are currently two proposed regeneration schemes for Coleraine town centre that are being taken forward by my Department. These schemes are the 'Lanes', which is to be developed on the site of the Abbey Street car park, and the 'Ramparts', which is to be developed on a site that includes the Mall car park. As I indicated in my response to AQW 3552/09, there have been delays in both schemes.

The delay in the Lanes scheme arises from a procedural difficulty with the transfer of the Abbey Street car park from the Department for Regional Development to my Department. The procedures currently in place only allow a Government Department to dispose of land if the land has been declared surplus. Although the purpose of the Lanes scheme is to create a multi-storey car park for Coleraine town centre, the fact that there is an identified shortage of car parking spaces in Coleraine means that the Abbey street car park cannot be declared surplus and, therefore, the disposal cannot proceed.

To allow the site to be transferred, the procedures for the disposal of Government land must be amended. I have agreed an appropriate amendment with the Minister for Regional Development and we will submit a joint paper to issue to the Executive Committee for consideration before the end of May.

I have determined that it is in the best interests of Coleraine overall for the Lanes scheme to be delivered before the Ramparts scheme. This means that the start of construction work on the Ramparts scheme will have to take place after the Lanes scheme is completed.

### Strategic Business Review of Social Services

**Mr Dallat** asked the Minister for Social Development how many jobs will be created in Coleraine following the recent Strategic Business Review of Social Services. (AQW 7494/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The Strategic Business Review proposals have recently been issued for a final period of public consultation which runs until June 2009. The proposals, if approved, will result in the relocation of some posts to Coleraine from Ballymoney and Limavady. It is not possible to confirm details until the consultation process and implementation planning is complete.

### Conflict Transitional Initiatives Court Case

**Mr Newton** asked the Minister for Social Development what was the cost to her Department of the Conflict Transitional Initiatives court case. (AQW 7515/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The Department has not received notification of costs from the legal representatives involved in the Conflict Transitional Initiatives court case at this point in time and therefore is not in a position to answer this question. Figures for final costs will not be available until the period for possible appeal against the judgement expires which will be 10 June 2009.

### Bonfires

**Mr McLaughlin** asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the total expenditure resulting from bonfires in the South Antrim area, in each of the last five years. (AQW 7521/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The clean-up costs associated with bonfires for the Housing Executive's Antrim and Newtownabbey 2 District Office areas (which comprise the South Antrim constituency) for the last five years are detailed in the following table:-

Year	Cost
2008	£14,576
2007	£24,549
2006	£15,350
2005	£13,801
2004	*£18,330

\* estimated cost

### Senior Civil Servant Bonuses

**Mr McGlone** asked the Minister for Social Development how much was paid in bonuses to senior Civil Servants in her Department in (i) 2003/04; (ii) 2004/05; (iii) 2005/06; (iv) 2006/07; and (v) 2007/08.

(AQW 7536/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The total amount paid in non-consolidated bonus payments to Senior Civil Servants in the Department for Social Development in respect of performance years 2003/04 through to 2007/08 is as shown in the table below. The table also includes the number of payments made.

Department for Social Development					
Performance Year	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Total Number of Bonuses	10	14	14	13	13
Total Value of Bonuses	£41,250	£65,000	£79,000	£90,000	£101,000

### Co-Ownership Housing

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Social Development how many applications for co-ownership housing were (i) submitted; and (ii) successful in 2006/07, 2007/08, 2008/09 and 2009/10 to date, in the North Down constituency.

(AQW 7545/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** Co-Ownership Housing has advised me that it records statistics according to local council area, rather than by constituency. The table below details the information requested in both the North Down and Ards council areas which are situated, at least in part, in the North Down constituency.

Year	Applications made	Successful
2006/07	131	112
2007/08	305	229
2008/09	42	9
2009/10	20	4

The number of applications for the 2008/09 financial year was affected by the suspension of new applications to the scheme between April and November 2008.

A number of applications received during April 2009 are currently being processed. Therefore, the number of successful applications may increase.

### Homeless Numbers in North Down

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Social Development how many people were registered as homeless in 2006/07, 2007/08 and 2008/09 in the North Down constituency. (AQW 7546/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** I am not able to provide this information in the format requested as the North Down constituency includes areas covered by both the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's Bangor and Newtownards district offices. The table below instead details the requested information with regard to the number of people registered as homeless by each of these district office areas.

Homeless presentations/acceptances 2006/07 until 2008/09 at district offices in the North Down Constituency						
	2006/2007		2007/2008		2008/2009 (provisional)	
	Presented	Accepted	Presented	Accepted	Presented	Accepted
Bangor	839	395 (47%)	768	392 (51%)	755	397 (53%)
Newtownards	618	382 (62%)	635	391 (62%)	631	375 (59%)

### Smoke Alarms

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Social Development if it is standard Housing Executive policy to fit smoke alarms in its properties. (AQW 7552/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** While the Housing Executive do not have a standard policy to fit smoke alarms in its properties, there are 87,589 tenanted properties of which 70,075 have hard wired smoke alarms. The Housing Executive installs hard wired smoke alarms where dwellings' electrical systems are being upgraded through its planned improvement and maintenance programmes. It is Housing Executive's policy to each year advise tenants who have yet to have a 'hard-wired' smoke alarm fitted to buy one or more of the battery smoke alarms.

### Mortgages

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister for Social Development if she has been in discussion with the Prime Minister in relation to ending the practice of offering 100% mortgages. (AQW 7605/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** Although I have not had any discussions with the Prime Minister about ending 100% mortgages I have met with the Council of Mortgage Lenders to both encourage responsible lending to homebuyers and to press lenders to ensure that affordable mortgage products are made available which help first time buyers and which will, in turn, help the wider economy.

### Housing Executive Grant Aided Works

**Mr Irwin** asked the Minister for Social Development how many people in the Newry and Armagh Constituency are awaiting approval for Housing Executive grant aided works relating to renovation, replacement, and home repair. (AQW 7612/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The information is not available in the format requested and is only available by district council area. The Newry and Armagh Parliamentary Constituency covers the Armagh City and District Council and part of the Newry and Mourne District Council areas. The table below details the information for each of these district council areas.

Grant Type	Armagh	Newry and Mourne
Renovation Grant	71	248
Replacement Grant	22	50
Home Repairs Assistance	87	556
<b>Totals</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>854</b>

### Redevelopment Scheme at Queen's Parade, Bangor

**Mr Cree** asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the proposed comprehensive re-development scheme at Queen's Parade, Bangor (AQW 7663/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** My Department has been working closely with key stakeholders such as North Down Borough Council, Planning Service and Roads Service to review the response to the Development Brief submitted by the developer in December 2008. This review is nearing completion and officials are due to present the Department's findings to North Down Borough Council elected members on 14 May 2009.

### Social Security Agency: Fraud and Error

**Mrs Hanna** asked the Minister for Social Development what progress has been made in reducing fraud and error in the Social Security Agency. (AQO 2697/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** Very significant progress has been made in reducing fraud and error in the Agency. The Social Security Agency operates a rigorous benefit security strategy which has resulted in a steady reduction in losses through fraud and error. The figures for 2008 are currently being finalised but early indications, subject to audit by Northern Ireland Audit Office, are that fraud and error losses are likely to fall further to their lowest level ever recorded. Put into context, this represents 1.2 % of the Agency's £3.8bn annual expenditure, made up of 0.5% official error, 0.4% customer error and 0.3% customer fraud. This compares very favourably with other similar large financial undertakings such as the insurance sector which experiences fraud levels of around 4%.

To date there has not been a noticeable impact on the levels of benefit fraud as a result of the increase in those receiving Social Security benefits, but this is something I will continue to monitor closely. Reducing incorrectness whether through fraud or error has been, and will remain, one of the Agency's top priorities and goes to the heart of ensuring those properly entitled to benefit receive the help they need.

I would like to pay tribute to the management and staff of the Agency for this very strong business performance which Members will be aware has been delivered against a background of ever-increasing efficiency requirements.

### Benefit Fraud

**Mr Elliott** asked the Minister for Social Development what impact the current recession is having on benefit fraud levels. (AQO 2698/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** Very significant progress has been made in reducing fraud and error in the Agency. The Social Security Agency operates a rigorous benefit security strategy which has resulted in a steady reduction in losses through fraud and error. The figures for 2008 are currently being finalised but early indications, subject to audit by Northern Ireland Audit Office, are that fraud and error losses are likely to fall further to their lowest level ever recorded. Put into context, this represents 1.2 % of the Agency's £3.8bn annual expenditure, made up of 0.5% official error, 0.4% customer error and 0.3% customer fraud. This compares very favourably with other similar large financial undertakings such as the insurance sector which experiences fraud levels of around 4%.

To date there has not been a noticeable impact on the levels of benefit fraud as a result of the increase in those receiving Social Security benefits, but this is something I will continue to monitor closely. Reducing incorrectness whether through fraud or error has been, and will remain, one of the Agency's top priorities and goes to the heart of ensuring those properly entitled to benefit receive the help they need.

I would like to pay tribute to the management and staff of the Agency for this very strong business performance which Members will be aware has been delivered against a background of ever-increasing efficiency requirements.



## Executive Stocktake

**Dr McDonnell** asked the Minister for Social Development what assessment she has made of whether the Executive's Strategic Stocktake will address her Department's spending priorities in the current economic crisis. (AQO 2699/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The Minister for Finance and Personnel announced the outcome of the Autumn 2008 Strategic Stocktake exercise to the Assembly in a statement on 20 January 2009. The key point I took from the Minister's statement was a recognition that the current financial position meant the only way in which more resources could have been allocated to a particular service would have been to scale back other public services. However, he indicated there was no appetite amongst Ministerial colleagues for such an approach.

I'm not sure if that was right. I do not believe the Strategic Stocktake was a sufficiently rigorous exercise – settling for describing our budgetary issues rather than tackling them. Members will be aware that my Party has produced a discussion paper on the budget – New Priorities in Difficult Times – which indicates ways that further resources can be directed to Jobs and Housing from within the existing budget framework.

Unlike many party political productions the SDLP paper shows where the money could come from. I hope that Members will read it. At the present time there is a £200million shortfall in the housing budget and this needs to be corrected. Housing cannot continue to live hand-to-mouth hoping for additional scraps from quarterly monitoring rounds. Housing needs, once and for all, to be put on a sound financial footing.

Whilst appreciating the demands now being placed on the finite resources available to the Executive from the NI Block allocation, I would expect housing to get its share of the additional Barnett funding being made available following the Chancellor's recent Budget statement.

## Minister for Social Development

**Mr T Clarke** asked the Minister for Social Development how many representations she has made to her Department in her capacity as an MLA, since taking up office. (AQO 2700/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The Member offers no definition of "representations" and so I will apply the broadest reasonable meaning in the interests of openness and clarity. I take very seriously my responsibility to ensure that there should be no conflict of interest between my roles as a Minister and as a constituency MLA and am scrupulous in ensuring that I do not advocate inappropriately on behalf of constituents on matters which fall within my responsibilities as a Minister.

However my constituents deserve the same level of service from me as they might expect from any other MLA and so, for example, it is my practice to pass on to the Department inquiries from constituents relating for example to pensions, child maintenance or social security benefits and allowances. The replies to such queries are dealt with at the operational level and not by the Minister. I also receive a significant number of letters, emails and telephone calls to my constituency office and, for example, to my party email address which actually relate to Ministerial business and which are routinely redirected to my Departmental Private Office.

So as Members might expect, I run an extremely busy constituency operation and have made representations on dozens, if not hundreds, of occasions – while of course maintaining appropriate separation of roles.

## Employment and Support Allowance

**Mrs O'Neill** asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the Employment and Support Allowance, including any problems that have been encountered regarding its implementation. (AQO 2701/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) is the most significant change in the benefit system in years and its implementation has been a success due to the hard work and commitment of the staff and management involved in the planning and rollout phases. The introduction of a new telephony service at the same time as a new benefit was an additional challenge and although the initial performance was good, some difficulties were experienced in January when the volume of calls to the 0845 enquiry line increased considerably. To address this issue an additional 18 telephony staff were recruited.

Overall performance continues to improve, not least, in the telephony and processing areas. The Centre answered 20,370 calls in March and assessed 2,269 claims, which is double the number of calls answered in January and a 50% increase in the number of assessments. In March 79% of customers who telephoned the claim line to make a claim opted to make the claim over the phone rather than receive a clerical form. Significantly, the length of time it takes to complete a claim by telephone has steadily reduced and the clearance time remains favourable when compared with the old Incapacity Benefit. Further improvements in performance should be realised in the coming months as staff gain experience and further planned IT enhancements are introduced.

### Housing Executive

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister for Social Development what action she intends to take to address the apparent absence of a programme of work for the Housing Executive in the current financial year.. (AQO 2702/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The Housing Executive is currently finalising its programmes of work for this financial year and these will be published for consultation with each of the district councils in early June. Following this consultation their programme will be announced.

### Housing: First-time Buyers

**Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister for Social Development for her assessment of whether the financial institutions are doing enough to help first-time buyers to get onto the housing ladder. (AQO 2703/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** In 2001 first time home buyers represented about 60% of house sales. By September 2008, this percentage had fallen to 23%; indeed, given current economic challenges, it may have fallen even further. However, I am aware that there is a variety of mortgage packages available aimed at helping first time buyers. Indeed, both the Bank of Ireland and the Ulster Bank have made finance available to the Northern Ireland Co-ownership Housing Association to assist 500 first time buyers enter the housing ladder. This action is very much to be welcomed.

In addition, the recent budget announcement has set out ways to encourage banks to make more mortgages available. The Council of Mortgage Lenders has commented that the most important element of the recent Budget for the mortgage market over the long term may prove to be the new asset backed securities guarantee scheme. This potentially offers an opportunity to restart the capital market funding for mortgages that will be a crucial factor in delivering an adequate supply of mortgage credit.

Therefore, whilst some lenders are making steps to help first-timers, I will continue to encourage lenders to ensure that affordable mortgage products are made available to help first time buyers and which will in turn help the wider economy.

### Social Housing: Belfast

**Ms Ní Chuilín** asked the Minister for Social Development if she will consider developing land under her Department's control in Belfast City Centre for social housing. (AQO 2704/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** I have already asked my officials to identify all land currently held by the Department that could be used to meet housing need. This includes land in Belfast City Centre.

### Consultants

**Ms Lo** asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the total cost to the Department of employing consultants. (AQO 2705/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The total cost of employing external consultants within the Department for Social Development (including the Social Security Agency) for 2008/09 was £1,929,236.

### Curzon Apartments

**Mr A Maskey** asked the Minister for Social Development for her assessment of the value for money of the apartments built at the old Curzon Cinema site in South Belfast; and if they met all the criteria for family type accommodation in that area of high demand. (AQO 2706/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** No schemes are delivered through the Social Housing Development Programme if they do not represent value for money or meet housing need. In this particular part of South Belfast, of the applicants on the waiting list in housing stress, less than a third are families. In meeting housing need, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive must match the homes to the particular needs of localities, taking a range of factors into account. This is what has been done in the particular area of South Belfast.

### Queen's Parade

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the Queen's Parade project. (AQO 2707/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** My Department has been working closely with key stakeholders such as North Down Borough Council, Planning Service and Roads Service to review the developer's response to the Development Brief that was received in December 2008. This review is nearing completion and officials are due to present the Department's findings to North Down Borough Council elected members in May 2009.

### Housing Procurement

**Ms Anderson** asked the Minister for Social Development what measures have been taken to ensure developers do not abuse the new housing procurement policy by top-slicing profits before they sub-contract to small contractors. (AQO 2708/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The sub-contracting of construction work is a commercial decision for a contractor and sub-contractor and will be determined by the prevailing market conditions. The Procurement Strategy, which I launched in October 2008, requires Procurement Groups to use framework agreements with the aim of achieving efficiency in combining resources, streamlining procurement processes and utilising a pool of suppliers to undertake developments thus avoiding the need to re-tender for each development. Their purpose is not to seek to manipulate or control market forces.

### Payment of Suppliers

**Mr Storey** asked the Minister for Social Development how many suppliers were not paid within 10 days in the last financial year; and to confirm the longest period that a supplier had to wait before being paid. (AQO 2709/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** The 10 day target for payments to suppliers came into force from the end of November 2008. Since then, 1284 suppliers have not been paid within 10 days. The longest delayed payment in the period from the end of November to the end of March 2009 was 129 days.

### Housing Executive: East Belfast

**Mr Newton** asked the Minister for Social Development what Housing Executive maintenance programmes are underway in East Belfast; and what plans she has for the upgrading of properties and maintenance programmes in East Belfast for 2010/2011. (AQO 2710/09)

**Minister for Social Development:** In the East Belfast District a scheme for replacing 101 kitchens in the Short Strand area has just been completed and another scheme to replace 67 kitchens in the vicinity of Vicarage Street and Glenallen Street has recently started. The Housing Executive programmes for 2010/2011 will be formulated once budgetary information has been finalised later in the year.

## NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY COMMISSION

### Assembly Roadshows

**Mr Ross** asked the Assembly Commission for its assessment of the Assembly Roadshows. (AQW 7422/09)

**The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr S Moutray):** The Assembly Commission is convinced of the need to raise public understanding of the Assembly and that is why the Commission has developed the Engagement Strategy. In addition to this important work, the Commission decided to undertake a series of road shows across Northern Ireland; however the Commission was conscious that this was a new concept, and one which had not been trialled before by the Assembly. In addition, it was not clear what level of interest there would be from the public.

As you are aware, the Commission organised nine road shows across Northern Ireland, which were attended by over 600 people.

It was noticeable that the main issues and concerns raised at each road show were similar. Issues raised included health matters such as autism and health spending; post-primary transfer; student tuition fees; the devolution of policing and justice; and the future of the Maze project.

The general consensus, of Commission Members and Members who participated in the panels, was that the road shows were an extremely useful step in raising public understanding of the Assembly.

The Assembly Commission will consider an evaluation report at its next meeting. Dependant on the outcome of that, the Commission will consider holding road shows in the remaining ten constituencies later in the year.

### Rent and Office Cost Claims

**Mr McNarry** asked the Assembly Commission on what basis rent expenses payments are being made for 9-11 Church Street, Ballymena that are significantly in excess of market rates. (AQW 7524/09)

**The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr A Maginness):** The rent payable for a Member's constituency office is based on the lease agreed between the Member and his or her landlord. The issue of assessing a market rate for office rentals will be considered by the Assembly Commission as part of its consideration of the SSRB Report on Members' salaries and allowances.

### Rent and Office Cost Claims

**Mr Dallat** asked the Assembly Commission if it will order a full independent review of all Office Cost Allowance rental expenses paid for 9-11 Church Street, Ballymena from 2007 in light of the report by the Interim Assembly Standards Commissioner published on 1 May 2009. (AQW 7534/09)

**The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr A Maginness):** Following consideration of the Interim Commissioner for Standards' report, the Committee on Standards and Privileges wrote to the Assembly Commission about this matter. The Commission will consider that correspondence at its meeting on 21 May 2009.

### Rent and Office Cost Claims

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Assembly Commission if it will have a full independent review carried out of all rent and office cost claims made in respect of 11 Bridge Street, Kilrea. (AQW 7611/09)

**The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr A Maginness):** The Assembly Commission currently has no plans to carry out a review of any individual MLA's rent and office claims.

# **Revised Written Answers**

This section contains revised written answers to questions previously 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.





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## HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

### Family Support Workers

In Bound Volume 39, page WA289, replace the answer to question (AQW 6458/09) asked by Lord Morrow with:

#### The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

**TABLE 1: NUMBER OF FAMILY SUPPORT WORKERS (I) ON CONTRACTS; AND (II) NOT ON CONTRACTS IN THE SOUTHERN HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE TRUST BROKEN DOWN BY AREA AS AT MARCH 2009.**

Trust Area	Number of Family Support Workers on a contract		Number of Family Support Workers not on a contract	
	Headcount	WTE	Headcount	WTE
Armagh & Dungannon Locality	0	0.0	8	125 hours per week in total on average
Newry & Mourne Locality	1	1.0	0	0.0
Craigavon & Banbridge Locality	2	2.0	0	0.0

**Source:** Southern Health and Social Care Trust

**Notes:**

1. WTE = Whole-Time Equivalent.
2. There is currently one vacancy (0.5 WTE) in the Craigavon and Banbridge locality for a Contracted Family Support Worker.



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## SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

### Benefits Not Claimed by the Elderly

In Bound Volume 36, page WA456, replace the answer to question (AQW 3947/09) asked by Mr Shannon with:

**The Minister for Social Development:** The £1.2 million quoted, was published in Help the Aged's SeniorLine Benchmark Report 2008. It is an estimate of benefit potentially available to older people who contacted SeniorLine with a benefit enquiry. The report acknowledges that enquiries about social security benefits continued to be the biggest area of calls to SeniorLine, 37% of all calls, which was a 60% increase from the previous year. This was mostly due to SeniorLine's participation in the Agency's Benefit Uptake Programme. This Programme aimed to increase awareness of social security benefits for customers identified by the Agency as having potential entitlement for additional benefit. I can report that the 2007/08 Programme generated over £8 million of additional benefit.

The Housing Executive and the Social Security Agency provide a range of services on a daily basis to ensure that people are advised of their potential entitlement to benefits, including outreach services, joint working and promotional campaigns. Both organisations participate in the recently established Interdepartmental Group on Benefit Uptake, the aim of which is to coordinate efforts to increase benefit take-up.

I launched the 2008/09 Benefit Uptake Programme in May 2008 to increase awareness of social security benefits. This builds on the previous successful uptake programmes which have been in place since 2005 and resulted in £15 million of additional benefit paid to the most vulnerable in our society, £11 million to older people. This year's Programme will see over 115,000 people contacted about possible benefit entitlement, over 108,000 are older people. I can report that £2.2 million in additional benefit has already been generated for older people.

In addition, an improved way to process new claims for State Retirement Pension was introduced in 2008. This has resulted in a more joined-up service for customers who are claiming State Retirement Pension but may also be entitled to State Pension Credit. This new service increases the Agency's ability to ensure that older people are receiving the full range of benefits to which they are entitled.

Overall, the Agency has a comprehensive system of reviews to ensure people are receiving their full entitlement. Since April 2008, over 5,000 cases have been adjusted upwards resulting in extra benefit payments of approximately £12.8m.

## REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### A26 Dualling

In Bound Volume 39, page WA79, replace the answer to question (AQO 2235/09) asked by Mr Storey with:

**The Minister for Regional Development:** My Department's Roads Service is progressing plans for the provision of a 7 km stretch of dual carriageway on the A26, between Glarryford and the A44 Drones Road. This is one of the major projects included in the 10-year investment delivery plan for roads.

In August 2008, I announced the preferred route, which closely follows the existing corridor. The route is currently being taken through the final stage of the scheme assessment process. This will culminate in the publication of an environmental statement and draft Orders, for planning and land acquisition, which I would anticipate occurring during the 2010/11 financial year.

It is anticipated that construction will commence in the latter part of the investment delivery plan period.

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## ENVIRONMENT

### East Antrim MP: Correspondence

In Bound Volume 39, page WA268, replace the answer to question (AQO 2381/09) asked by Mr K Robinson with:

**The Minister of the Environment:** My Department and agencies have received correspondence from me as the Member of Parliament for East Antrim on 446 occasions since 9 June 2008. This figure is made up of 88 pieces of correspondence which I sent to my Department and agencies, and 358 instances where correspondence has been received by my constituency office and forwarded to my Department.

In addition I have made 135 representations to Planning Service in the form of meetings, telephone calls and written correspondence since 9 June 2008.

## ASSEMBLY COMMISSION

### Assembly Shop

In Bound Volume 39, page WA317, replace the answer to question (AQW 6174/09) asked by Mrs S Ramsey with:

**The Representative of the Assembly Commission:** Attached is a list of all Local Enterprise Agencies that the Assembly contacted in relation to the development of the Assembly Gift Shop.

Through the Local Enterprise Agencies, local crafters then made contact with the Assembly with a view to displaying/selling their goods in the Assembly Gift Shop. As the Gift Shop developed a number of crafters also made contact with other crafters (through other networking channels) advising them of the initiative.

Enterprise NI – List of Agencies by Region with Website Details, International Dialing Codes and Map Reference

Eastern Inner

East Belfast Enterprise (14)

308 Albertbridge Road

Belfast

BT5 4GX

Tel: 00 44 28 9045 5450

Fax: 00 44 28 9073 2600

E-mail: [info@eastbelfast.org](mailto:info@eastbelfast.org)

Web: <http://www.eastbelfast.org>

North City Business Centre Ltd (22)

2 Duncairn Gardens

Belfast

BT15 2GG

Tel: 00 44 28 9074 7470



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Fax: 00 44 28 9074 6565  
E-mail: [mailbox@north-city.co.uk](mailto:mailbox@north-city.co.uk)  
Web: <http://www.north-city.co.uk>

Ormeau Enterprises Ltd (26)  
Ormeau Business Park  
8 Cromac Avenue  
BELFAST  
BT7 1EL  
Tel: 00 44 28 9033 9906  
Fax: 00 44 28 9033 9937  
E-mail: [info@ormeaubusinesspark.com](mailto:info@ormeaubusinesspark.com)  
Web: <http://www.ormeaubusinesspark.com>

ORTUS (27)  
Twin Spires Centre  
155 Northumberland Street  
Belfast  
BT13 2JF  
Tel: 00 44 28 9031 1002  
Fax: 00 44 28 9031 1005  
E-mail: [hq@ortus.org](mailto:hq@ortus.org)  
Web: <http://www.ortus.org>

Townsend Enterprise Park (30)  
28 Townsend Street  
Belfast  
BT13 2ES  
Tel: 00 44 28 9089 4500  
Fax: 00 44 28 9089 4502  
E-mail: [admin@townsend.co.uk](mailto:admin@townsend.co.uk)  
Web: <http://www.townsend.co.uk>

Work West Enterprise Agency (31)  
301 Glen Road  
Belfast  
BT11 8BU  
Tel: 00 44 28 9061 0826  
Fax: 00 44 28 9062 2001

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E-mail: [info@workwest.co.uk](mailto:info@workwest.co.uk)  
Web: <http://www.workwest.co.uk>

Eastern Outer  
Ards Business Centre Ltd (3)  
Jubilee Road  
Newtownards  
BT23 4YH  
Tel: 00 44 28 9181 9787  
Fax: 00 44 28 9182 0625  
E-mail: [postbox@ardsbusiness.com](mailto:postbox@ardsbusiness.com)  
Web: <http://www.ardsbusiness.com>

Castlereagh Enterprises Ltd (8)  
Dundonald Enterprise Park  
Enterprise Drive  
Carrowreagh Road  
Dundonald  
BT16 0QT  
Tel: 00 44 28 9055 7557  
Fax: 00 44 28 9055 7558  
E-mail: [enterprise@castlereagh.com](mailto:enterprise@castlereagh.com)  
Web: <http://www.castlereagh.com>

Glenwood Enterprises Ltd (16)  
Glenwood Business Centre  
Springbank Industrial Estate  
Poleglass  
Belfast  
BT17 0QL  
Tel: 00 44 28 9061 0311  
Fax: 00 44 28 9060 0929  
E-mail: [office@glenwoodbc.com](mailto:office@glenwoodbc.com)  
Web: <http://www.glenwoodbc.com>

Lisburn Enterprise Organisation Ltd (18)  
Enterprise Crescent  
Ballinderry Road  
Lisburn  
BT28 2BP

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Tel: 00 44 28 9266 1160  
Fax: 00 44 28 9260 3084  
E-mail: [centre@lisburn-enterprise.co.uk](mailto:centre@lisburn-enterprise.co.uk)  
Web: <http://www.lisburn-enterprise.co.uk>  
Mallusk Enterprise Park Ltd (19)  
Mallusk Drive  
Newtownabbey  
BT36 4GN  
Tel: 00 44 28 9083 8860  
Fax: 00 44 28 9084 1525  
E-mail: [info@mallusk.org](mailto:info@mallusk.org)  
Web: <http://www.mallusk.org>

North Down Development Organisation Ltd (23)  
Enterprise House  
Balloo Avenue  
Balloo Industrial Estate  
Bangor  
BT19 7QT  
Tel: 00 44 28 9127 1525  
Fax: 00 44 28 9127 0080  
E-mail: [mail@nddo.co.uk](mailto:mail@nddo.co.uk)  
Web: <http://www.nddo.u-net.com>

North East  
Acorn the Business Centre (1)  
2 Riada Avenue  
Garryduff Road  
Ballymoney  
BT53 7LH  
Tel: 00 44 28 2766 6133  
Fax: 00 44 28 2766 5019  
E-mail: [enquiries@acornbusiness.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@acornbusiness.co.uk)  
Web: <http://www.acornbusiness.co.uk>

Antrim Enterprise Agency Ltd (2)  
58 Greystone Road  
Antrim  
BT41 1JZ  
Tel: 00 44 28 9446 7774

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Fax: 00 44 28 9446 7292  
E-mail: [admin@antrimenterprise.com](mailto:admin@antrimenterprise.com)  
Web: <http://www.antrimenterprise.com>

Ballymena Business Centre (5)  
Galgorm Industrial Estate  
62 Fenaghy Road  
Ballymena  
BT42 1FL  
Tel: 00 44 28 2565 8616  
Fax: 00 44 28 2563 0830  
E-mail: [info@ballymenabusiness.co.uk](mailto:info@ballymenabusiness.co.uk)  
Web: <http://www.ballymenabusiness.co.uk>

Carrickfergus Enterprise Agency Ltd (7)  
8 Meadowbank Road  
Carrickfergus  
BT38 8YF  
Tel: 00 44 28 9336 9528  
Fax: 00 44 28 9336 9979  
E-mail: [kelli@ceal.co.uk](mailto:kelli@ceal.co.uk)  
Web: [www.ceal.co.uk](http://www.ceal.co.uk)

Larne Enterprise Development Company Ltd (17)  
LED COM Industrial Estate  
Bank Road  
Larne  
BT40 3AW  
Tel: 00 44 28 2827 0742  
Fax: 00 44 28 2827 5653  
E-mail: [info@ledcom.org](mailto:info@ledcom.org)  
Web: <http://www.ledcom.org>

LED COM  
Willowbank Business Park  
Willowbank Road  
Millbrook  
LARNE  
Tel: 00 44 28 2826 9973

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Fax: 00 44 28 2826 8247  
E-mail: kennelson@ledcomwbp.org  
Web: <http://www.ledcom.org>

Moyle Enterprise Company Ltd (20)  
61 Leyland Road  
Ballycastle  
BT54 6EZ  
Tel: 00 44 28 2076 3737  
Fax: 00 44 28 2076 9690  
E-mail: [info@moyle-enterprise.com](mailto:info@moyle-enterprise.com)

North West  
Causeway Enterprise Agency (9)  
Loughanhill Industrial Estate  
Coleraine  
BT52 2NR  
Tel: 00 44 28 7035 6318  
Fax: 00 44 28 7035 5464  
E-mail: [info@causeway-enterprise.co.uk](mailto:info@causeway-enterprise.co.uk)  
Web: <http://www.causeway-enterprise.co.uk>

North West Marketing (24)  
North West Business Complex  
Skeoge Industrial Park  
Beraghmore Road  
Derry  
BT48 8SE  
Tel: 00 44 28 7135 2693  
Fax: 00 44 28 7135 6293  
E-Mail: [info@north-westmarketing.com](mailto:info@north-westmarketing.com)  
Web: <http://www.north-westmarketing.com>

Roe Valley Enterprises Ltd (28)  
Aghanloo Industrial Estate  
Aghanloo Road  
Limavady  
BT49 0HE  
Tel: 00 44 28 7776 2323



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Fax: 00 44 28 7776 5707  
E-mail: [info@roevalleyenterprises.co.uk](mailto:info@roevalleyenterprises.co.uk)  
Web: <http://www.lysba.com>

Workspace (Draperstown) Ltd (32)  
7 Tobermore Road  
Draperstown  
BT45 7AG  
Tel: 00 44 28 7962 8113  
Fax: 00 44 28 7962 8975  
E-mail: [info@workspace.org.uk](mailto:info@workspace.org.uk)  
Web: <http://www.workspace.org.uk>

**Southern**

Armagh Business Centre Ltd (4)  
2 Loughgall Road  
Armagh  
BT61 7NJ  
Tel: 00 44 28 3752 5050  
Fax: 00 44 28 3752 6717  
E-mail: [sam@abcarmagh.com](mailto:sam@abcarmagh.com)  
Web: <http://www.abcarmagh.com>

Banbridge District Enterprises Ltd (6)  
Scarva Road Industrial Estate  
Scarva Road  
Banbridge  
BT32 3BQ  
Tel: 028 4066 2260  
Fax: 028 4066 2325  
E-mail: [info@bdelonline.com](mailto:info@bdelonline.com)  
Web: <http://www.bdelonline.com>

Craigavon Industrial Development (11)  
Organisation Ltd  
I<sup>2</sup> CIDO Innovation Centre  
Charlestown New Road  
Carn  
Craigavon

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BT66 6PW

Tel: 00 44 28 3833 3393

Fax: 00 44 28 3835 0390

E-mail: [info@cido.co.uk](mailto:info@cido.co.uk)

Web: <http://www.cido.co.uk>

Down Business Centre (12)

46 Belfast Road

Downpatrick

BT30 9UP

Tel: 00 44 28 4461 6416

Fax: 00 44 28 4461 6419

E-mail: [business@downbc.co.uk](mailto:business@downbc.co.uk)

Web: <http://www.downbc.co.uk>

Newry and Mourne Enterprise Agency (21)

Enterprise House

WIN Business Park

Canal Quay

Newry

Tel: 00 44 28 3026 7011

Fax: 00 44 28 3026 1316

E-mail: [nmcoop@dial.pipex.com](mailto:nmcoop@dial.pipex.com)

Web: <http://www.nmea.net>

## **Western**

Cookstown Enterprise Centre Ltd (10)

Derryloran Industrial Estate

Sandholes Road

Cookstown

BT80 9LU

Tel: 00 44 28 8676 3660

Fax: 00 44 28 8676 3160

E-mail: [info@cookstownenterprise.com](mailto:info@cookstownenterprise.com)

Web: <http://www.cookstownenterprise.com>

Dungannon Enterprise Centre Ltd (13)

2 Coalisland Road

Dungannon

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BT71 6JT  
Tel: 00 44 28 8772 3489  
Fax: 00 44 28 8775 2200  
E-mail: [admin@dungannonenterprise.com](mailto:admin@dungannonenterprise.com)  
Web: <http://www.dungannonenterprise.com>

Fermanagh Enterprise Ltd (15)  
Enniskillen Business Centre  
Lackaghboy Industrial Estate  
Tempo Road  
Enniskillen  
BT74 4RL  
Tel: 00 44 28 6632 7348  
Fax: 00 44 28 6632 7878  
E-mail: [info@fermanaghenterprise.com](mailto:info@fermanaghenterprise.com)  
Web: <http://www.fermanaghenterprise.com>

Omagh Enterprise Company Ltd (25)  
Great Northern Road  
Omagh  
BT78 5LU  
Tel: 00 44 28 8224 9494  
Fax: 00 44 28 8224 9451  
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## ENVIRONMENT

### Tourism Planning Policy

In Bound Volume 40, page WA287, replace the answer to question (AQW 7173/09) asked by Mr Shannon with:

**The Minister of the Environment:** My Department is working on Draft Planning Policy Statement 16 on tourism which, subject to Executive clearance, we aim to publish for consultation after the summer.

We aim to implement the final statement by the end of March 2010 from which point its contents will be material to decisions on individual planning applications and appeals.





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